

THE INDEPENDENCE OF JOURNALISM IN MEDAN: CHALLENGES AND REALITIES IN PERFORMING JOURNALISTIC DUTIES

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Abstract

Working as a journalist has a routine that is basically a need for information that the public wants. The routine that is carried out does not recognize any time and conditions, in other words, it must always be *standby / ready to* do coverage. However, most people think that the job of a journalist looks relaxed and easy-going because it is not bound by a schedule like most people in the office. But actually, the work of journalists is very demanding and risky. The work of journalists every day, regardless of time, place and conditions, is directly related to the nine principles of journalism, one of which is the fourth principle which states that journalists must maintain independence in their journalistic duties. The purpose of this study is to analyze the independence of journalists in carrying out their journalistic duties in Medan City. This research uses descriptive method with qualitative approach. The research was conducted in Medan City for 5 months using data collection techniques namely observation, interviews, and documentation. The conclusion of the research related to the application of journalists' independence in carrying out journalistic duties in Medan City is that it cannot be fully realized, due to many conflicts of interest.

I. Introduction

A journalist's job is basically to fulfill the information needs of the public. This routine is a common thing to do when carrying out journalistic duties. In fact, the routine knows no time, and in any condition, journalists are standby and ready to do coverage. The condition of the journalist's work routine can be said to work within 24 hours. This means that anytime, anywhere, and under any conditions, journalists must be ready to cover and make news (Silitonga & Muqsith, 2023). Therefore, there is no time management in the journalist's job. Unlike those who work in offices or factories, who work according to the time schedule set by the company management.

The journalism profession is unique because it operates without fixed time management. While most people begin their day in the morning or rest at night, journalists are already working in the field, gathering and packaging news (Putra & Bidin, 2023). Their duties continue even on holidays, ensuring that the public stays informed. Journalism knows no day or night, as journalists remain committed to delivering information. Even during vacations, a journalist's instinct compels them to report major events unless they are sick or officially on leave.

Despite common misconceptions that journalism is an easygoing job without strict schedules, it is, in fact, demanding and full of risks. Journalists whether in the field or in the newsroom, must effectively manage their time to meet editorial deadlines (Kotisova & Císařová, 2023). The nature of their work, which does not adhere to fixed hours or locations, requires discipline and dedication. Both reporters and editors face immense pressure to ensure timely and accurate news delivery, making journalism a profession that demands both mental and physical resilience.

The relentless work schedule of journalists ties directly to the nine principles of journalism, particularly the principle of maintaining independence in reporting (Makur et al., 2023). The issue of journalistic independence remains a topic of debate, as the public continues to question whether journalists truly uphold their autonomy in news coverage (Hamada, 2022; Shah et al., 2023; Yoedtadi et al., 2021). This discussion is ongoing, as long as the press remains a vital part of society. Given that the press is now considered the fourth pillar of democracy alongside the executive, legislative, and judiciary its role and independence in shaping public discourse remain crucial issues in modern society.

To uphold the press as the fourth pillar of democracy, journalists must maintain their independence in reporting, as outlined in the journalistic code of ethics (Makur et al., 2023). According to Article 1, Indonesian journalists must produce accurate, balanced, and good-faith news. The journalistic code of ethics serves as a moral guideline for journalists, ensuring they meet professional and ethical standards (Gollmitzer, 2023; Makur et al., 2023; Putra & Bidin, 2023; Yoedtadi et al., 2021). It has been established by journalistic organizations and the Press Council to uphold journalistic dignity and press freedom.

However, in practice, violations still occur, with some journalists producing misleading reports that do not align with actual facts and data. Such practices harm the public by prioritizing certain interests over truthful reporting, compromising journalistic independence. True journalist independence requires self-reliance and impartiality, free from influence or pressure from individuals or institutions.

The lack of journalistic independence stems from various factors, including biased reporting, data manipulation, failure to verify facts, and conflicts of interest involving both

journalists and media owners. Low salaries further compromise journalists' independence, as financial instability may push them to accept incentives from sources or interest groups (Hamada, 2022). These issues have contributed to a decline in journalistic integrity and professionalism, weakening their ability to prioritize the public interest (Chansrakaeo & Info, 2022; Makur et al., 2023; Putra & Bidin, 2023). Journalists with strong integrity uphold honesty, truth, and justice while maintaining high social responsibility, which is essential for professional and ethical journalism.

Journalists face both internal and external pressures that challenge their independence, as media companies, editorial boards, and public influence often interfere with their work, creating conflicts between professional integrity and external interests (Kotisova & Císarová, 2023; Lindblom et al., 2024). While press freedom is essential for serving the public, it is often compromised when media companies prioritize business and political agendas over journalistic ethics. The increasing industrialization of the media industry forces journalists to conform to company policies, making true independence difficult. Political influence, such as biased coverage during the 2020 Medan City Pilkada, further undermines journalistic neutrality, turning reporters into tools for political campaigns. Additionally, journalists face serious risks, including threats, violence, and even murder, as seen in cases like the killings of Amran Parulian Simanjuntak (2017) and Marsa Harahap (2021), as well as attacks on journalists covering sensitive topics. These incidents highlight the persistent struggle for journalistic independence and safety, emphasizing the need for ethical reporting and protection from external interference.

Journalistic independence is increasingly compromised by the combined pressures of media owner interests, political influence, and physical threats, forcing journalists to balance editorial policies, public expectations, and ethical responsibilities (Chansrakaeo & Info, 2022; Gollmitzer, 2023). True independence requires adherence to journalistic principles, yet external pressures often hinder free and fair reporting. Ensuring press freedom and journalist safety is vital for democracy and journalistic integrity. Professional competence is crucial, as incompetent journalists are more susceptible to influence, affecting both independence and public trust in media. Research has shown various threats to journalistic independence, such as paid news contracts (Ritonga, 2021), pandemic-related pressures (Belani & Aji, 2022), and political ownership of media (Fazri et al., 2021), which lead to surveillance and intervention. Additionally, studies on cyber media and government ties (Loisa et al.) reveal how power relations shape reporting biases. Theoretical perspectives like social responsibility theory emphasize that press freedom must serve the public, while media political economy theory highlights how industrialization and profit motives erode journalistic independence, making content increasingly subject to economic and political influences.

