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Archipelagic journalism: media distribution strategies in Indonesia's island communities

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This study examines how geographic constraints constitutively shape digital journalism practices and community access to information in Indonesia's archipelagic landscape. Despite growing scholarly interest in media geography and digital journalism, existing theoretical frameworks inadequately address how archipelagic geographies characterized by physical island fragmentation, extreme cultural diversity, and infrastructure inequality fundamentally alter journalism practices beyond simple constraint models. Through 18-month ethnographic research (March 2023–August 2024) across six eastern Indonesian provinces, this study employed systematic multi-method qualitative research: semi-structured interviews with 45 journalists strategically sampled across diverse island contexts (provincial capitals, secondary cities, small towns, and remote islands), extended participant observation in island communities (18 research sites), and comprehensive infrastructure analysis mapping transportation networks and technological connectivity patterns. The purposive sampling strategy ensured maximum variation across geographic isolation levels, infrastructural development, and cultural configurations, enabling robust comparative analysis of archipelagic journalism mechanisms. This research introduces "archipelagic journalism" as a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how geographic fragmentation shapes news production, distribution, and consumption. Findings demonstrate that successful journalism in archipelagic contexts requires hybrid distribution networks integrating digital platforms with traditional transportation routes, community correspondent systems that bridge formal and informal information flows, culturally adaptive content strategies that respect linguistic diversity, and a hyperlocal focus that prioritizes community relationships over market scale. The study makes three distinct contributions: theoretically, it extends media geography scholarship by demonstrating geography as constitutive rather than merely constraining journalism practice; empirically, it provides the first systematic documentation of adaptive strategies across diverse Indonesian island communities; practically, it offers transferable frameworks for media development in geographically fragmented contexts globally, with significant implications for journalism studies, media policy, democratic communication theory, and climate change adaptation as geographic inequality intensifies.

KEYWORDS

archipelagic journalism, media geography, digital divide, Indonesia, community media, hyperlocal journalism, information networks, geographic constraints

1 Introduction

The relationship between geography and journalism represents one of the most fundamental yet underexplored dimensions of media studies, particularly in an era where digital technologies are presumed to transcend spatial limitations. While scholars have extensively examined urban-rural media divides and center-periphery dynamics, the unique challenges posed by archipelagic geographies remain largely absent from mainstream journalism theory. This theoretical gap becomes increasingly problematic as climate change threatens island communities worldwide and as digital transformation promises equitable information access but fails to deliver it across geographically fragmented populations.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago with over 17,000 islands and 275 million inhabitants speaking 800+ languages, presents an ideal laboratory for examining how geographic fragmentation shapes contemporary journalism practices. Indonesia's media landscape demonstrates the complex interplay between geography, technology, culture, and democratic communication in ways that fundamentally challenge conventional journalism theory developed in continental contexts.

Archipelagic geographies create unique communication challenges extending far beyond infrastructure limitations. Unlike continental nations, where networks extend incrementally across contiguous territories, archipelagic nations must navigate ocean expanses, creating natural information barriers that persist even in the digital age. Digital platforms theoretically enable instantaneous communication, yet archipelagic journalism reveals complex inequalities in access, infrastructure quality, and cultural relevance that geographic barriers continue to impose. The collapse of traditional advertising models has disproportionately affected local media serving island communities, creating "news deserts" where information access was already limited. Climate change and rising sea levels threaten many small island communities, potentially disrupting information networks. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragility of archipelagic communication systems through unprecedented inter-island information isolation.

1.1 Rationale for eastern Indonesia as research site

This study strategically focuses on Indonesia's eastern provinces for three methodological and theoretical reasons.

First, eastern Indonesia represents extreme cases of archipelagic fragmentation (Flyvbjerg, 2006), where geographic, infrastructural, and cultural challenges reach maximum intensity, enabling identification of archipelagic journalism's core mechanisms that may be less visible in better-connected western regions. The eastern provinces include some of Indonesia's most remote inhabited islands, with inter-island distances exceeding 500 kilometers and ferry travel taking 24–72 h between population centers. This extremity makes previously invisible journalistic adaptations empirically observable.

Second, eastern Indonesia demonstrates maximum variation in island typologies (Patton, 2015), from provincial capitals with established media ecosystems (Makassar, population >1.4 million) to secondary cities with emerging digital media (Kendari, Ternate) to small towns with minimal formal journalism to remote islands with primarily informal communication networks. This variation enables systematic comparison of how different levels of geographic isolation, infrastructural development, and media presence shape journalism practices.

