

Kompas Group's Dual-Product Strategy in Indonesia's Digital Media Economy: A Picardian Media Economics Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the challenge legacy media face in sustaining economic viability amid digital disruption in Indonesia, focusing on the tension between journalistic idealism and business sustainability. The objective of this research is to examine the economic strategies Kompas Group employs to manage the dual-product media market amid intensified competition and changing audience behavior. This study applies a descriptive qualitative research method, with data collected through in-depth interviews with a media economics expert, internal representatives of Kompas Group, and Generation Z audiences, supported by a literature review and secondary data analysis. The findings indicate that Kompas Group implements a dual economic strategy by separating advertising-driven platforms, such as Kompas.com, from subscription-based digital journalism through Kompas.id. Although this strategy demonstrates adaptive efforts toward digital transformation, its effectiveness remains constrained by structural challenges, including declining advertising revenues, low willingness among younger audiences to pay for news, reduced tolerance for digital advertising, and weakened brand loyalty due to algorithm-driven news consumption on social media. Additionally, both intramedia competition with digital-native media and intermedia competition with global technology platforms further intensify economic pressures on legacy media. This study concludes that the long-term sustainability of Kompas Group depends not only on technological innovation but also on its capacity to adapt to evolving audience behavior, address structural imbalances in the digital media economy, and diversify revenue sources while maintaining core journalistic values.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary media economy, public attention has become the most contested resource, shifting competition among media organizations from journalistic quality alone

toward speed, algorithmic visibility, and platform relevance. In Indonesia, this transformation places legacy media under severe pressure as younger audiences increasingly consume news through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. As a result, traditional advertising revenues decline while audience loyalty weakens, challenging the sustainability of long-established media institutions. Kompas Group, as one of Indonesia's largest and oldest legacy media organizations, represents a critical case for understanding how legacy media navigate these structural disruptions.

The central research problem of this study concerns how Kompas Group manages the tension between journalistic idealism and economic sustainability in a digital media environment dominated by global technology platforms. While digital transformation is often framed as a technological issue, this study argues that the core challenge is economic and structural: how legacy media operate within a dual-product market when audience attention is increasingly controlled by algorithms rather than editorial distribution.

Previous studies on media economics have extensively discussed digital disruption, declining advertising revenues, and the rise of platform capitalism [1], [2]. Research has also examined subscription-based journalism as an alternative revenue model [3] and changing audience behavior among younger generations [4]. However, existing literature tends to treat legacy media as homogeneous entities and rarely examines the internal operational separation of business models within a single media group, particularly in the Indonesian context. Moreover, few studies analyze how the concept of audience-as-product operates under algorithmic distribution systems that weaken brand attachment and reshape value creation for advertisers [5]. This gap highlights the need for a contextualized case study that connects media economics theory with organizational practice.

This study positions itself within Picard's media economics framework, which conceptualizes media as operating in a dual-product market involving audiences and advertisers [1]. Rather than reiterating textbook definitions, this framework is applied directly to analyze Kompas Group's strategic separation between advertising-based platforms (Kompas.com and Grid Network) and subscription-based digital journalism (Kompas.id). By focusing on this operational distinction, the study offers a novel contribution to understanding how legacy media attempt to stabilize revenue streams while preserving journalistic credibility under digital capitalism.

The objective of this research is to examine Kompas Group's economic strategies in responding to digital disruption, with particular attention to audience behavior, revenue diversification, and structural constraints within Indonesia's media ecosystem. The study seeks to provide insight into how legacy media can adapt without fully commodifying journalism or surrendering editorial autonomy to algorithmic logic.

It is expected that the findings of this study will contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research extends media economics scholarship by contextualizing the dual-product market under algorithm-driven distribution. Practically, it offers strategic insights for legacy media organizations facing similar sustainability challenges in emerging digital markets, while also informing public discourse on the future of quality journalism in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was selected because the research focuses on understanding the processes, dynamics, and economic strategies implemented by Kompas Group within Picard's media economics framework, as well as on exploring expert and audience perceptions of Kompas Group's position within Indonesia's digital media ecosystem. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of organizational strategies, meaning-making processes, and social realities that cannot be adequately captured by quantitative measurement alone [6].