Based on the various issues related to journalistic independence described above, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by journalists in maintaining their independence while carrying out their duties in Medan City. The research is titled "The Independence of Journalists in Carrying Out Journalistic Duties in Medan City." The general objective of this study is to analyze the independence of journalists in performing their journalistic duties in Medan City. Specifically, the study aims to examine the implementation of journalistic independence in Medan City, assess the impact of journalistic independence on media practices in the city, and identify the key factors influencing journalists' independence in carrying out their duties.

Theoretical Review

A. Journalist Independence

Journalistic independence is essential for upholding professionalism, integrity, and the public interest by ensuring journalists can report truthfully and fairly without external influence. Independence means being free from interference, pressure, or bias that could compromise coverage and reporting. While neutrality is a choice, true independence allows journalists to take a stance while maintaining fairness and objectivity. Professional journalists adhere to the Press Law and ethical standards, ensuring their work educates and empowers the public. Key principles, as emphasized by the Canadian Association of Journalists, include truthfully serving the public, defending free information flow, exposing wrongdoing, and avoiding conflicts of interest, all of which safeguard journalistic credibility and ethics.

Journalistic independence, as outlined in Press Law No. 40/1999, is crucial for a free and objective press, ensuring journalists can report accurately without external pressures while adhering to ethical and legal responsibilities. Recognized as a human right under Article 19 of the UN Charter, press freedom is essential to democracy and public trust. The law and the Journalistic Code of Ethics (KEJ) protect journalists from censorship and influence by media owners, governments, and advertisers, reinforcing their role as the fourth pillar of democracy (Gollmitzer, 2023; Makur et al., 2023; Putra & Bidin, 2023; Silitonga & Muqsith, 2023; Yoedtadi et al., 2021). Ethical journalism demands accuracy, fairness, and transparency, ensuring facts remain untainted by political or financial interests. While independence does not always mean neutrality, it prioritizes truth and public welfare, allowing journalists to provide credible and unbiased information.

Journalists' independence is essential for upholding truth and delivering high-quality news, yet it often faces challenges from media ideology, ownership interests, and external pressures. True independence means that journalists must work without intervention, ensuring balanced and factual reporting guided by their conscience. Unlike lawyers who advocate for clients, journalists must remain impartial and avoid external influence, including from media owners. Accuracy, as emphasized in the Journalistic Code of Ethics, requires that news remains truthful and based on objective facts without fabrication. Independence in journalism is akin to scientific integrity, where the pursuit of truth and justice is paramount.

The value of truth in the information/news broadcast is said to be accurate, in accordance with the journalistic code of ethics. It can be interpreted that accurate in the journalistic code of ethics is believed to be true, according to the objective circumstances when the event occurred. emphasizes "do not add things that do not exist. Don't make things up or make them up". Of course, this is in accordance with the notion of truth, which is included in the element of accuracy. The realization of independence in accordance with KEJ can be illustrated as a scientific expert who works with the ability to bring di ri closer to truth and justice. Allah says in QS. Al-Maidah verse 8 as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَغْدِلُوا ۖ اِعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Meaning: *O you who have believed, be those who always establish (the truth) for the sake of Allah, bearing witness with justice. and do not let your hatred of any people lead you to be unjust. Be just, for justice is nearer to piety, and fear Allah, Verily, Allah is aware of what you do.*

According to Tafsir Al-Wajiz by Shaykh Prof. Dr. Wahbah az-Zuhaili, believers must uphold truth and justice sincerely for Allah, without bias or favoritism. This principle aligns with journalists' independence, emphasizing the need to report events truthfully and fairly, without manipulating facts for personal or external interests. Upholding truth and fairness with sincerity strengthens journalists' integrity and reinforces the core values of independence in their profession.

On the other hand, journalists must also understand and be wise in reporting events, so as not to cause hostility and hatred in accordance with QS.Al Hujarat verse 6,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ أَنْ تَضَيُّبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحِرُوا عَلَى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ لِدِمِينٍ.

Meaning: *"O you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with news, then check it carefully so that you do not inflict a calamity on a people without knowing the circumstances, causing you to regret what you have done".*

The understanding of the verse is that O believers, if you get important news from the wicked who have deviated from the boundaries of religion then do not rush to believe, but seek the real explanation and confirm the truth of the news before being affected by it. It is feared that those of you who are innocent people will be affected by bad things and things that are makrooh so that you regret and grieve for the wrong you have done and wish that it had never happened. This verse was revealed for Walid bin 'Uqbah bin Abi Mu'aith whom the Messenger of Allah (SAW) sent to the Banu Mushthaliq as a confidant (to collect the zakaah of goats). When they heard about it, they approached him, then 'Uqbah was afraid of them and returned. He said: "Verily the people want to kill me and prevent their alms", Then Rasulallah (peace be upon him) wanted to attack them, then their messenger came and said: "O Rasulallah, we heard your messenger, so we approached him to honor him and want to carry out what he conveyed, namely alms".

When viewed from the words of Allah SWT, the journalistic code of ethics in the context of journalist independence cannot be separated from the values of Islamic teachings, where journalist independence remains in the KEJ corridor as a blend in carrying out journalistic duties. Because the understanding of actual, factual and balanced news according to conscience requires journalists to implement Islamic KEJ, in order to *be* able to carry out the mission of *amar makruf nahi munkar*, as Allah SWT says in QS. Ali Imran verse 104 explains:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

Meaning: *"And let there be among you a group of people who always invite goodness, command the good, and prevent the evil. They are the lucky ones".*

According to Tafsir Al-Mukhtashar, believers should promote virtue, encourage good deeds, and prevent wrongdoing, as guided by Islamic teachings. An Islamic journalistic code of ethics is essential to uphold ethical standards and maintain journalists' integrity. By adhering to these principles, Muslim journalists can fulfill religious duties (*amar makruf nahi munkar*), promote the public good, and prioritize the welfare of society over personal or group interests.

