

Polarization of Journalists' Attitudes Regarding State Bonds to Press Freedom and Media Continuity

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a myriad of alterations and substantial repercussions across numerous domains of human existence. Beyond merely affecting the healthcare sector, COVID-19 has also exerted influence over the sustainability of educational systems, economic structures, public governance, and even the journalistic field. These circumstances have led to a notable decline in advertising revenues within the media, necessitating reductions in employee wages, implementation of layoffs, and in some instances, declarations of insolvency. A strategic governmental intervention designed to mitigate the economic ramifications of the pandemic on the press has been the establishment of collaborative initiatives between governmental bodies and media organizations, which includes the provision of financial assistance. Although these initiatives are ostensibly intended to bolster the media sector, they have subsequently manifested as a potential jeopardy to the autonomy of the press. Employing qualitative methodologies grounded in critical paradigms, the research undertook an analysis of both primary and secondary data, acquired through comprehensive interviews with journalists and stakeholders in media policy, alongside extensive desk research utilizing diverse documentary sources. The findings of the investigation indicated that the collaboration between the case study television station and the Indonesian government during the pandemic, while yielding benefits for both entities, engendered a power dynamic that compromised the independence of the media in the context of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Autonomy of Media, Cooperation with Governmental Entities, Financial Support for Media Outlets.

Introduction

The presence of a media landscape that operates independently and is devoid of governmental interference is a fundamental criterion for assessing the democratic state of a nation. The media functions as a platform for articulating diverse perspectives, including critiques of public policies deemed inappropriate, thus exemplifying the principle of freedom of expression within society. Moreover, the media plays an essential role in furnishing the populace with accurate and transparent information, empowering them to make informed decisions grounded in factual evidence. Additionally, the media assumes a critical function in social oversight, ensuring governmental accountability by monitoring political authority and mitigating the risk of power misuse.

In nations characterized by diminished democratic frameworks or authoritarian governance, the media frequently serves as an instrument for the manipulation and regulation of public sentiment in alignment with governmental interests. Dissent against the government may be suppressed, while the information disseminated by the media is often less independent and subject to censorship. Rigorous oversight of public forums and limitations on free expression are defining characteristics of how authoritarian regimes manage the media landscape.

Traditional methods for regulating the spread of information frequently entail structural alterations presented as standard administrative practices. This tactic is particularly prominent in authoritarian governments, where supporters of the regime are appointed to editorial roles and leadership positions within media organizations to steer the news narrative in accordance with the prescribed agenda. Although this method may seem to be unique to authoritarian contexts, analogous instances can also be observed in political systems that are professed to be democratic.

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Following the dissolution of the New Order regime in Indonesia, the press experienced an unprecedented liberation from restrictions. Media outlets were no longer bound by governmental protocols regarding their reporting practices. During the New Order, information dissemination was characteristically uniform and employed sophisticated language, especially when addressing delicate topics such as governmental criticism. The government exerted control over all facets of the press through the Department of Illumination, which issued a Press Publishing Business License (SIUPP). This license became a prerequisite for the establishment

of mass media and had to conform to governmental policies. Should the press diverge from or critique the government, their SIUPP would be revoked (bredel) by the Ministry of Illumination (Susilastuti, 2000). The media landscape in Indonesia has evaded the constraints imposed by the authoritarian New Order regime. However, achieving a completely autonomous and liberated media institution remains a formidable challenge even in the wake of Indonesia's transition towards a more democratic framework. The press embodies a multitude of interests, encompassing both conscious and subconscious dimensions, as well as organized and unorganized entities. Consequently, the press must take into account various determinants that influence its structure, including financial resources, organizational frameworks, ideological orientations, cultural contexts, and technical considerations such as capacity and accessibility challenges (Eddyono, 2021).

As an observer of societal realities, the press bears the responsibility of scrutinizing and comprehending diverse facets of social, economic, and cultural dynamics. The information garnered is subsequently disseminated to the public through a range of media platforms, including newspapers, television, radio, and digital networks. In this capacity, the press assumes a pivotal role in shaping public perception and influencing individual and collective behavior.

Moreover, the press functions as a catalyst for transformative change aimed at enhancing societal conditions. By providing accurate and trustworthy information, the press can ignite change and motivate progressive initiatives. It possesses the capability to advocate for the rights of marginalized communities, draw attention to pressing social issues, and amplify the voices of the overlooked. Thus, the press not only acts as a conduit for information dissemination but also serves as a dynamic force in advancing the social and economic welfare of the community. Nevertheless, to fulfill this role effectively, the press must remain independent and impervious to the influences of vested interests, thereby safeguarding its integrity and credibility in the public sphere.

Journalists can be analogized to operators of vehicles navigating highways, where press freedom represents a vast route leading to diverse destinations, while adherence to journalistic ethics functions as a safety harness that provides essential guidance for executing their responsibilities. It is imperative to collectively comprehend the true essence of press freedom and the intricacies of journalistic endeavors. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are essential to uphold both the freedom of the press in thought and action and to elevate awareness regarding the significance of a journalistic code of ethics embedded in daily practice. Initiatives aimed at reinforcing the role of the press as a cornerstone of democracy necessitate ongoing commitment and diligence (Manan, 2010).