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. Informants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. First, a media economics expert was selected to provide macro-level insights into the Indonesian media industry and digital disruption. Mercy Widjaja was chosen for her professional background as a media practitioner and observer, with extensive experience in the media business and transformation strategies. Second, two Generation Z digital audiences, Sutan and Sulthon, were selected for their active consumption of news on social media platforms and online news portals. Their inclusion was intended to represent young audiences whose consumption behavior aligns with the concept of audiences as commodities within the dual-product market framework [1]. Third, internal representatives of Kompas Group, namely Tilly and Audrey, were recruited due to their involvement and knowledge of newsroom practices, editorial decision-making, and the organization's digital transformation strategy. Recruitment was conducted through direct professional contact and voluntary participation.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted both online and offline, depending on informant availability. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes. Interview questions were guided by key themes derived from Picard's media economics framework, including revenue models, audience behavior, advertising dynamics, platform competition, and organizational adaptation strategies. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure ethical considerations, informants were given the option of anonymity, although some agreed to be identified due to their professional roles.

Secondary data were obtained from academic journals, industry reports, policy documents, and other publications on media economics, digital transformation, and the Indonesian media industry. These sources were used to contextualize the interview findings and strengthen the study's theoretical grounding [2], [3].

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach combined with framework analysis. Interview transcripts were coded thematically, with categories aligned to Picard's key constructs such as the dual-product market, audience-as-product, advertiser dependence, and market competition [1]. Triangulation was applied by comparing interview data with secondary literature to enhance analytical validity and consistency.

This study is limited to examining economic strategies and perceptions related to the digital transformation of Kompas Group. It does not measure financial performance quantitatively, nor does it include content analysis, political bias assessment, or non-economic dimensions of media practice. Consequently, the findings reflect interpretive

insights and strategic perceptions rather than empirical financial outcomes, and conclusions should be understood within this qualitative and contextual scope.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Application of Media Economics Framework in Kompas Group's Digital Transformation

The research findings show that the strategic steps taken by Kompas Group in responding to digital disruption are strongly aligned with the core concepts of Robert G. Picard's media economics framework. Picard explains that media organizations operate within a dual-product market, in which media simultaneously sell content to audiences and sell audiences to advertisers [1]. This structure is clearly reflected in the architecture of Kompas Group's business model.

Kompas Group operates two distinct but complementary economic models. First, Kompas.com functions as an advertising-based news portal that serves as a traffic generator to attract mass audiences. Second, Kompas.id operates as a subscription-based digital journalism platform for audiences seeking in-depth reporting, investigative journalism, and exclusive analysis. This strategic bifurcation is consistent with previous studies showing that legacy media increasingly separate free and paid platforms to stabilize revenue while maintaining audience reach [11]. Such operational separation allows media organizations to respond to platform competition without fully abandoning journalistic depth [12].

Interviews with internal representatives of Kompas Group, namely Tilly and Audrey, confirm this strategic separation. They explained that the newsroom structure within Kompas Group is now organized into two main pillars: a commercial newsroom responsible for producing fast, relevant content for Kompas.com and Grid Network, and a premium newsroom dedicated to Kompas.id. Similar newsroom differentiation has been identified in other legacy media undergoing digital transformation in Asia and Europe [13]. The differences in work rhythm and content production illustrate how resources are allocated based on economic considerations rather than mere editorial preferences. Picard emphasizes that resource allocation is central to media economics because content production is costly and requires sustained investment [1].

In the Indonesian context, the pressure of transformation has intensified due to changes in media revenue structures. Kompas.id emphasizes that transformative capital is essential for media survival in the digital era, particularly as advertising revenue becomes increasingly fragmented. This condition mirrors global trends where advertising-driven models are becoming structurally vulnerable [14].

Picard identifies four key economic actors in media industries: media owners, audiences, advertisers, and media employees [1]. The interaction among these actors is clearly visible within Kompas Group's organizational structure and strategic decisions. Expert interviews reinforce this perspective. Mercy Widjaja stated that media organizations such as Kompas must maintain journalistic idealism while simultaneously operating under market logic, creating a constant tension between social responsibility and economic sustainability. This aligns with previous research showing that legacy media with normative missions face higher economic pressure than purely commercial digital outlets [15].