1. Journalist Independence in Islamic Journalism

Journalist independence means that journalists have independence and cannot be pressured by any party in the process of covering and disseminating information. Independence is one of the manifestations of journalists' freedom in carrying out their journalistic duties, which should not be intervened by power or things that damage independence itself. The word independence in the practice of journalistic activities means not taking sides, not depending on a person/group, having independence (cannot be intervened), *covering both sides* (reporting in a balanced manner), and reporting according to the facts obtained. Referring to the word independence, journalists as the spearhead of mass media in conveying information have a big role. The independence that journalists have will also provide "freedom of space" in making reports, and disseminating information through the mass media. However, it must be understood that independence must also bring independence in reporting information correctly and fairly as a manifestation of Islamic teachings. Although the independence of the media does not rest solely on journalists, but also on all elements of society, especially media owners and the editorial team of the media where journalists work.

The attitude of independence in the Quran is said by Allah in Surah Ar-Ra'd Verse 11:

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ ۚ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ ۚ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِن وَالٍ

Meaning: "For man there are angels who follow him in turn, in front and behind him, guarding him at the command of Allah. Verily, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change the condition of themselves. And if Allah wills evil for a people, there is no one who can resist it; and there is no protector for them but Him."

Journalists must uphold independence by adhering to professional and ethical standards, as their actions are observed and recorded by angels at Allah's command. According to Tafsir Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah, Allah grants protection and blessings to people unless they choose to disobey His commandments. This reinforces the idea that true journalistic independence begins from within, requiring integrity and freedom from external influences. Journalists must remain steadfast in their commitment to truth and fairness, trusting that Allah's guidance will protect them from negative consequences when upholding ethical reporting.

In the context of Islamic journalism, independence aligns with Islamic teachings derived from the Quran and Sunnah. Dedy Djamaluddin Malik defines Islamic journalism as the process of reporting events related to Muslims and Islamic teachings, while Suf Kasman expands this definition to include adherence to journalistic norms

based on the Quran and Hadith. These perspectives highlight that journalistic independence must be rooted in Islamic principles, ensuring that news coverage remains truthful, ethical, and beneficial to society while maintaining the values of integrity and accountability.

B. Press Theory

The press is a social institution with two main meanings: narrowly as newspapers and broadly as an institution that carries out journalistic duties to inform and engage the public. As a subsystem of society, the press interacts with and is influenced by other social institutions, shaping and responding to human needs. It does not operate independently but functions within an organized structure, often linked to the state, where the government plays a role in planning and implementing societal goals.

Because of its existence, the press will also be influenced, and even determined by the relationship between the press subsystem and the subsystem in the state philosophy and the state political system and government, where the press is located. According to (Aredianto, Mass Communication: An Introduction 2017, 52) The press system is a subsystem of the communication system. It has its own characteristics compared to other systems. Thus, the press in a country will reflect the social system in which it is regulated by the relationships between individuals and existing institutions. The relationship between the press and society is reciprocal (mutual influence) (Chansrakao & Info, 2022; Standaert et al., 2021). The state creates a press or mass media system, then this system will modify the society of that country. Because each country is different, each press system in that country is also different, so that the pattern of interaction between the state and its press continues to change.

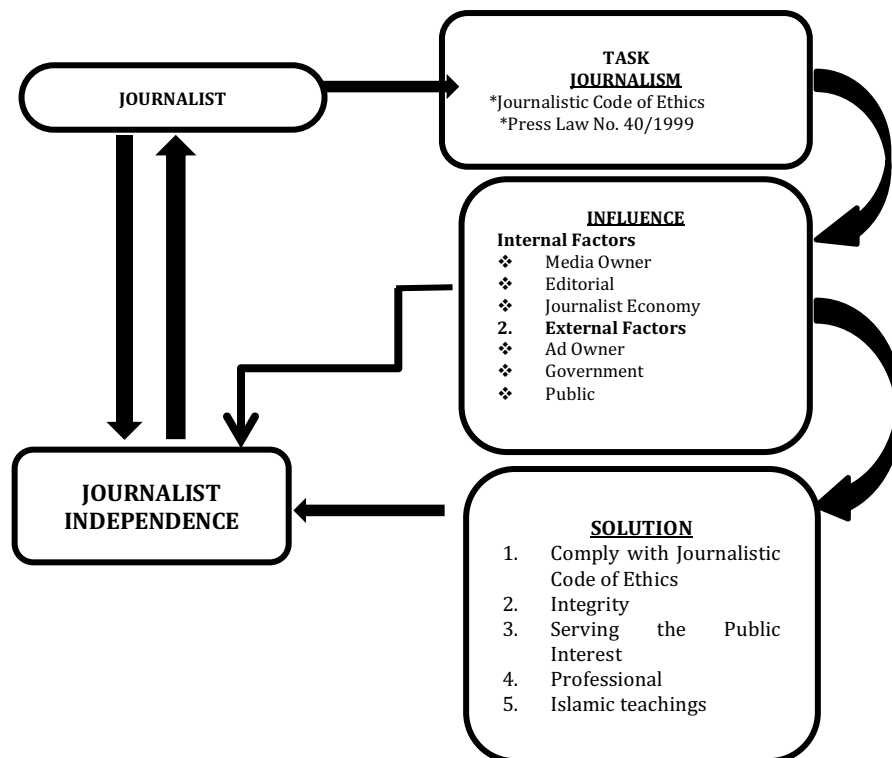
Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, in Four Theories of the Press, categorize the global press into four theories reflecting societal structures: Social Responsibility, Political Economy, and Authoritarian Press Theories. Social Responsibility Theory balances press freedom with accountability, ensuring media serves the public interest with accuracy and fairness. Political Economy Theory (Azhari et al., 2023; Repository, 2008) highlights the media's profit-driven nature, where ownership influences content to serve economic and political interests, often limiting diversity. Authoritarian Press Theory views the press as a government tool (Chansrakao & Info, 2022; Yoedadi et al., 2021), controlling information to maintain state power and suppress dissent (Repository, 2008; Shah et al., 2023). These theories illustrate how media systems are shaped by political, economic, and societal dynamics.