The rights encompassing the freedom of opinion, the freedom of expression, and the freedom of the press are fundamental human rights that are unequivocally guaranteed within the framework of a democratic nation such as Indonesia, which prides itself on its commitment to these principles. These essential freedoms are meticulously governed by TAP MPR No. XVII, a pivotal regulation concerning human rights, and have been rigorously enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, a process that was accomplished through a significant amendment to the foundational 1945 Constitution. This particular amendment serves to unequivocally affirm the right to freedom of opinion and expression as articulated in Article 28E, paragraph 2, which emphatically grants every individual the liberty to express their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes in alignment with their personal conscience and moral compass. Furthermore, Article 28E, paragraph 3, distinctly recognizes and safeguards the right of every person to assemble peacefully and express their opinions freely, thereby fostering an environment conducive to healthy public discourse. In addition to these provisions, Article 28F

guarantees the right of individuals to communicate effectively, access information, and utilize any form of communication channel necessary for personal development and the enhancement of their social

environment, as well as the fundamental right to seek, possess, store, process, and transmit information without undue hindrance.

When engaging in a comprehensive discussion surrounding the discourse of mass media, one cannot overlook the significant concept of public space, a notion that was originally articulated by the esteemed theorist Jurgen Habermas in his 1997 work, which critically examines the dynamics of civil society and the state. As an idealized construct, the “public sphere” or “public space” delineates the intermediary space that exists between the authoritative state and the diverse realm of civil society, wherein individual citizens are afforded the opportunity to actively engage in the discourse surrounding a myriad of societal issues collectively, all within the framework of striving to achieve consensus among themselves or exerting influence over their environment, the governing body, and the market forces at play.

Habermas (1997) posits that public spaces serve as vital arenas where citizens can engage in free and open dialogue regarding pressing public issues, characterized by an absence of coercive pressures from the ruling powers or governmental authorities. Within this particular context, the mass media emerges as a crucial instrument, acting as the primary means of shaping and sustaining these public spaces, thereby facilitating citizen participation in the formation of public opinion and enabling them to exert influence over governmental policies through the rich discourses cultivated within these spaces dedicated to public engagement and deliberation.

In the contemporary landscape of global civilization, characterized by rapid advancements and widespread technological connectivity, the mass media assumes a pivotal and indispensable function within the intricate fabric of society, wherein a significant portion of the human populace actively engages with and participates in various political frameworks, including the quintessential institution of the state. The primary responsibility of mass media is to furnish and propagate crucial information that significantly influences the formation of individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives regarding diverse societal phenomena. Furthermore, the mass media operates as a vital independent platform that not only fosters the development of public opinion but also cultivates an environment conducive to the discourse and deliberation of salient issues that affect the collective welfare of society. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the role of mass media is fraught with numerous challenges and obstacles, such as the potential for inherent bias, the manipulation of information, and the undue influence exerted by various political and economic entities, all of which pose a substantial threat to the integrity and credibility of media institutions. In order to preserve its essential democratic function and uphold the principles of transparency and accountability, it is essential that robust oversight mechanisms and a profound sense of ethical responsibility are instituted within the mass media, ensuring that it transcends the role of a mere propaganda apparatus and instead emerges as a foundational pillar that actively supports and nurtures the ideals of democracy within society.

The notion of press independence, while often conflated with the broader concept of a free press, embodies a more nuanced understanding that underscores the distinction between these two critical principles. Specifically, freedom of the press is conceptualized as a cultural norm that serves as a reference point for the shared values and collective beliefs that permeate the public sphere, whereas a free press denotes a structural condition that underpins the existence and operational autonomy of press institutions, thereby enabling them to fulfill their essential functions without external interference. According to Masduki (2009), press independence is articulated as a fundamental guarantee of citizens' rights to access information, which in turn serves as the bedrock for the formation of attitudes and opinions within both social and aesthetic realms, with mass media functioning as a crucial social institution in this regard. From a political standpoint, freedom of the press is further interpreted as the inherent right of citizens to be informed about a myriad of public issues and to engage in the open dissemination of such information (Masduki, 2009). Furthermore, Dhakidae (2002) elucidates the concept of freedom of the press as the capacity of society to utilize available space to actively seek, publish, and circulate information, thereby reinforcing the essential role of media in the democratic

process. This notion of press freedom, particularly during the New Order era, was notably constrained by standards rooted in security interests, which significantly limited the scope of journalistic practice and the dissemination of information within society (Dhakidae, 2002).

The inherent right of the populace to exercise control over governmental entities is an essential cornerstone in any nation that identifies itself as democratic. Within this framework, the media serves an indispensable

function, acting as a powerful mechanism for social oversight through a diverse array of reporting activities that are meticulously designed to ensure that governmental policies are being implemented in accordance with their originally intended goals and objectives.

Furthermore, the media assumes a pivotal role in the protection of human rights by serving as a platform that not only highlights but also holds accountable the commitments and promises made by politicians during election campaigns, thereby reminding them of their obligations to the electorate. In a fully functioning democratic society, it is imperative that the social and political structures are underpinned by an unfettered and expeditious dissemination of information via press media, which is crucial for facilitating the development of informed public opinion. Nevertheless, it is of paramount importance to recognize that the

media is not immune to external biases and influences, which can significantly undermine its vital role as the sentinel of democracy and the guardian of civic engagement. Consequently, it becomes essential to protect the independence and integrity of the media rigorously, ensuring that the information disseminated remains impartial and serves effectively as a check on governmental power and authority.