Kompas Group's digital transformation is also evident in its investment in digital technologies, including machine learning for news recommendation systems, digital marketing, and audience analytics. These investments aim to improve efficiency, understand audience behavior, and enhance monetization strategies. Innovation and efficiency have been widely recognized as critical survival factors for media firms in highly competitive digital markets [3], [16].

Overall, the findings confirm that Kompas Group's digital strategy represents a concrete application of Picard's media economics framework. The coexistence of advertising-based and subscription-based models, differentiated newsroom structures, and data-driven decision-making demonstrates how Kompas Group manages the dual-product market amid unstable market conditions. However, the effectiveness of this strategy remains closely tied to audience behavior and broader structural changes in the digital media ecosystem [17].

3.2 Digital Audience Consumption Behavior and Its Implications for Media Business Models

The findings indicate that the consumption behavior of digital audiences, particularly Generation Z, constitutes the most significant factor influencing the effectiveness of Kompas Group's business model. Interview results show that younger audiences have shifted from active news seeking to incidental news exposure, in which news is encountered unintentionally through social media platforms. This shift reflects a broader transformation in digital news consumption identified in prior studies [14].

Sulthon stated that he almost never accesses news portals directly. Instead, he relies on content that appears on TikTok, Instagram, or algorithmic recommendations. He explained that he only reads news when it appears on his social media feed, and rarely feels the need to open a news website intentionally. Sutan expressed a similar view, noting that most of the news he consumes originates from social media rather than from news portals such as Kompas.com. Comparable audience behavior patterns have been documented across multiple national contexts [18].

In Picard's framework, such audiences no longer fall within traditional decision-making patterns, but instead represent a digital market fully shaped by platform algorithms [1]. This condition has significant implications for Kompas Group. First, younger audiences demonstrate a low willingness to pay for premium news content. Sulthon explicitly stated that he has no interest in subscribing to Kompas.id because free news available on social media already satisfies his informational needs. Previous research confirms that perceived content substitutability significantly reduces subscription intention among younger audiences [19].

Second, tolerance toward digital advertising among young audiences is increasingly low. Sulthon noted that he immediately exits a website when advertisements are excessive. This behavior aligns with studies showing that advertising overload leads to avoidance and a decline in ad effectiveness [20].

Third, brand loyalty toward news media has significantly weakened. Sutan stated that he does not have a specific preference for Kompas over other news portals, as his access

to news largely depends on what appears on social media. Algorithmic gatekeeping has been shown to erode source awareness and weaken brand attachment [5], [21].

Consequently, the findings confirm that changes in audience consumption behavior directly weaken both economic models operated by Kompas Group. This supports previous scholarship emphasizing that audience behavior is a structural determinant of media sustainability rather than a peripheral variable [22].

3.3 Intermedia and Intramedia Competition in the Indonesian Digital Media Ecosystem

The findings indicate that the combination of intermedia competition and intramedia competition creates substantial structural pressure on the economic sustainability of Kompas Group. This competition does not merely reshape the Indonesian digital media industry but also generates financial pressure that directly affects business models and operational practices.

The most significant shift originates from changes in the primary sources of media revenue. Advertising flows have increasingly migrated toward global digital platforms such as Google, Meta, and TikTok. This phenomenon reflects broader patterns of platform dominance in digital advertising markets [17], [23]. Such market concentration weakens the bargaining position of local media organizations.

Expert interviews reinforce this condition. Mercy Widjaja emphasized that competition from social media is the most disruptive force facing professional media organizations. Platform algorithms, rather than newsrooms, now determine what content reaches the public. Similar concerns have been raised in prior studies on intermedia competition and platform power [24].

Intramedia competition further intensifies these challenges. Digital-native media outlets operate with lower cost structures and prioritize speed. Research consistently shows that speed and brevity dominate digital news selection, particularly among younger users [9], [18].

The financial implications of these audience shifts are substantial. Picard's dual-product market model becomes increasingly fragile when audiences are no longer loyal, and advertisers favor platforms that offer precise targeting [1]. Comparable dynamics have been identified in legacy media markets globally [20], [25].