The Liberal Press Theory, or Libertarian Theory, emerged in the 17th century as a reaction to authoritarian control, advocating for press freedom, individual rights, and a media system free from government interference. It positions the press as a watchdog that critiques government actions and provides a platform for public discourse. However, while this system ensures freedom from state censorship, media independence is often compromised by economic pressures, as ownership and financial interests influence content. This theory is practiced in democratic nations (Hamada, 2022; Standaert et al., 2021) like the United States, Canada, and parts of Europe, though true press impartiality is often challenged by political and commercial influences.

The Soviet Communist Press Theory, rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, sees the press as a tool of the ruling party, serving state interests through strict government control and censorship. Private media ownership is banned, and the press functions to indoctrinate, educate, and mobilize society in line with socialist principles. Profit motives are eliminated, and media operates under party directives, ensuring that public discourse aligns with the state's goals. Institutions like Glavit enforce censorship, maintaining the party's ideological dominance and preventing dissent. This model, adopted in the Soviet Union and other communist states, prioritizes state control over journalistic independence.

F. Framework

Picture 5. Framework



Source : Researcher Processed 2022

The researcher created a conceptual framework as a thought process in conducting the research, namely the researcher wanted to see how the implementation, obstacles, solutions to the realization of the independence of Medan City journalists in carrying out journalistic duties. The table image starts from journalists having journalistic duties (fat arrows), journalists also have challenges and solutions (thin arrows). Then, journalists in carrying out journalistic duties are guided by the Press Law No. 40/1999 and the guidelines for professional behavior standards in carrying out their duties in the journalistic code of ethics (KEJ). In carrying out their duties, journalists have challenges or obstacles both internally (editorial and media owners) and externally (government and public). The solution to these challenges and obstacles is that journalists must obey and comply with the KEJ, have integrity, namely being firm

in principle and strong in values (including Islamic principles and values) and honest and fair. The solution is expected to realize the independence of journalists. The realization of the independence of journalists will produce journalistic works in accordance with the Press Law and KEJ.

Research Methods

This research employs a descriptive method with a qualitative approach to understand journalists' independence in Medan City. The study gathers data through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, focusing on behaviors, attitudes, and influencing factors. It does not test hypotheses but aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of journalistic independence. Data collection includes interviews with selected journalists and supporting documents related to the topic.

The research informants consist of 10 journalists from print, electronic, and online media in Medan City, chosen based on their assignment location, experience of over five years, and certification through the Journalist Competency Test (UKW). Primary data comes from these journalists, while secondary sources include literature, articles, and online references. Data collection techniques include non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure a thorough investigation of journalistic independence.

Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity is ensured through observation diligence, triangulation, and peer discussions. Triangulation compares different data sources to test consistency, while peer discussions allow for an open review process, refining the research findings and ensuring credibility.

Results and Discussion

Journalistic Code of Ethics and Public Interest

Journalists are required to adhere to the Journalistic Code of Ethics (KEJ) in order to maintain professional standards and avoid legal issues. The KEJ serves as a guideline for journalists, helping them understand their duties and ensuring their actions align with ethical principles. Compliance with the KEJ prevents criminalization, violence, and legal violations, while also protecting press freedom, which belongs to both journalists and the public. The Press Council affirms the importance of these ethical principles and oversees their implementation to ensure journalists maintain their professionalism and independence.

The KEJ is a moral and operational foundation for journalists, ensuring they act responsibly and ethically in society. It provides flexibility in coverage and safeguards press freedom from external interference. The KEJ is created by journalists for journalists and is only applicable to them. Adherence to the code is also mandated by Indonesian law, specifically the Press Law Number 40 of 1999 (Chansrakao & Info, 2022; Makur et al., 2023; Putra & Bidin, 2023), which requires journalists to follow the code as part of their professional obligations.

Journalists from various media platforms in this study emphasize the importance of adhering to the Journalistic Code of Ethics and prioritizing public interest. They

acknowledge that the code of ethics serves as a moral standard and is mandated by Press Law No. 40 of 1999, ensuring accountability in news coverage. Journalists strive to present reality objectively while balancing the interests of media owners and advertisers. If conflicts arise, they carefully package news using refined language to maintain neutrality and uphold journalistic integrity.

Syafitri Tambunan, Assistant Editor of the North Sumatra Page Column at Analisa Daily, also highlights the necessity of following ethical guidelines as required by media organizations. She notes that while public interest should ideally be prioritized, in practice, journalists face constraints due to business and corporate influences. The media operates within a system where multiple interests must be considered, making it challenging to fully advocate for the public interest without accommodating other stakeholders.

Several journalists from various media outlets in Medan emphasize the fundamental role of the Journalistic Code of Ethics in their profession, viewing it as a moral standard and legal safeguard. Agustina from Harian Berita Sore describes the code of ethics as the "soul" of journalistic work, ensuring accuracy and prioritizing public interest over external influences. Similarly, Waspada Daily journalist Muhammad Ferdinan Sembiring insists that ethical guidelines and press laws are "non-negotiable" but acknowledges that journalists operate within company constraints. Meanwhile, MH Pulungan from Medan Pos Baringin Daily highlights challenges in adhering to ethical standards, noting that financial pressures and media ownership policies sometimes conflict with journalistic integrity.