The mechanism through which information is acquired and the expression of thoughts and opinions is normatively enshrined and fully guaranteed by Press Law No. 40/1999, which explicitly defines the press as a fundamental social institution and a means of mass communication engaged in journalistic activities; this encompasses a comprehensive process that includes seeking, obtaining, possessing, processing, and transmitting information, whether in written form, auditory form, visual imagery, data, graphics, or any other formats through various channels of print media, electronic media, and an assortment of other media platforms. As an integral component of the governmental framework, the sustainability and continued existence of the press are intricately linked to the overarching political system that prevails during any given historical period. The authentic press is characterized as an independent institution that refrains from aligning itself with any specific group or governmental authority, instead favoring the unadulterated truth of information in the form of factual reporting that it disseminates to the general public, thus fulfilling its obligation to serve the community with integrity and transparency.

The monopolization of specific information through various channels of mass media has the potential to severely hinder the essential independence that is fundamental to a free press. Such monopolistic behaviors can emerge from a multitude of origins, which may include state bureaucracies that possess the authority to dictate the narratives that are disseminated to the public, economic financiers who may exert influence over news outlets in alignment with their business interests, manifestations of community communalism that can create social pressures limiting the diversity of viewpoints represented in the media, and even the habitual practices of journalists who often adhere to established patterns of reporting without adequately questioning or delving deeper into the issues at hand. State bureaucracies, in their quest to control the flow of information, frequently exert significant power over the narratives that are permitted to reach the public, while economic financiers may manipulate media outputs to ensure that news coverage aligns with their corporate agendas. Furthermore, the symptoms of community communalism can generate social pressures that constrain the variety of perspectives represented in the media landscape, leading to a homogenization of viewpoints that does not reflect the diverse realities of society. Additionally, the routine behavior of journalists, who may often gravitate towards conventional patterns of coverage without critically engaging with the material or investigating further, can inadvertently reinforce the existing monopoly on information and its dissemination.

Therefore, in order to safeguard the independence of the press and ensure that it can fulfill its vital role in society, it is imperative to actively confront and dismantle all forms of monopolistic influence, thereby allowing mass media to operate autonomously and impartially.

In an ideal scenario, the press should possess the autonomy to report and analyze a wide array of topics that encompass the myriad aspects of human life and societal experience. However, the realization of such press independence necessitates the fulfillment of several critical conditions. Firstly, the press must cultivate a profound awareness of its role as an “educator” within the broader context of the political education of the populace.

This entails an understanding that the information disseminated through mass media channels can significantly shape public attitudes and perceptions, whether in a positive or a negative manner. Consequently, the press

must be acutely aware of the potential repercussions that arise from public opinion, which is invariably influenced by the reporting practices employed within the mass media. Secondly, a genuinely free press requires the existence of a society that exhibits a certain level of maturity in its behavioral patterns. Santoso, as referenced by Masduki (2009), elucidates that a mature society is characterized by its capacity for critical thinking, its resilience against undue influence from news narratives, and its ability to resist manipulation by external forces.

The primary allegiance of a journalist must unequivocally reside with the citizens of the community they serve, as it is only through such loyalty that journalists can effectively fulfill their role in society. Journalists can truly serve the public interest when they are able to maintain their independence from the individuals or groups they report on, thereby ensuring that their coverage is fair and unbiased. In practical terms, however,

journalists frequently encounter pressures from a variety of stakeholders, which may include media owners who have vested interests, financiers who may impose financial constraints, and governmental entities that can exert influence over their work, all of which pose a significant threat to journalistic independence. This pressure may manifest itself in various forms, including direct interventions in the editorial process or through indirect threats such as the possibility of job loss or the withdrawal of funding. Consequently, it is imperative that concerted and robust efforts are made to uphold the freedom of the press and to fortify the conditions under which journalists operate, ensuring that they are afforded the space to work without external pressures. Only by establishing such an environment can journalists be empowered to provide truthful, objective, and valuable information to the public, thereby enabling the media to fulfill its essential role as a pillar of democracy that diligently monitors power and advocates for the public interest.

Iskandar and Lestari (2016) endeavored to articulate a comprehensive definition of independence, positing that it signifies a state of being that is entirely free from dependence on any external entities or individuals. It is crucial to note that the concept of independence should not be conflated with that of neutrality. While neutrality may be interpreted as a stance of impartiality towards all individuals and matters, independence encompasses a broader scope, embodying the notion of liberation from any interests that diverge from the pursuit of truth alone. Moreover, independence entails the absence of interference from external parties in the decision-making processes of journalists, particularly with regard to the crafting of news stories and the presentation of factual information. Furthermore, Karppinen and Moe (2016) elucidate the concept of independence as a condition that signifies the lack of any external control, characterizing it as being free from the influences of outside parties, and also highlighting the capacity of both individuals and institutions to make autonomous decisions and to act in accordance with their own rationale.

Sudibyo (2009) asserts that journalists tend to exhibit a pronounced orientation towards sources that emanate from public officials, official agencies, and influential figures, irrespective of the specific issues they seek to address. In this context, it is evident that the media landscape in Indonesia remains heavily

reliant on the pronouncements of elite sources, as noted by Sudibyo (2009). This sentiment is echoed by Atmakusumah Astaatmaja, who emphasizes that the role of the press should not devolve into that of a mere public relations apparatus for any given organization. The independence of journalists is profoundly influential on the idealism inherent in the news narratives they convey.