At the operational level, Kompas Group faces increased production costs due to its presence across multiple platforms. Studies in media economics confirm that multiplatform production significantly increases labor and technology costs during the digital transition [16].

Overall, Kompas Group must compete not only for revenue, but also for relevance, trust, and visibility within an increasingly fragmented ecosystem.

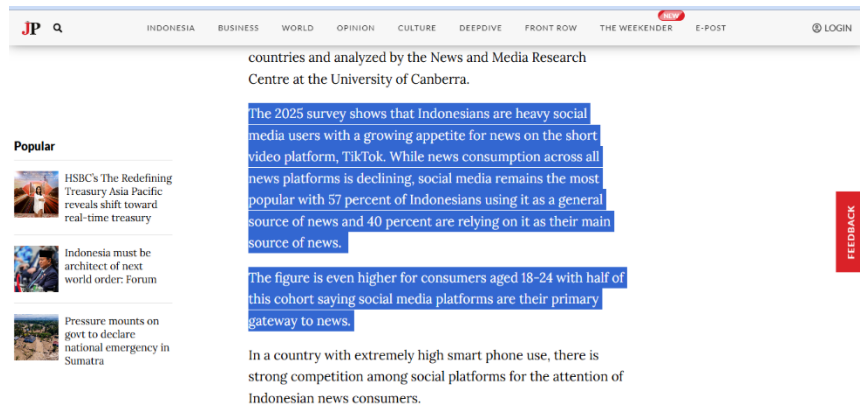


Figure 6. Digital News Consumption Data by Platform. Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025.

At the operational level, Kompas Group faces increased production costs due to its presence across multiple platforms, including news portals, mobile applications, social media, YouTube, television, and print. Each platform requires distinct content formats, presentation styles, and production rhythms. Internal interviews with Tilly and Audrey confirm that Kompas Group's newsroom must simultaneously fulfill two major functions: meeting the demand for fast-paced content on Kompas.com while maintaining the quality of in-depth journalism on Kompas.id. This multiplatform workload increases labor and technology costs, thereby placing additional pressure on the company's economic sustainability.

Under these conditions, the sustainability of Kompas Group is closely tied to its ability to identify alternative revenue models. Mercy Widjaja highlighted that funding mechanisms such as international NGO grants, public support, crowdfunding, or transparent government financing could provide potential solutions. She referenced public broadcasting models, such as the BBC, as examples of how media organizations can maintain independence through diversified, clearly regulated funding structures. However, the Indonesian context differs significantly, as media funding policies remain underdeveloped and provide limited structural support for quality journalism.

Overall, the combination of intramedia and intermedia competition creates a complex and challenging environment for Kompas Group. The organization must compete not only for advertising revenue but also for public attention, brand identity, relevance, and trust. In the midst of these pressures, Kompas Group continues to pursue digital transformation while attempting to preserve its journalistic principles as a mainstream media institution. The challenge it faces is no longer limited to economic survival, but extends to maintaining its authority as a source of information within an increasingly fragmented digital media ecosystem.

3.4 Economic Implications for the Sustainability of Legacy Media

The findings demonstrate that the economic implications faced by Kompas Group are structural and systemic rather than merely technical or operational. Digital disruption has transformed the foundations of the media industry, including revenue models, content distribution mechanisms, audience preferences, and market dominance. As a legacy media organization, Kompas Group must confront not only technological change but also

fundamental shifts in the political economy of attention that directly affect its long-term sustainability.

The dual-product market model described by Picard becomes increasingly unstable under these conditions. When audiences are fragmented, sporadic, and weakly attached to media brands, the economic value of audiences as commodities declines. This condition directly undermines advertising-based revenue, as advertisers increasingly allocate their budgets to global digital platforms that offer more efficient data-driven targeting. As previously noted, a significant proportion of Indonesia's digital advertising expenditure is absorbed by Google, Meta, and TikTok, reducing the share available to local media organizations. This structural imbalance reflects what Picard describes as a market power imbalance, in which media companies lose control over both audience distribution and monetization [1].