Faizal Syahputra Lukman from RRI Medan reinforces the view that the journalistic code of ethics is inseparable from a journalist's conscience, stating that ethical adherence is an obligation, especially in public broadcasting institutions like RRI. He emphasizes that RRI prioritizes public interest, delivering unbiased and beneficial news in line with its mission. Despite various challenges, journalists across different media platforms recognize their moral responsibility to provide accurate and fair information to the public, even as they navigate pressures from media owners, advertisers, and financial constraints.

Several journalists from various media in North Sumatra emphasize the importance of adhering to the journalistic code of ethics and prioritizing public interest in their work. Kirwanto from TVRI North Sumatra stresses that ethical compliance is essential to maintaining professionalism and avoiding conflicts. Metro TV journalist Usrizal Pulungan highlights that news should serve the public, particularly issues affecting many people, such as corruption and economic concerns. Similarly, Hamdani Nasution from sumutcyber.com views the code of ethics as fundamental to journalism, emphasizing that news should align with conscience and attract public attention. Sugiatmo from digtara.com reinforces that journalists have a responsibility to ensure their news serves the public, with editors playing a crucial role in determining which stories align with public interest. Despite differences in media platforms, all journalists agree that ethical journalism and serving the public remain their primary responsibilities.

The Relationship between Journalist Competence and Independence

Journalist competence is essential for producing high-quality news coverage, directly influencing their independence and professionalism. Skilled journalists can effectively gather, manage, and deliver accurate information, ensuring that the public receives reliable news. A lack of competence can lead to poor-quality reporting, failing to meet public information needs and potentially damaging the reputation of the media. Moreover, competence supports professional independence, enabling journalists to work without undue influence and maintain credibility. However, economic, political, and media policy factors can sometimes hinder journalists from fully applying their skills, affecting their ability to meet public expectations.

Research findings indicate that journalists across print, electronic, and online media agree on the strong link between competence and independence. Competent journalists can produce valuable and clear news, while those lacking skills may struggle and become reliant on others, compromising their independence. However, external pressures such as editorial policies and economic constraints can limit their ability to apply their competencies fully. Even with professional certifications like UKW, some journalists find their qualifications do not always translate into practical independence due to outside influences. Despite these challenges, competence remains a key factor in ensuring objective, creative, and independent journalism.

Freedom of the Press and the Moral Responsibility of Journalists

The research highlights the connection between press freedom and journalists' moral responsibility across various media platforms. While journalists generally feel free to report without direct interference, external factors such as media ownership, editorial policies, and government influence sometimes limit this freedom. Despite these challenges, they emphasize that press freedom must be exercised with ethical responsibility, ensuring reports are accurate, balanced, and considerate of societal impact. Certain topics, particularly those involving powerful figures or businesses, may face restrictions due to economic and political pressures, leading to internal discussions within media organizations. However, journalists remain committed to truthfulness, objectivity, and serving the public interest, striving to balance their freedom with accountability and adherence to ethical standards.

Integrity and Professionalism of Journalists

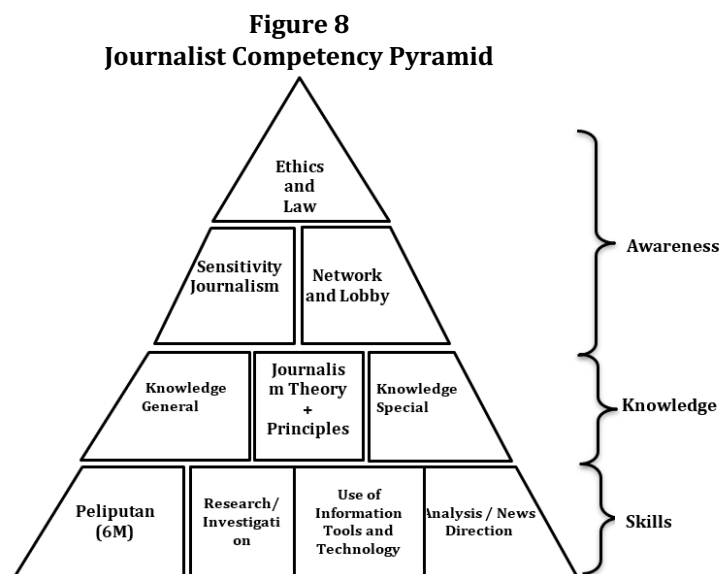
Journalists must uphold integrity by being honest, fair, independent, and responsible to maintain public trust and professionalism. Integrity ensures accurate, unbiased reporting and adherence to ethical standards, legal frameworks, and moral values. Research on print, electronic, and online media journalists highlights that independence is reflected in news quality—when prioritizing public interest, independence is maintained, but external pressures often compromise it. Fear of legal repercussions and job insecurity further challenge journalistic freedom, despite protections under the Press Law No. 40 of 1999. However, feature writing allows journalists creative freedom to highlight humanitarian issues with less intervention. RRI Medan journalist Faizal Syahputra Lukman affirms that while independence is difficult, adhering to ethical journalism, cross-checking sources, and focusing on topics like

education, tourism, and culture help maintain credibility and public trust.