In this regard, it is incumbent upon journalists to possess the requisite courage to communicate the truth, as highlighted by Kompas.com (2009).

John Dewey, as referenced in Sudibyo (2009), articulates the view that the media serves as a fundamental necessity for societal change. The media is widely regarded as a pivotal component within the democratic process, assuming a central role in bridging the gap between the government and the public, or, alternatively, in connecting various segments of society (Sudibyo, 2009). The media's function extends to aiding the public in delineating what can be construed as the truth, while simultaneously providing clarity amidst the contradictions that arise from the competing interests of individuals and communities in their daily lives. Currently, the discourse surrounding COVID-19 vaccines remains particularly salient, primarily because it pertains to critical public health and safety concerns. Numerous contentious issues have surfaced in relation to the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, encompassing discussions about its safety, the ethical considerations surrounding halal and haram categorization, as well as debates regarding the various types or brands of vaccines available, alongside their respective advantages and disadvantages.

In the context of Indonesia's application of the *trias politik*, which delineates the separation of powers into three distinct branches, namely the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the media is frequently characterized as the fourth pillar of democracy, thus highlighting its significance alongside these formal institutions. One of the primary justifications for the press's classification as this additional pillar stems from its crucial role and influential position within the democratic framework. Unlike the officially recognized pillars of governance, the press does not hold a formalized status akin to that of the executive, legislative, or judicial branches; however, it is important to acknowledge that the press functions as a vital mechanism for performance oversight and accountability concerning the actions of the state's three established pillars. Consequently, it is imperative to recognize that the press cannot maintain a stance of impartiality when it comes to any particular political party or entity, as its foundational purpose requires the press to strive for independence while also ensuring an unbiased perspective in its reporting and analysis.

Agner Fog, as referenced in the work of Iskandar and Lestari (2016), articulates the notion that the media serves as a crucial buffer for the democratic process, thereby underscoring its protective role in fostering a healthy political environment. In addition, Brian McNair elucidates that there exist at least five fundamental roles that the media must fulfill in order to effectively contribute to the realization of a vibrant democratic society. The first of these roles is to provide timely information about current events and developments occurring within society; the second role involves the education of the public regarding the factual realities that are observed on the ground, thereby promoting informed citizenry. The third role is to serve as a platform for public discourse, which facilitates the shaping and influencing of public opinion; the fourth role necessitates that the media act as vigilant monitors of those in positions of power and authority; and finally, the fifth role encompasses the responsibility of the media to advocate for specific political viewpoints, thereby enriching the democratic dialogue (McNair, 2019).

However, it is increasingly apparent that, rather than serving as the intended watchdog of the various branches of democracy, the media has begun to exhibit tendencies that suggest it is undermining the very foundations of democratic governance. In various ways, the media appears to be trading the principles of democracy for what can be termed "mediaocracy," a phenomenon that arises from the agenda-setting capabilities wielded by media corporations that are predominantly controlled by a select few private entities. The origins of this mediaocracy can be traced back to the consolidation of power within the ever-evolving landscape of media corporations, alongside the concurrent rise of political corporations that seek to exert influence on public affairs. Schechter interprets the concept of mediaocracy as a manifestation of the increasingly symbiotic relationship that has developed between

media elites and their political counterparts, highlighting the convergence of interests between these two powerful groups.

Together, the media and political elites establish an interdependent system that possesses such formidable influence that overt ideological positions and a shared worldview effectively obscure the underlying corporate agendas that drive their interactions (Schechter, 2007). A pertinent illustration of the mediaocracy phenomenon can be observed in the operational practices of journalists, particularly those working in television journalism, during the unprecedented circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of an initial research endeavor, the author undertook a series of in-depth interviews with a diverse group of journalists, seeking to gather insights into their experiences and challenges during the pandemic. In a conversation with Totok Suryanto, who holds the esteemed position of Deputy Editor-in-Chief at TV One, he articulated that the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic extend beyond mere financial implications; there has been a significant transformation in the operational methodologies employed by journalists. This transformation is particularly evident in the heightened emphasis placed on the safety and well-being of the entire working crew, which now includes practices such as the regular application of disinfectants at meticulously scheduled intervals and the strict regulation of working hours to minimize exposure to the virus. In response to these unprecedented circumstances, TV One has instituted a novel working arrangement that comprises a rotation of three consecutive working days followed by a two-day respite, reflecting the organization's commitment to both productivity and employee safety. In relation to the content being broadcasted, Totok expressed a prevailing concern that television programming has devolved into a monotonous and visually unengaging format, which has the potential to precipitate a decline in viewer engagement and interest in the television station's offerings. This decline can also be attributed to the broader societal impacts of COVID-19, which have led to a reduction in the willingness of individuals to engage with the media, including sources who may now be reluctant to participate in interviews or meetings (T. Suryanto, personal communication, May 2020).