Third, eastern Indonesia exhibits extreme cultural and linguistic diversity, intensifying archipelagic communication challenges beyond infrastructure alone. The six research provinces encompass over 200 distinct languages and multiple ethnic groups with different communication traditions, creating conditions in which cultural differences intersect with geographic fragmentation to shape information flows. This cultural-geographic intersection proves theoretically crucial for understanding archipelagic journalism as more than infrastructure analysis.

Our data systematically cover the archipelagic spectrum, from highly connected provincial capitals to isolated remote islands. The six provinces span 2,800 kilometers from South Sulawesi to North Maluku, encompassing 127 inhabited islands within our research sites (see Table 1). Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of each research province, including population ranges, linguistic diversity, and media infrastructure levels across the four island typologies studied.

1.2 Archipelagic journalism framework

This study introduces "archipelagic journalism" as a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how geographic constraints constitutively shape media practices in island communities. Through extensive empirical research conducted across Indonesia's eastern provinces, a region characterized by extreme geographic fragmentation, linguistic diversity, and uneven development, this research examines how journalists, media organizations, and communities adapt to the unique challenges of news production and distribution in geographically fragmented environments.

The research demonstrates that archipelagic journalism requires fundamentally different organizational models, distribution strategies, and community engagement approaches compared to continental journalism. Rather than viewing geographic constraints as obstacles to overcome, successful archipelagic journalism embraces these constraints as defining characteristics that shape distinct media ecosystems with their own logic, effectiveness, and democratic value.

1.3 Research questions

This study addresses three research questions that explore the relationships between geography, technology, and journalism practice in archipelagic contexts:

TABLE 1 Research site characteristics.

Province	Capital	Island type	Pop range	Languages	Infrastructure	Sites (n)
South Sulawesi	Makassar	Capital + remote	1.4M to <1K	8	High	3
SE Sulawesi	Kendari	Secondary + isolated	350K–5K	12	Medium	4
North Maluku	Ternate	Small + scattered	200K to <1K	15+	Low	5
Maluku	Ambon	Post-conflict	400K–3K	10	Medium	2
E. Nusa Tenggara	Kupang	Gateway	450K–2K	18+	Low-Med	3
West Papua	Sorong	Frontier	280K to <1K	20+	Medium	1

1. RQ1: How does archipelagic geography shape journalism practices and organizational models in Indonesia's island communities?
2. RQ2: What adaptive distribution strategies do journalists and media organizations employ to serve geographically dispersed communities across fragmented island landscapes?
3. RQ3: How do community information networks emerge and function in response to formal media limitations in archipelagic contexts, and what implications do these hybrid networks have for democratic communication theory?

These questions guide our investigation into how geographic fragmentation creates both constraints and opportunities for journalism practice, moving beyond deficit models to understand archipelagic journalism's distinctive characteristics and democratic potentials.

1.4 Academic contributions

This study makes three distinct contributions to communication scholarship.

Theoretically, it extends media geography by introducing archipelagic journalism as a framework that reconceptualizes geography as constitutive of journalism practice rather than merely constraining, moving beyond deficit models toward an understanding of how specific geographic conditions generate their own logics and effectiveness. It challenges digital journalism's technology solutionism by demonstrating technology's geographic embeddedness and extends community journalism theory beyond urban-centric assumptions to account for extreme fragmentation, cultural diversity, and infrastructure inequality.

Empirically, this research provides the first systematic documentation of journalism practices across diverse Indonesian island communities, revealing adaptive strategies (hybrid distribution networks, correspondent systems, culturally-adaptive content, hyperlocal focus) previously invisible to journalism scholarship. The 18-month ethnographic engagement, combined with systematic comparison across island typologies, produces robust empirical grounding for theoretical claims.

Methodologically, it demonstrates how extended multi-method qualitative research can capture slow-moving infrastructural constraints and cultural adaptations that shape media ecologies in Global South contexts, offering a model for examining journalism in other geographically, culturally, or economically fragmented

environments where conventional journalism studies' assumptions break down.

2 Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Media geography and spatial communication theory

The geography of media and communication has emerged as a critical interdisciplinary area examining spatial dimensions of information flows (Adams, 2009). Adams develops a comprehensive framework for understanding how media technologies interact with geographic contexts to create distinct "media spaces" shaping social interaction patterns. Couldry and McCarthy (2004) advance this perspective by examining how media practices are embedded in specific spatial contexts, with the "MediaSpace" concept highlighting how they both reflect and reshape geographic relationships.