Discussion

Implementation of Journalist Independence in Carrying Out Journalistic Duties in Medan City

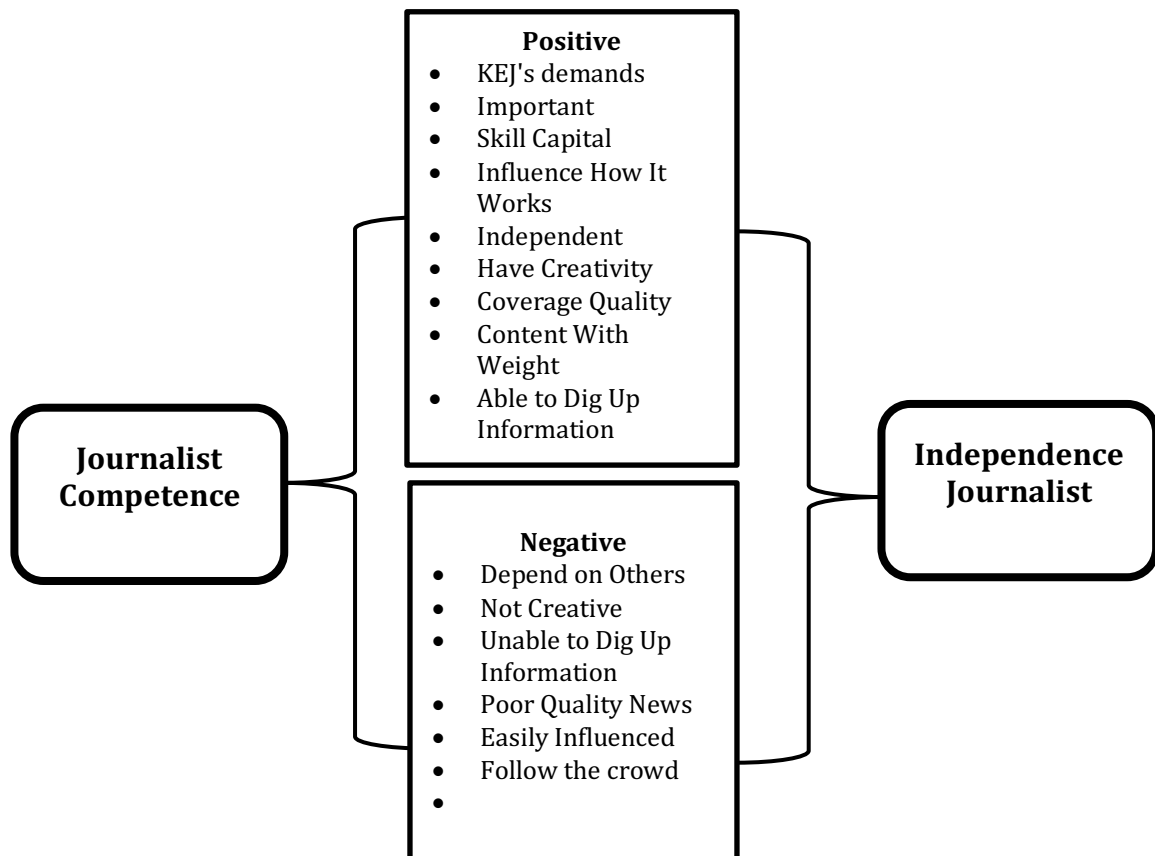
Journalist competence is crucial for producing high-quality, accurate, and objective news that informs society and maintains media credibility. Skilled journalists enhance public trust and the competitiveness of their media, while inadequate competence leads to shallow reporting and audience disengagement. As journalism shapes public knowledge and behavior, journalists must continuously improve their skills to uphold ethical standards and ensure responsible reporting. Competence also supports journalistic independence, preventing external influences from compromising media integrity. The Poynter Institute's "competence pyramid," adopted by the Press Council, underscores essential journalistic skills needed to maintain professionalism and uphold the public interest.



The journalist competence pyramid consists of three key components: awareness, knowledge, and skills. Ethical and legal awareness guides journalistic decisions, knowledge provides essential principles for in-depth reporting, and skills like writing, interviewing, and researching are crucial in the digital era. Strong competence supports journalistic independence, ensuring high-quality and reliable news. Research findings confirm that competence is vital for producing quality coverage and maintaining independence, as journalists without strong skills, knowledge, and ethics struggle to be creative and uphold journalistic integrity. According to (Susanto 2021, 24) unqualified journalists lack independence and idealism, making them reliant on others rather than actively seeking information. Media gain public trust by upholding independence, which is achieved through professional journalism. True independence means journalists

and media operate freely without external interference. Based on the discussion of the research results, it can be described as follows:

Figure 9. Relationship between Competence and Independence of Journalists



Source: Researcher Processing from 2022 Research Results

Journalist Freedom and Social Responsibility

Freedom of the press is a right granted by the state to fulfill public information needs, impacting both media companies and society. This freedom allows the public to choose from various journalistic products, encouraging media diversity. However, journalistic freedom is not absolute; it must respect societal ethics and norms. According (Daulay 2016, 54) freedom and responsibility go hand in hand, ensuring harmony among religious, ethnic, and cultural communities. Both the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and the 1945 Constitution impose limits on press freedom to prevent societal unrest. As Dennis McQuail emphasized, journalistic freedom carries a vital responsibility to positively contribute to social, cultural, and political life.

Furthermore, if we look at the freedom of the press put forward by John C. Merrill (1989), it is a condition that allows press workers (journalists) to choose, determine, and carry out their duties according to their wishes. Meanwhile, (Abrar 2011, 85) underlines that press/journalist freedom also includes to) and negative freedom (freedom from) and positive freedom (freedom to).

Journalists must be critical of societal issues while exercising responsible

freedom that adheres to ethical and social norms. True journalistic freedom is not absolute but must be balanced with social responsibility, ensuring fair and impartial reporting. This balance prevents misinformation and maintains public trust in the media. In Islam, journalistic responsibility emphasizes social awareness and accountability, as highlighted in Surah Al-Muddassir, Verse 38, which states that every individual is accountable for their actions. Similarly, Surah Al-Isra, Verse 36, stresses the need for verification before spreading information, aligning with journalism ethics to prevent misinformation and uphold public trust.

Furthermore, the context of the press in social responsibility is by Theodore Peterson in (Abrar 2011, 48) wrote that the power and position of those who monopolize the media also gives rise to an obligation for them to be responsible to society, requiring them to ensure that society has sufficient information to make decisions, and if the media does not want to be responsible, then it is deemed necessary for social institutions to force them to do so.