Furthermore, numerous dimensions of journalistic practice have been fundamentally altered in light of the pandemic, particularly in regard to the challenge of maintaining editorial independence when the primary source of information becomes predominantly the government. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, it was uncommon for media organizations to collaborate or engage in joint broadcast initiatives, as television stations typically focused on producing their own content, whether that be through in-house production of taped segments or live news broadcasts. However, the exigencies imposed by the COVID-19 crisis have necessitated a shift towards collaborative efforts among television companies, compelling them to engage in joint broadcasting arrangements, commonly referred to as TV Pool and Radio Pool. An illustrative example of this collaborative broadcasting during the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen in the press conferences held by the Task Force for the Acceleration of COVID-19 Handling, which took place at the Media Center of the

National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) in Jakarta. These press conferences, which are typically moderated by Government Spokesman Ahmad Yurianto, are broadcast live across the TV Pool and Radio Pool networks, thereby granting broadcasting rights to all participating media outlets. According to the records maintained by the Committee for the Safety of Journalists (KKJ) during this period, there was a notable implementation of TV Pool arrangements by various television stations at significant locations such as Jakarta City Hall, the Presidential Palace, the Athletes' House, and the National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB), effectively creating a shared resource that could be utilized to fulfill the video production needs of all media organizations involved.

Conducting comprehensive coverage concerning the multifaceted issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic is undeniably a formidable endeavor that presents numerous challenges and complexities. Journalists operating in various parts of the globe invariably encounter a multitude of impediments, as evidenced by the experiences of their counterparts in nations such as Hungary, Thailand, and the Philippines. These dedicated professionals often confront the looming threat of incarceration should

they dare to produce reports that are critically informed and reflective of the harsh realities of the situation.

A similar scenario has unfolded in India, where the Supreme Court has mandated that journalists are compelled to adhere strictly to reporting exclusively what the Government proclaims regarding the COVID-19 virus without deviation (Djauhar, 2020). In Indonesia, despite the legal protection afforded to the freedom of the press, the prevailing approach that necessitates media collaboration in combating the pandemic poses a significant risk of blurring the crucial boundaries that define the independence of journalists. It is imperative for journalists to maintain a critical stance towards governmental actions because the broader public health and safety of the population are profoundly reliant on their efficacy and integrity in reporting on the pressing issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The prevalence of uniformity in news content represents a substantial threat to the critical faculties traditionally associated with journalistic practice. The narrative of news disseminated by private television networks is, at the very least, significantly influenced by various economic factors inherent to the media landscape, particularly the overarching dynamics of market construction. The national private television sector possesses considerable economic significance in the transmission of news, as the notion of a price attached to news content can fundamentally alter its dissemination (Burton, 2007). The market dynamics under discussion encompass a range of stakeholders, including investors or owners, news sources, advertisers, and the ultimate consumers of media—namely, the audience. The investor or owner is characterized as a market participant due to their vested interests and emotional attachments to the content being reported, particularly in relation to the highly pertinent issue of news concerning the COVID-19 vaccine and its implications.

The investor or owner contributes essential resources in the form of financial backing and ancillary services to the television networks, thereby facilitating the operational efficiency of their business models. In this context, preliminary findings suggest that investors actively engage in the intricate "game" that occurs behind the scenes of television news production, thereby shaping the narratives that are ultimately presented to the public. Meanwhile, news sources—comprising governmental entities, political figures, academics, and the general populace—are classified as market participants due to their influential roles in shaping media content through their opinions, which are capable of garnering public attention and eliciting various responses of support or dissent. The interests of advertisers are intricately intertwined with their support for media outlets, as they contribute to the financial viability of these organizations by purchasing advertising slots during broadcasts.

Furthermore, advertising serves as the lifeline for media organizations, enabling them to sustain their operations and continue disseminating information to the public. Lastly, the consumers, or audience members, play a critical role in determining the success of media content through their engagement levels, which are quantified by ratings and audience share metrics. In this regard, the audience represents the target demographic for media broadcasts, with higher audience numbers signifying an elevated assessment of the media content being presented.

Methods

Research Design

This comprehensive research endeavor is fundamentally designed to meticulously investigate and analyze the multifaceted impact that the manipulation of vested interests has on the autonomy and independence of television journalists, particularly in relation to their reporting on the COVID-19 vaccine. This examination is specifically focused on the editorial teams and staff members associated with four prominent Indonesian television networks, namely iNews TV, Metro TV, TV One, and Trans 7. The methodological approach adopted for this study is the case study method, which is characterized by its provision of thorough and detailed descriptions and explanations that relate to various dimensions of an individual, a collective group, an organization, a specific program, or a broader social scenario, as articulated by Mulyana in 2017. The essence of case study research is to delve into and elucidate the

underlying factors that contribute to understanding "how and why" certain contemporary events unfold, a perspective supported by the work of Yin in 2018. Typically, the events selected for examination through this methodology are real-time occurrences that are currently in progress, rather than historical events that have already concluded, as noted by Rahardjo in 2017. The rationale behind selecting this particular type of case study, which is singular in its focus, is to give concentrated attention to the specific issue or concern that serves as the central instrument of the case, allowing for an in-depth and detailed description and analysis, as emphasized by Creswell in 2013.