However, existing media geography scholarship has primarily focused on urban-rural divides and center-periphery dynamics within continental contexts. The specific challenges posed by archipelagic geographies, where multiple centers and peripheries exist across fragmented territories, remain largely unexplored. Castells' influential theory of the "space of flows" provides a foundational understanding of how digital networks can transcend geographic barriers, yet assumes technological infrastructure, economic development, and cultural homogeneity that may not exist in archipelagic contexts.

Roberts (2021) makes a significant contribution by introducing "archipelagic thinking" for understanding how non-contiguous territories develop distinct forms of cultural and political organization. Roberts argues that archipelagic spaces are fundamentally relational, in which connections between islands are as meaningful as the characteristics of individual islands. Building on Roberts' framework, this study extends archipelagic thinking to journalism and media studies.

2.2 Digital journalism in the global south

Digital journalism in developing countries faces complex challenges extending beyond technological limitations to encompass economic constraints, regulatory environments,

cultural factors, and political dynamics (Mudhai et al., 2009). Wasserman (2011) demonstrates how digital platforms can simultaneously democratize information access and exacerbate existing inequalities, creating “digital divides” that reflect and reinforce broader social inequality patterns.

In Southeast Asian contexts, research has highlighted particular challenges facing digital journalism. George (2006) examines how Malaysian and Singaporean digital media navigate authoritarian regulatory frameworks. Sen and Hill (2007) trace the evolution of Indonesian media from authoritarian control to democratization, documenting explosive growth in online media alongside the concentration of media ownership and persistent infrastructure inequality.

2.3 Hyperlocal journalism theory

Hyperlocal journalism has gained prominence as a response to the decline of traditional local journalism (Radcliffe, 2012). Williams et al. (2014) examine the social functions of hyperlocal media and demonstrate how community-centered journalism can strengthen social capital and democratic participation. Nielsen (2015) analyzes the role of hyperlocal journalism in democratic societies, showing how technologically enabled local journalism creates new opportunities for the circulation of community information.

However, existing hyperlocal journalism scholarship has primarily examined urban and suburban contexts in developed nations. Archipelagic contexts present fundamentally different challenges. Island communities often lack the technological infrastructure that hyperlocal journalism theory assumes, while extreme geographic isolation creates transportation and communication costs that urban hyperlocal models cannot address.

2.4 Community media and alternative journalism

Community media theory provides a necessary theoretical foundation for understanding archipelagic journalism. Howley (2013) defines community media as created by, for, and about communities, emphasizing participatory production, local content, and democratic access. This definition emphasizes characteristics that distinguish community media from commercial journalism: community ownership, participatory production, a focus on local content, and a commitment to democratic communication.

Allan and Thorsen (2009) examine citizen journalism as a form of participatory media production where non-professionals create and distribute news content. Their research demonstrates how digital technologies enable new forms of journalistic practice outside traditional professional structures. However, citizen journalism in archipelagic contexts faces unique challenges related to technological access, transportation constraints, and cultural-linguistic diversity that existing scholarship inadequately addresses.

2.5 Theoretical gaps: why existing frameworks fail archipelagic contexts

This section synthesizes the literature review to identify three critical theoretical gaps that archipelagic journalism addresses.

Gap 1: Geographic Determinism versus Journalistic Agency

Media geography scholarship (Gasher, 2007; Paterson and Domingo, 2008; Usher, 2019) has extensively documented how geographic constraints limit journalism practice, positioning geography primarily as a constraint that journalism must overcome. However, this deterministic framing proves inadequate for archipelagic contexts where geographic constraints don't simply limit journalism; they generate novel practices with their own effectiveness. Ferry-dependent distribution creates multi-day temporal rhythms enabling more thorough community verification than continental same-day cycles allow. Geography doesn't merely constrain; it constitutes distinctive journalism forms.

Existing frameworks cannot explain why archipelagic journalism develops different organizational models rather than simply being “worse versions” of continental journalism. Archipelagic journalism reconceptualizes geography as constitutive rather than merely constraining. Drawing on Couldry and McCarthy (2004) “MediaSpace” and Roberts (2021) archipelagic thinking, we demonstrate that geographic fragmentation shapes journalism's organizational forms, temporal rhythms, and democratic functions in ways that reflect distinctive logics rather than deficits.