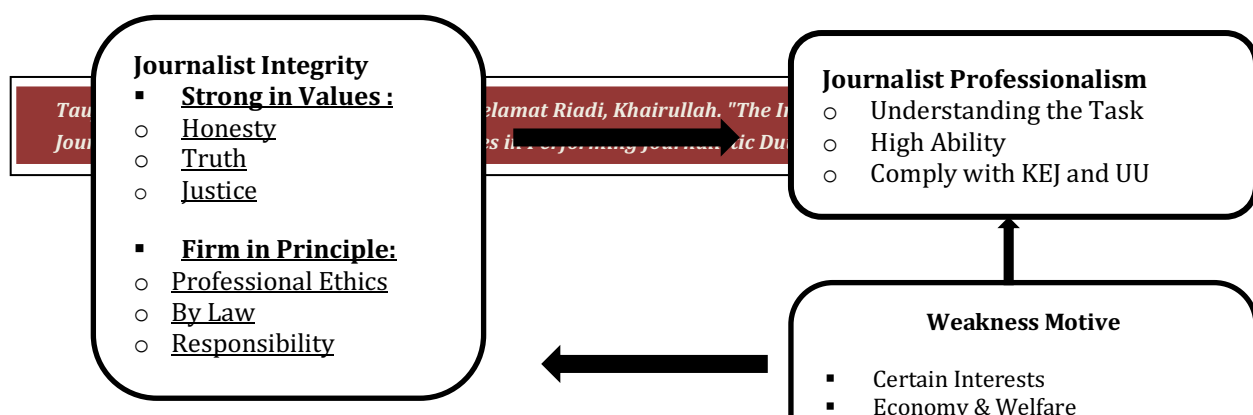
Theodore Peterson's concept of a socially responsible press emphasizes that the media must serve the public interest rather than solely their own. This requires journalists to provide accurate information while avoiding controversy and conflict. Journalistic freedom must align with ethical standards and legal regulations, ensuring responsible reporting. According to the theory of social responsibility, the media has an obligation to prioritize societal interests. While journalists generally agree on the need for socially responsible reporting, they often face dilemmas in balancing journalistic freedom with ethical and professional responsibilities.

Integrity and Professionalism of Journalists

Journalist integrity is crucial for maintaining honesty, truth, and justice in news reporting, ensuring credibility and public trust. Integrity reflects strong ethical principles, yet it is often challenged by personal interests, media ownership, and editorial pressures. A journalist's independence is closely tied to their integrity and professionalism, as balanced and fair reporting upholds journalistic credibility. However, integrity can be compromised by factors such as close relationships with sources, gifts, advertising pressures, and company interests, which may influence news content and publication speed. These challenges indicate that journalists still struggle to maintain strong integrity and professionalism in their work.

From the discussion of the research results above related to the integrity and professionalism of journalists in carrying out their journalistic duties, researchers can describe the flow of motives for the weaknesses and strengths of journalists' integrity and professionalism as follows:

Figure 11. Integrity and Professionalism of Journalists



Source: Researcher Processing from 2022 Research Results

Journalist independence is crucial for delivering accurate and unbiased news, but it faces challenges from government influence, powerful entities, and economic pressures. External interventions threaten journalistic credibility and idealism, raising concerns about press integrity. Economic struggles also make journalists vulnerable to outside influences, affecting their independence. However, feature writing provides a creative space where journalists can maintain some autonomy, focusing on human interest stories that evoke empathy and highlight social issues. Unlike straight or spot news, which are often influenced by advertisers or authorities, feature writing allows journalists to uphold humanitarian values and present unique perspectives.

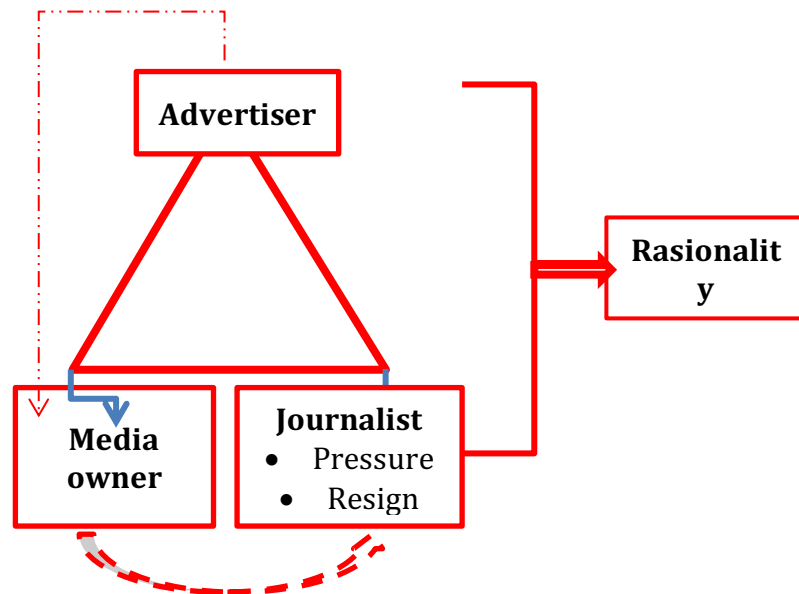
Impact Implementation of Journalist Independence in Carrying Out Journalistic Duties in Medan City

Journalist independence is essential for maintaining objective, accurate, and unbiased news reporting. By adhering to professional ethics, journalists can critically monitor government policies and focus on public issues that impact society. True independence ensures that news remains credible and free from external pressures, directly influencing public trust in the media. However, media independence is increasingly threatened by business dynamics, where financial interests often dictate editorial decisions. The political economy of media prioritizes profitability, with media owners and advertisers shaping news production. This commercialization raises concerns about balanced reporting and journalists' ability to uphold ethical principles amidst business-driven agendas.