The primary objective of this research is to conduct an exhaustive examination of the editorial backgrounds and contexts of the chosen television networks, namely iNews TV, Metro TV, TV One, and Trans 7, particularly in relation to their news coverage concerning the COVID-19 vaccine. In pursuit of this aim, it is essential to explore the various social, political, cultural, and economic contexts or atmospheres that prevailed during the creation and dissemination of news about the COVID-19 vaccine. Furthermore, it is crucial to identify and analyze the various stakeholders and parties that derive benefits from the existing flow and structure of communication that is employed in the reporting of the COVID-19 vaccine. Therefore, this research aspires to uncover and elucidate the underlying manipulations of interests that may be influencing the narrative surrounding the news coverage of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The focal point of this research encompasses four privately-owned television stations, specifically iNews TV, Metro TV, TV One, and Trans 7. Among these, Metro TV and TV One have been strategically selected as representative samples of news television stations that embody distinctly different political perspectives. It is noteworthy that Metro TV maintains political affiliations with the current governing authorities, whereas TV One operates in opposition to the government, presenting a contrasting viewpoint. In addition, iNews is characterized as a news television station that occupies a centrist position in terms of its reporting content, attempting to present a balanced view. Lastly, the Trans 7 television station is primarily recognized as an entertainment network; however, it also features a news program where the content presented is generally perceived to be relatively neutral in tone and perspective.

The research methodology that is characterized by the case study approach encompasses a variety of data collection techniques that are frequently employed in academic inquiry, which include the gathering of documents, the utilization of archival recordings, the conduction of interviews, the practice of direct observation, and the scrutiny of both actors and physical equipment, as articulated by Yin in the year 2018. In this particular study, the data was meticulously gathered through a combination of interviews, documentation, detailed field notes, photographs, audio recordings, personal documents, and various other official documents that were pertinent to the research inquiry.

This comprehensive investigation took place during the month of March in the year 2021, a period during which the researchers endeavored to unveil the complexities of how and why the manipulation of incidents occurred, which subsequently had a significant impact on the perceived independence of television journalists when they reported on the pressing issue of the COVID-19 vaccine. By employing case studies framed within a critical paradigm, the researchers sought to thoroughly investigate and expose the irregularities and inconsistencies that exist within the flow and structural dynamics of communication that pertain to news coverage regarding the COVID-19 vaccine.

The researchers focused their attention on several pivotal points, particularly case studies that were targeted at tracing the ideological underpinnings that drive contemporary events, with the aim of formulating "why" and "how" questions that would enable them to attain a more nuanced and profound understanding of the topic at hand. Oral information was systematically gathered through a diverse array of informants involved in this research, which was executed using a purposive sampling technique, a method that entails the selection of data sources based on specific and deliberate considerations. This purposive sampling approach was determined by actively seeking out individuals who possessed a

substantial level of knowledge and firsthand experience regarding the events in question, thereby ensuring that they were capable of articulating their insights effectively. The informants encompassed a wide range of professionals, including the Editor of iNews TV, the News Production Manager, various Reporters, Cameramen, and Editors; the Editor of TV One, the Executive Producer of Bulletin TV One; Reporters, Cameramen, and Editors from Metro TV, along with a Producer of the News Bulletin; Reporters, Cameramen, and Editors from Trans 7, as well as a Reporter, Cameraman, and Editor from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) COVID Task Force, and the Chair of the BNPB COVID-19 Task Force. Furthermore, the researchers undertook a thorough examination of the news texts related to the COVID-19 vaccine that were produced by the four television stations, employing Gamson and Mondigliani's framing theory as a theoretical framework for their analysis. Additionally, documentation studies were systematically employed in order to extract as much pertinent information as possible, thereby facilitating the processing of the collected data in a manner that adequately elucidates the observable symptoms associated with the research inquiry.

Moving on to the data analysis technique, the researchers engaged in three distinct forms of data analysis and interpretation specific to case study research, which are as follows: first, the process of description, which entails a comprehensive recounting of all research findings that are subsequently organized in alignment with the predefined research objectives; second, theme analysis, which represents an effort to identify the underlying "red thread" that serves to integrate the various categories that have emerged from the research, thereby allowing for the construction of a coherent "building" that sheds light on the previously obscure social research object, rendering it more illuminated and comprehensible; and third, the researchers reiterated the necessity of examining whether all the issues related to the phenomenon concerning journalist independence, as well as the political economy of the media, are indeed interconnected with the reporting practices surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine, thereby emphasizing the intricate relationship between these multifaceted elements.

Data Validity Technique A multitude of qualitative researchers have employed various measuring instruments as a means to ascertain the validity of data derived from qualitative research methodologies, thereby adhering to the four fundamental trustworthiness criteria that were meticulously articulated by the scholars Guba and Lincoln, as delineated in Moleong's work published in 2017.

These criteria are categorized as follows: 1). Credibility, which refers to the confidence in the truth of the data, 2). Transferability, which pertains to the applicability of findings to other contexts, 3). Dependability, which involves the stability of data over time and across various conditions, and 4). Confirmability, which emphasizes the objectivity of the data and interpretations. In the context of this particular research endeavor, the techniques employed to validate the research findings encompass a range of strategies, including: 1). An extension of observational practices aimed at meticulously verifying whether the data that has been previously provided by the identified data sources is indeed accurate and reliable. In instances where inaccuracies are detected, the researcher undertakes a more rigorous and comprehensive observation process to ensure that the data collected is unequivocally authentic and valid. 2). The triangulation of various data sources serves as an additional method to probe the veracity of the data by utilizing diverse sources of information. The methodological steps undertaken by the researcher in this triangulation process are as follows: initially, a comparison is made between the outcomes of the informant's interview and the results of observations regarding the informant's behaviors during interactional contexts, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal cues exhibited in their interactions with other individuals. Subsequently, the researcher compares the consistency of responses provided by the sources, that is, analyzing what was articulated in public forums versus what was disclosed in private encounters. Furthermore, the researcher engages in conversations with individuals outside the primary informant to gather additional perspectives, and lastly, the researcher undertakes a comparison between the interview outcomes and the content of documents pertinent to the subject of the interview. Throughout the data collection phase, the researchers conducted comprehensive and in-depth interviews with the informants, employing both video and audio recording