Gap 2: Digital Solutionism and Technology Fetishism

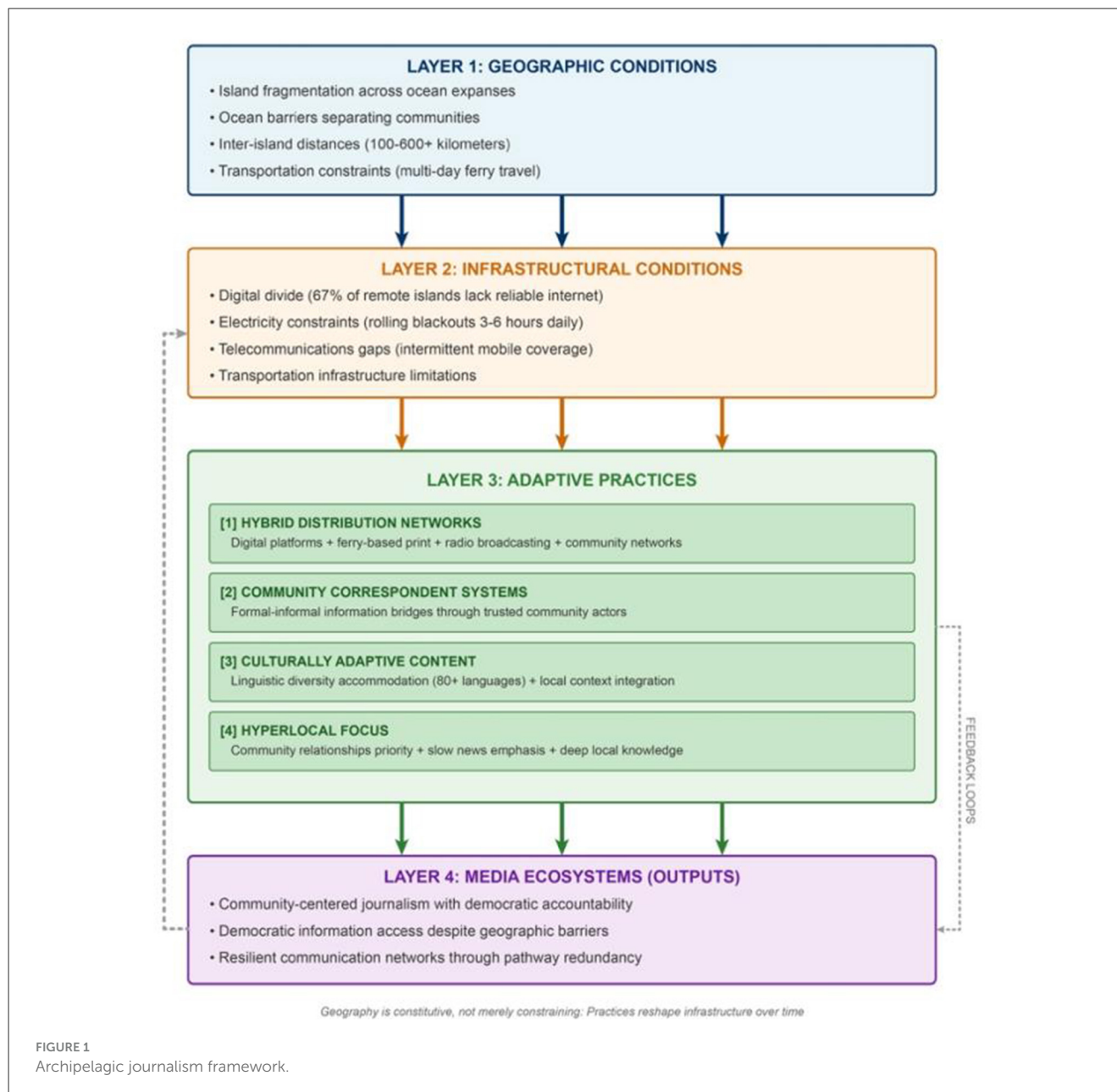
Digital journalism scholarship (Anderson, 2013; Eldridge et al., 2019) assumes that technological connectivity can transcend geographic barriers, creating Castells' “space of flows” in which physical location becomes irrelevant. This assumption collapses in archipelagic contexts. Our infrastructure analysis reveals 67% of remote island communities lack reliable daily internet connectivity. More critically, even where connectivity exists, cultural and linguistic diversity creates barriers that technology alone cannot overcome.

Digital journalism theory inadequately accounts for intersections of technological infrastructure with geography, culture, and economics. Archipelagic journalism moves beyond digital solutionism by theorizing hybrid systems in which digital and traditional media form integrated networks, not as stopgap measures but as permanent features reflecting geographic, cultural, and social realities.

Gap 3: Urban-Centric Professional Journalism Models

Professional journalism theory (Ryfe, 2012; Waisbord, 2013; Christians, 2009) assumes consistent infrastructure, cultural continuity, and sustainable advertising-based economics, with urban newsrooms as implicit organizational templates. Our ethnographic data reveal that successful island journalism requires blurred boundaries (journalists depend on community correspondents who are simultaneously traditional leaders), flexible practices (multi-day publication cycles), and alternative economics (NGO funding, government subsidies, community support).