At the same time, the subscription-based model implemented through Kompas.id faces economic limitations rooted in audience behavior. Interview findings indicate that younger audiences are not strongly willing to pay for news content, particularly when free alternatives are widely available on social media platforms. This condition constrains the growth potential of paid digital journalism and limits subscription revenue to a relatively small segment of loyal, highly engaged readers. While subscription models are often viewed as a more stable source of income in contemporary media economics, their effectiveness in Indonesia remains challenged by price sensitivity and entrenched expectations of free information.

Operationally, Kompas Group incurs significant economic burdens due to its multiplatform presence. The need to produce content simultaneously for digital portals, mobile applications, social media, video platforms, television, and print media increases production costs, particularly in terms of human resources and technological infrastructure. Picard emphasizes that labor costs and investments in skills development represent major expenditure components in media organizations [1]. In the context of digital transformation, Kompas Group must continuously invest in reskilling and upskilling its workforce to remain competitive, further intensifying economic pressure.

Expert perspectives suggest that alternative funding models may be needed to sustain quality journalism. Mercy Widjaja highlighted the potential role of public funding, international grants, crowdfunding mechanisms, and transparent state-supported financing as supplementary revenue sources. Public broadcasting models such as the BBC illustrate how diversified and clearly regulated funding structures can support journalistic independence and long-term sustainability. However, the Indonesian media environment lacks a comprehensive policy framework to institutionalize such funding mechanisms, limiting their immediate applicability.

Overall, the economic implications identified in this study indicate that the sustainability of Kompas Group depends on its ability to continuously adapt to structural changes in the media economy. The organization must navigate declining advertising revenues, constrained subscription growth, rising production costs, and intensified competition for audience attention. These pressures require strategic innovation that extends

beyond technological adoption to include diversifying revenue sources and reconfiguring organizational priorities.

In this context, Kompas Group's experience reflects the broader challenges legacy media face in the digital era. Economic survival is no longer determined solely by journalistic quality or brand reputation, but by the capacity to operate effectively within a fragmented, algorithm-driven, and highly competitive media ecosystem. The findings underscore that sustaining legacy media institutions requires not only adaptation but also structural solutions that address imbalances in the contemporary media economy.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the economic sustainability of Kompas Group, as a legacy media organization, is shaped by the interaction among structural changes in the digital media economy, evolving audience behavior, and intensified competition within and beyond the journalism sector. The findings highlight that while the dual-product market strategy reflects strategic awareness of balancing mass reach and quality journalism, its long-term viability is increasingly constrained by platform dominance, fragmented audience attention, and declining effectiveness of traditional advertising and subscription logics. These conditions indicate that legacy media sustainability can no longer rely solely on technological adaptation and must instead involve structural and strategic realignment within the digital ecosystem.

From a practical and policy-oriented perspective, this study offers several decision-ready implications. First, Kompas Group should progressively reduce reliance on display advertising and prioritize higher-value advertising formats and branded content aligned with journalistic credibility. Second, Kompas.id's differentiated value proposition needs to be strengthened through exclusive, contextual, and explanatory journalism that clearly distinguishes it from free news alternatives. Third, a platform strategy is required that leverages social media and aggregators for discovery while reinforcing brand recognition and direct audience relationships. Fourth, Kompas Group should develop a clear revenue diversification roadmap that includes events, educational products, data services, and cross-subsidization models to mitigate structural vulnerabilities in the digital advertising market.

This study is subject to several limitations. The analysis is based on a limited number of informants, which constrains generalization across the broader media industry. It does not include financial statement analysis, content performance analytics, or quantitative audience metrics, and relies on perceptions from internal actors that may contain institutional bias. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an analytical explanation of strategic dynamics rather than a measurement of financial performance or audience impact.

Future research is encouraged to integrate mixed-method approaches by combining qualitative insights with financial data, audience analytics, and comparative studies across multiple legacy and digital-native media organizations. Further studies may also explore content differentiation strategies and algorithmic visibility in relation to brand trust and willingness to pay. For the general public, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of why sustaining quality journalism in the digital era requires collective adaptation—by

media institutions, audiences, and platforms alike—highlighting the societal importance of supporting credible journalism amid platform-driven information ecosystems.

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