devices to capture the discussions accurately. Following this, the collected data was transcribed into a detailed interview transcript, and to ensure the fidelity of the data representation, the researcher solicited

the informant's review of the transcript to confirm that the conveyed meanings aligned with the written documentation of the interview. In order to further align and synchronize the findings emerging from this research, the researchers will also facilitate focus group discussions (FGD) as an integral component of their methodological approach.

Result and Discussion

Research Result

The emergence and subsequent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in the city of Wuhan, China, during the month of December in the year 2019, has been exerting a profound and multifaceted impact on various domains including public health, political frameworks, economic systems, and the trajectory of social development on a global scale (Jia and Lu, 2021). This unprecedented public health crisis, characterized by the rapid spread of the virus, has presented journalists around the world with a distinctive array of challenges that encompass not only new threats to the freedom of the media but also significant concerns regarding the safety and ethical practices of journalists in their reporting endeavors (Price and Antonova, 2022). Allsop (2020) articulates that the COVID-19 pandemic has essentially "hammered" the media landscape across the globe, with particularly pronounced effects at the local level, leading to widespread repercussions such as budget cuts, workforce layoffs, furloughs, and reductions in salaries for media personnel, all of which have deeply impacted the operational capacity of news organizations (Price and Antonova, 2022). Furthermore, Bright et al. (2020) posit that health-related news is frequently perceived as biased and misleading, primarily due to its politicization, which manifests through the criticism of a corrupt democratic system, the elevation of certain political leaderships, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories that distort the public's understanding of the crisis (Jia and Lu, 2021).

On March 2, 2020, the government of Indonesia officially announced the identification of the very first case of COVID-19 within its borders, marking a significant turning point in the nation's public health narrative. In the period spanning from March 1 to March 18, there was a noticeable surge in news coverage concerning COVID-19 across numerous television channels, which subsequently contributed to a marked increase in the overall viewership of news programming. Specifically, the consumption of news broadcasts via television experienced a substantial rise, quantified at an increase of approximately 25%, with this trend being particularly evident among viewers belonging to the upper socioeconomic class. This upward trajectory in viewership was not confined solely to traditional news programs but was also reflected in the increased audience engagement with children's programming and entertainment series. The implementation of a stay-at-home policy, enacted in mid-March in an effort to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, further influenced television viewing habits, leading to a remarkable escalation in the audience segment of children aged between 5 and 9 years old. Notably, this demographic exhibited a significant jump in average ratings, moving from a previously established 12 percent to a notable 15.8 percent by March 18. In the capital city of Jakarta, the viewership ratings for this particular age group reached unprecedented levels, highlighting the profound effects of the pandemic on media consumption patterns and the engagement of younger viewers during this critical period.

The findings derived from the Nielsen Television Audience Measurement (TAM) system, which meticulously tracked viewership patterns across eleven distinct urban locales, indicate a notable upward trajectory in the average television audience engagement levels. Specifically, this increase can be quantified as a rise from an initial average rating of 12 percent recorded on March 11, 2020, escalating to a more substantial 13.8 percent by March 18, 2020; this percentage translates to an augmentation of approximately 1 million additional individuals tuning into television broadcasts. Furthermore, the duration of television viewership has also exhibited a remarkable surge, with an increase of over 40 minutes, as evidenced by the leap from an average viewing time of 4 hours and 48 minutes on March 11, 2020, to a more pronounced average of 5 hours and 29 minutes on March 18, 2020. Notably, demographic analysis reveals that viewers belonging to the upper socioeconomic strata have demonstrated a conspicuous inclination towards extended television viewing sessions since March 14, 2020, with this trend persisting and intensifying over time. This phenomenon is further substantiated by the statistics illustrating an increase in average ratings

from 11.2 percent on March 11 to 13.7 percent by March 18, 2020, indicating a significant shift in viewer engagement.

The ramifications of this evolving media landscape have undoubtedly compelled stakeholders within the television industry to engage in rigorous strategizing and innovative thinking in order to navigate the unprecedented challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the far-reaching implications of the COVID-19 virus, it becomes imperative to examine the profound effects it has had on journalists and the field of journalism as a whole. In an effort to mitigate the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus, the Government, through the auspices of the Minister of Health, has promulgated Minister of Health Regulation (PMK) Number 9 of 2020, which delineates the parameters for implementing Large-Scale Social Restrictions.

Discussion

This comprehensive regulation encompasses stipulations pertaining to Workplace Vacations, effectively mandating a transition from traditional workplace environments to remote work arrangements, with the exception of certain critical sectors such as the Indonesian National Army (TNI), the Republic of Indonesia Police (Polri), as well as essential services related to food supply, fuel distribution, health services, economic functions, financial operations, communication channels, industrial activities, import-export processes, logistics distribution, and other fundamental needs. In addition, other workplaces are required to operate with a significantly reduced number of personnel present on-site. Moreover, the Ministry of Communication and Information has issued directives advising television stations to temporarily suspend the production of programs that necessitate in-person interactions among individuals during the ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, as highlighted by a report from BBC News Indonesia in 2020.