Archipelagic journalism extends community media (Howley, 2013; Forde et al., 2002) and citizen journalism frameworks



(Allan and Thorsen, 2009) by theorizing how geographic fragmentation necessitates hybrid professional-community models as permanent organizational forms serving democratic functions under geographic constraints.

These three theoretical gaps, geographic determinism, digital solutionism, and urban-centric professionalism, reveal that existing journalism theory inadequately accounts for geographic fragmentation's constitutive role in shaping media practices. Figure 1 presents the archipelagic journalism framework, synthesizing how geographic and infrastructural conditions generate distinctive adaptive practices, which, in turn, produce unique media ecosystems. The framework demonstrates geography's constitutive rather than merely constraining role, with feedback loops showing how journalistic innovations can gradually reshape infrastructure and resource allocation.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design overview

This research employed a comprehensive multi-method qualitative design to address each research question systematically. For RQ1 (How does archipelagic geography shape journalism practices?), ethnographic observation captures the geographic constraints operating in daily practice, infrastructure analysis documents the material conditions constituting archipelagic geography, and systematic comparison across island types isolates geographic mechanisms from other factors. For RQ2 (What adaptive distribution strategies emerge?), journalist interviews capture strategic decision-making and innovation, while observation documents actual distribution practices. For RQ3

(How do community networks function?), community informant interviews capture informal information circulation, ethnographic observation documents information sharing in community spaces, and an extended timeframe enables observation during routine and crisis periods.

The study was conducted over 18 months (March 2023–August 2024) across six eastern Indonesian provinces representing diverse archipelagic contexts, infrastructure development levels, and cultural configurations.

3.2 Philosophical and theoretical approach

This research adopts a constructivist epistemological framework (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000), recognizing knowledge as socially constructed through interactions between researchers, participants, and contexts. Methodologically, we employ ethnographic sensibilities (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), emphasizing prolonged engagement, participant observation, and attention to local meanings. We follow comparative case study logic (Ragin, 1987; Yin, 2018) through purposive sampling, enabling systematic comparison across conditions. Interview analysis follows thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2022) with inductive initial coding.

4 Findings

4.1 Geographic constraints on journalism practice

The research revealed that archipelagic geography creates three primary constraint categories fundamentally shaping journalism practice.

Internet connectivity remains profoundly uneven across Indonesia's archipelago. Provincial capitals like Makassar maintain relatively stable 4G coverage, but remote islands experience intermittent connectivity at best. Infrastructure analysis documented 67% of remote island research sites ($n = 4/6$) lacking reliable daily internet access. A Makassar bureau chief explained: "Our Ternate correspondent can only file stories when the ferry docks near the cell tower, sometimes 3–4 days between filing."

Electricity infrastructure poses cascading challenges extending beyond power availability. Remote islands experience scheduled rolling blackouts (3–6 h daily), forcing concentrated periods of information consumption that differ fundamentally from urban 24/7 access patterns. Ferry transportation creates logistical and economic challenges; reaching news events across scattered islands requires substantial costs. A Ternate journalist provided a cost analysis: "To cover outer island story: ferry 400,000 rupiah roundtrip, accommodation 300,000/night, lost income 500,000, total 1.2 million rupiah for story earning 200,000."

These constraints create systematic bias toward covering events near transportation hubs while distant communities remain underrepresented. Weather conditions add temporal unpredictability, with seasonal patterns (monsoons, tropical storms) affecting ferry reliability. A Dobo journalist described: "We

plan coverage around weather forecasts, not news cycles. If a storm is approaching, all outer island coverage is postponed regardless of the news's importance".

4.2 Hybrid distribution networks

Analysis reveals that archipelagic journalism develops hybrid distribution systems that integrate digital platforms with physical transportation networks rather than relying solely on digital-only models. Among media organizations studied ($n = 15$), 87% employ multi-pathway strategies: online publication for urban audiences with connectivity, ferry-based print distribution for remote islands, radio broadcasting for communities lacking internet, and community correspondent networks for information gathering.