The growing influence of advertisers and media owners often results in discussions between journalists, editorial teams, and management about news content, considering its potential impact on business interests. These discussions can lead to news being withheld or altered to align with commercial and political priorities rather than reflecting actual events in the field. As media organizations adopt a profit-driven approach, journalists may shift their loyalty from public interest to media owners, advertisers, and government entities, reducing

independence to a mere slogan. This dependence makes it difficult for journalists to uphold their ethical responsibilities, as they become entangled in the interests of the media institutions they serve, ultimately leading to a decline in journalistic integrity and independence.

Figure 13
Pyramid Media Business Vortex



Source: Research Processing Based on Research Results 2022

Journalists often face pressure and intervention, making it difficult to maintain independence and professionalism, sometimes even forcing them to leave their jobs. Research in Medan City shows that journalists navigate these challenges by softening their language in reports. However, they find great satisfaction when their news is published without censorship, reinforcing their commitment to journalistic ethics. Public trust and recognition further validate their independence, ensuring journalism remains a pillar of truth and accountability.

Factors Influencing the Independence of Journalists in Carrying Out Journalistic Duties in Medan City

A true journalist works to deliver fact-based, unbiased information in service of the public, making journalism an honorable and legally bound profession. However, many journalists struggle to maintain objectivity due to external influences, despite clear ethical guidelines. According to research, journalism is built on nine core principles, including truth, public loyalty, verification, independence, and providing a forum for public discourse. Unfortunately, media businesses often prioritize profit over journalistic integrity, compromising press freedom, which is meant to benefit society. As a social institution, the press plays a crucial role in supervision, opinion formation, and education, but journalists,

especially in Medan City, often face challenges in upholding independence due to conflicting interests.

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers on journalists working in Medan City, it turns out that upholding and maintaining journalist independence has experienced ups and downs, sometimes it can be upheld and sometimes it is difficult to realize. This is more due to the existence of greater interests than the information obtained by journalists in the field. There are at least two factors that influence the independence of journalists, namely:

1. Internal Factors

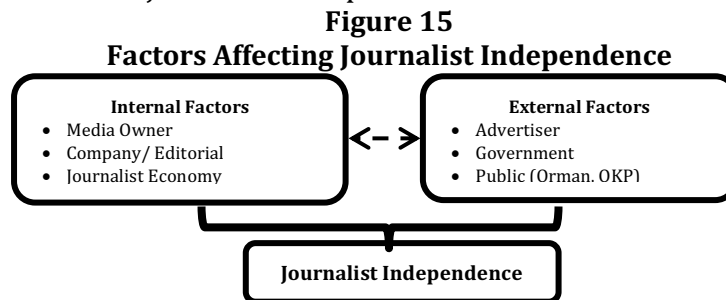
Internal factors play a dominant role in influencing journalist independence, stemming from media owners, editorial management, and journalists' economic welfare. Media owners and editors often determine whether news is published, sometimes withholding reports due to close ties with individuals or institutions involved. Journalists may soften their reporting to ensure publication, while financial insecurity can pressure them to accept external influences. Additionally, editorial decisions are often shaped by business interests and internal power dynamics, where media owners and managers exert significant control over journalistic independence. While(Susanto 2021, 26-27) external influences can come from society that distorts the news space. However, the news production process should be protected from various influences. This protection is in the form of a moral foundation and professional ethics. In order for the media to gain public trust, journalists must have capability, integrity, and professionalism.

2. External Factors

External factors also influence journalist independence, particularly from advertisers, government partnerships, businesses, and societal organizations. These influences can lead to news being withheld, delayed, or embargoed based on media owner decisions, which editorial management follows. Additionally, journalists often face obstacles from external parties that hinder their reporting efforts (Aji 2022, 36). Journalists face significant challenges in maintaining independence due to various internal and external pressures. Ideally, only the editorial team should influence news content, but in reality, journalists encounter obstacles from sources and external parties. According to Shoemaker-Reese's theory of five circles of influence, these pressures affect journalists at both individual and institutional levels. Internal and external influences are interconnected, particularly between media owners, advertisers, and the government. Media owners prioritize maintaining relationships with advertisers to secure revenue, including journalist salaries, and seek synergy with the government for favorable policies, ultimately impacting journalistic independence.

The relationship between internal and external relationships(Sukardi, Easy Ways to Understand the Journalistic Code of Ethics and the Press Council 2008, 46)ultimately weakens the independence of journalists in criticizing something related to the interests of the community. Employment regulations and journalistic independence are distinct concepts. Just as a doctor follows company policies but must adhere to medical ethics when diagnosing patients, journalists

must comply with company rules while maintaining integrity in reporting. Journalists should not alter facts, even if they negatively impact their media company. The journalistic code of ethics mandates independence, including from press owners. In this context, Press Council Regulation No. 5 of April 28, 2008, prohibits press owners or management from forcing journalists to produce news that violates ethical or legal standards. Based on the discussion above, the two factors that influence journalist independence are: can be described as follows:



Conclusion and Suggestions

The independence of journalists in carrying out their duties in Medan City has not been fully realized due to various conflicts of interest. These conflicts arise from media owners, editorial management, advertisers, the government, and even the journalists' own economic interests. However, journalist independence can still be exercised through feature writing, which allows journalists greater creative freedom. This writing style enhances their sensitivity to human life and significant events, enabling a more independent approach to reporting. The impact of journalist independence in Medan City can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, it brings satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment to journalists. However, the negative impact includes pressure, threats, and changes in work principles due to external influences. Some journalists may also face dismissal or feel compelled to leave their jobs if their independence conflicts with the interests of media owners or other powerful stakeholders.

Several factors influence journalist independence, categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors, such as media owners, company management, and journalists' economic conditions, play a more dominant role than external factors like advertisers, government, and public influence. These internal and external factors do not operate separately but instead interact and influence each other, shaping the level of independence that journalists can exercise in their work.

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