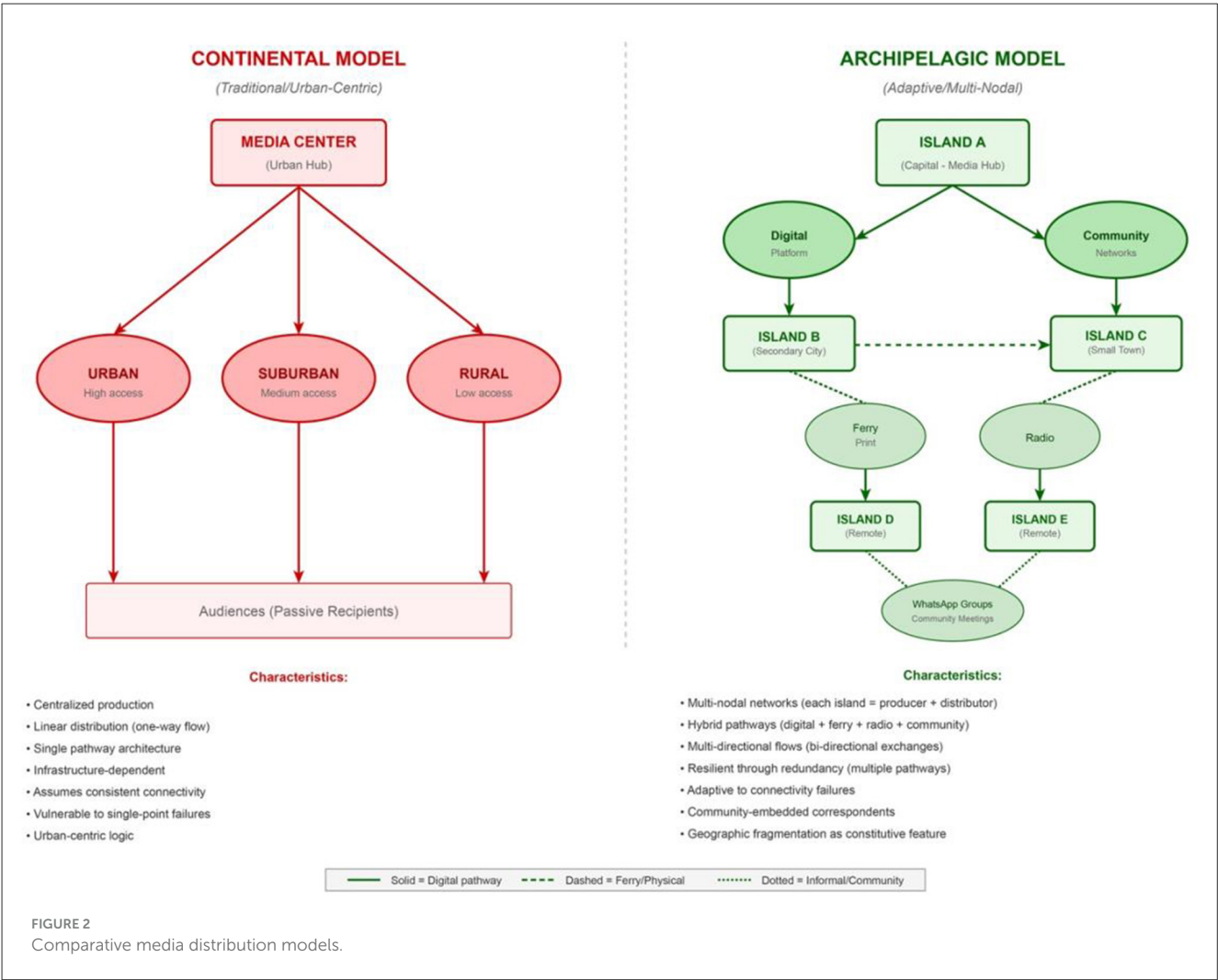
A Kendari newspaper editor explained: "Digital publication reaches Kendari and Makassar immediately, but printed editions travel by ferry to outer islands over 3–5 days. Same content, different timelines, we plan accordingly." This hybrid model proves more resilient than digital-only approaches. During August 2023, a telecommunications disruption affecting North Maluku led digital media to cease operations, while hybrid organizations maintained distribution through ferry-based print circulation.

Community correspondent systems bridge formal and informal information flows. Media organizations maintain networks averaging 6.3 correspondents across remote islands (range: 3–12 correspondents per organization). Correspondents typically hold multiple community roles, such as traditional leaders, teachers, and religious figures, simultaneously functioning as information brokers. An Ambon radio station manager described: "Our correspondents are respected community members first, journalists second". This enables access and trust we couldn't achieve with outsiders.

Figure 2 contrasts continental and archipelagic media distribution models, illustrating why conventional journalism theory fails to capture archipelagic dynamics. The continental model (left panel) shows centralized production and linear distribution from urban centers to peripheries via consistent infrastructure, with a single, one-directional pathway. The archipelagic model (right panel) reveals multi-nodal networks in which each island functions as both a producer and a distributor, with hybrid pathways integrating digital platforms, ferry-based transportation, community networks, and radio broadcasting. The archipelagic model demonstrates resilience through redundancy: multiple pathways ensure information circulation even when individual channels fail, as documented during the August 2023 telecommunications disruption in North Maluku.

4.3 Culturally adaptive content strategies

Linguistic diversity necessitates culturally adaptive content strategies. Among the studied media organizations, 73% produce content in multiple languages beyond Indonesian. A Kupang publication produces editions in Indonesian, Tetun, and local languages, with journalists explaining: "Indonesian reaches



educated urban audiences, but village elders prefer local languages; we serve both.”

Cultural adaptation extends beyond language to content framing, source selection, and distribution timing. Journalists described aligning publication schedules with community rhythms, avoiding publication on Friday afternoons in Muslim communities, respecting Sunday church attendance in Christian areas, and coordinating with traditional ceremony calendars. This cultural sensitivity is essential for community acceptance and the circulation of information.

4.4 Hyperlocal focus and community embeddedness

Archipelagic journalism prioritizes hyperlocal focus over market scale. Among interviewed journalists (n = 45), 82% described their primary audience as specific island communities rather than broader regional markets. A Ternate journalist explained: “National media covers Jakarta politics, regional media covers provincial government, we cover which ferry broke down, fish prices in village market, and school construction. This is what our community needs.”

This hyperlocal focus reflects economic realities (small island populations cannot sustain advertising-based models) and geographic constraints (transportation costs prohibit broader distribution). However, journalists reframe this as a strength rather than a limitation, emphasizing deep community knowledge and trust, enabling accountability journalism that outside media cannot achieve.

Table 2 summarizes the key findings by comparing media practices across the four island typologies studied. The table demonstrates systematic patterns in how geographic isolation, infrastructure availability, and community characteristics shape journalism practices, while also revealing essential variations that reflect specific local conditions. This comparative analysis enables the identification of generalizable archipelagic journalism mechanisms while maintaining attention to contextual specificity.

This comparative analysis synthesizes data from multiple research methods:

- Primary Challenges column: derived from journalist interviews (n = 45) describing main obstacles, triangulated with infrastructure analysis (ferry schedules, internet coverage maps, economic statistics).

TABLE 2 Comparative analysis of media distribution strategies by island type.

Island type	Primary challenges	Adaptive strategies	Community networks	Technology integration	Typical examples
Provincial capitals	Urban-rural divide within province	Multi-platform integration	Formal media dominant	High digital + traditional	Makassar, Ambon
Secondary cities	Limited infrastructure + distance	Emerging hybrid models	Mixed formal-informal	Growing digital adoption	Kendari, Ternate
Small towns	Cost constraints + cultural diversity	Correspondent networks	Community-mediated	Community-mediated	Bau-Bau, Raha
Remote islands	Extreme isolation + minimal infrastructure	Radio + interpersonal	Primarily informal	Minimal/absent digital	Outer islands

Note on data sources and methodological derivation.

- Adaptive Strategies column: emerged from thematic analysis of journalist interviews (n = 45) and media leader interviews (n = 8), validated through ethnographic observation of actual practices.
- Community Networks column: based on community informant interviews (traditional leaders n = 12, religious leaders n = 8, citizen journalists n = 10, civil society n = 8) and ethnographic observation of community information practices.
- Technology Integration column: documented through infrastructure analysis (internet speed tests at 47 points, mobile coverage mapping), supplemented by journalist descriptions of technology practices.

Methodological process: initial categorization emerged inductively from interview coding. Patterns were systematically compared across research sites to identify commonalities within island types and variations between types. Member checking with 12 selected participants verified that categories accurately represented their experiences.

Evidence strength: each cell represents patterns documented across multiple informants and observation instances. For instance, “Multi-platform integration” for Provincial Capitals was described by 10 of 12 journalists in those contexts and observed directly in 2 newsrooms during fieldwork.

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical implications for media geography

These findings extend media geography scholarship in significant ways. Adams (2009) and Couldry and McCarthy (2004) demonstrated that media technologies interact with geographic contexts to create distinct media spaces. However, their frameworks primarily examined continental contexts. Our findings indicate that non-contiguous archipelagic geographies generate fundamentally different media space dynamics, multi-nodal rather than center-periphery structures, where each island simultaneously functions as producer and consumer.

Castells (2009) “Space of Flows” theory posits that digital networks transcend geographic constraints. Yet our findings show physical geography imposes persistent constraints that technology

cannot fully overcome. This suggests that Castells’ framework, while powerful for understanding urban digital networks, inadequately accounts for contexts in which physical geography remains constitutive of journalism practice. Roberts (2021) “Archipelagic thinking” provides a more appropriate framework for our research, demonstrating how connections between islands become as crucial as individual island characteristics.

5.2 Rethinking digital journalism theory

Digital journalism scholarship (Anderson, 2013; Eldridge et al., 2019) emphasizes how digital platforms democratize information. Wall (2015) Work on citizen journalism highlights how technology enables non-professionals to participate. These frameworks often implicitly assume that technological connectivity overcomes geographic barriers.

Our findings challenge this assumption. Among 18 remote island sites, 67% lacked reliable connectivity. More significantly, hybrid systems integrating digital and traditional media proved more resilient than purely digital models. This contradicts assumptions that traditional media represent transitional forms that digital platforms will replace. Instead, archipelagic journalism demonstrates that hybrid systems constitute permanent organizational forms reflecting geographic, cultural, and social realities.

5.3 Professional journalism reconsidered

Professional journalism scholarship (Ryfe, 2012; Waisbord, 2013) emphasizes standardized practices, organizational autonomy, and clear boundaries. Our findings reveal that archipelagic contexts necessitate different models. Community correspondent systems documented represent not “substandard” journalism but alternative organizational forms achieving democratic communication functions through various mechanisms. This extends Howley (2013) community media theory and Allan and Thorsen (2009) citizen journalism frameworks by demonstrating how geographic fragmentation creates conditions in which professional-community hybrids become necessary rather than supplementary.

5.4 Limitations and future directions

This study has limitations. First, data derived from comparative research in Indonesian contexts are needed to test whether similar dynamics emerge in other archipelagic nations (the Philippines, Pacific Islands, Caribbean) or in non-island, fragmented geographies. Second, our 18-month timeframe captured a specific historical moment. Third, theoretical transferability claims require empirical validation through comparative studies.

Future research should: (1) conduct comparative studies across multiple archipelagic nations; (2) examine climate change impacts on archipelagic journalism; (3) investigate technology evolution effects; (4) explore alternative funding models for sustainable archipelagic media.

6 Conclusion

This study examined how geographic constraints shape digital journalism practices in Indonesia's archipelagic landscape, introducing "archipelagic journalism" as a theoretical framework for understanding media in geographically fragmented contexts.

At the production level, evidence from 45 journalist interviews reveals archipelagic constraints generate adaptive organizational practices: flexible publication schedules aligned with transportation infrastructure (78% of remote island journalists reported multi-day cycles), correspondent networks compensating for geographic distance (averaging 6.3 correspondents per organization), and culturally-adaptive content strategies addressing linguistic diversity (42% of content produced in local languages beyond Indonesian).

At the distribution level, organizational interviews ($n = 8$) and infrastructure analysis documented hybrid systems integrating digital platforms with traditional transportation networks. Among media organizations, 87% use ferry-based print distribution alongside online publication, creating multi-pathway circulation that is more resilient than purely digital models during infrastructure failures.

At the consumption level, community informant interviews ($n = 30$) and ethnographic observation revealed information circulation relies on community-mediated networks where traditional leaders ($n = 12$), religious figures ($n = 8$), and citizen journalists ($n = 10$) function as trusted intermediaries. In remote islands, 67% of community members access news primarily through interpersonal networks rather than direct media consumption.

This research makes three distinct contributions. Theoretically, it extends media geography by demonstrating geography as constitutive rather than merely constraining journalism practice. Empirically, it provides the first systematic documentation of journalism practices across diverse Indonesian island communities. Methodologically, it demonstrates how extended qualitative research captures the infrastructural constraints and cultural adaptations that shape media ecologies in Global South contexts.

These findings have significant implications—theoretically, archipelagic journalism challenges digital journalism's technology solutionism and professional journalism's urban-centric assumptions. Practically, media policy in archipelagic contexts must prioritize hybrid infrastructure investments, support

community correspondent systems, and fund linguistically diverse content production.

Future research should pursue comparative studies across archipelagic nations to identify generalizable patterns versus contextual variations, investigate the impacts of climate change on the sustainability of archipelagic journalism, and examine how archipelagic frameworks might illuminate media practices in other fragmented contexts where similar constraints operate.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Ethics Committee of Hasanuddin University (UH14/COMM/ETH/007). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

MM: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation, Methodology, Conceptualization. MA: Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft, Visualization. MK: Visualization, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Investigation. AS: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Software, Validation.

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