The preliminary investigations conducted by scholars within the domain encompassed, among various elements, a statement from TV One's Deputy Editor-in-Chief, which indicated that the repercussions of COVID-19, beyond financial losses, manifested as alterations in the operational patterns of journalists. His organization prioritizes the well-being of its personnel, for instance, by implementing regular disinfection protocols and meticulously scheduling work hours. TV One, in particular, has adopted a work rotation system consisting of three consecutive workdays followed by two days of rest. In terms of news content, TV One posits that television broadcasts are increasingly becoming monotonous, leading to a significant risk of diminishing viewership. For instance, generating human interest stories in light of the COVID-19 pandemic presents considerable challenges, as there is a necessity to safeguard both journalists and sources, who occasionally decline face-to-face interactions (Suryanto, personal communication, 28 May 2020). Numerous considerations that were previously inconceivable arose when journalists were compelled to report amidst the pandemic, such as the pursuit of journalistic independence while relying solely on government-provided information. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, media organizations seldom engaged in collaborative efforts or conducted joint broadcasts. Television networks typically executed their programming autonomously (in-house production), encompassing both recorded and live news segments. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, television entities were mandated to engage in cooperative broadcasts, as exemplified by television pools and radio pools. A notable instance of such collaboration during the pandemic was the press conference held by the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 at the BNPB Jakarta Media Center. This press briefing is conventionally facilitated by a government spokesperson and is disseminated live through both television and radio pools, with broadcasting rights granted for use by all media outlets.

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The media sector has experienced significant repercussions due to the economic downturn associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, culminating in a substantial decline in advertising revenues. According to the Nielsen Survey Institute (Yoedtadi and Hermawan, 2022), media advertising income plummeted by 25% in April 2020, reaching 3.5 trillion. To support journalists in Indonesia, especially those whose media outlets have suffered financially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government instituted the FJPP program (Yoedtadi and Hermawan, 2022). This initiative is administered by the Covid-19 Task Force in conjunction with the Indonesian Press Council (Jati, 2021). The objective of the FJPP program is to position journalists as pivotal agents in fostering behavioral change within society to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 virus while generating journalistic outputs that adhere to the Journalistic Code of Ethics concerning information dissemination about the pandemic, and to engage in offering sustainable solutions to pressing national press issues that directly affect journalists' well-being. Within the framework of the FJPP program, the Press Council has enlisted approximately 4,300 journalists nationwide to report on the pandemic from a behavioral change standpoint that is conducive to addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19. Each participant in the fellowship receives a monthly stipend of approximately Rp. 2,175,000, which is anticipated to assist journalists in navigating the exigencies posed by the pandemic. The FJPP program encompasses three principal activities: Firstly, the initiative encourages journalists to generate news that incorporates a behavioral change perspective aimed at curtailing the transmission of COVID-19. Secondly, participants are expected to enhance news content by underscoring the significance of disciplined behavior within the community to effectively implement health protocols. Thirdly, the program actively engages journalists as change agents by augmenting the role of the press as an institution fulfilling its mandate to educate the public in the context of national emergencies. Participants of the FJPP program are tasked with delivering continuous coverage on the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for the public's adherence to health protocols as a new societal norm, including proper mask usage, hand hygiene, social distancing, exercising, and vaccination. For each journalistic piece produced, participants will receive remuneration in the form of monthly allowances (Dewan Pers, 2020).

Conclusion

The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by media organizations and journalists have resulted in numerous media enterprises facing bankruptcy or being unable to compensate the salaries of the journalists or contributors in their employ. This predicament arises from a substantial decline in revenue derived from advertising, which constitutes the primary source of operational funding for news dissemination. The contraction in advertising revenue was precipitated by the catastrophic state of the national economy, which led to a cessation of business activities. This phenomenon is observable in numerous nations worldwide, with Poland serving as a pertinent example.

The FJPP initiative represents the government's endeavor to support media organizations in avoiding insolvency while enabling journalists to continue their professional activities.

The government assures that the FJPP initiative will not impede journalists' critical faculties, thereby ensuring that media independence remains a fundamental objective for journalists. This initiative also upholds the principles of democratic press freedom. Nonetheless, journalists are urged to be cognizant of the adverse consequences of their reporting and to fulfill the public's demand for information regarding COVID-19, particularly concerning vaccine brands and their accessibility.

The findings of the research indicate that the government, via BNPB, is endeavoring to influence journalistic practices to align reporting with the preferences of governmental authorities, policymakers, and media proprietors. Additional evidence was gathered from several senior journalist sources who regarded this as a manifestation of overt governmental intervention against journalists. Conversely, BNPB has articulated that there are no constraints or pressures imposed on editorial reporting, aiming

instead to enhance public awareness concerning the perils associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Several sources perceive this initiative as being solely for the protection of the broader community against the proliferation of misinformation regarding COVID-19. This compelling rationale and commitment to non-intervention are what have facilitated the seamless operation of this program

without encountering opposition. Furthermore, researchers identified external influences attempting to sway the content and direction of editorial reporting policies related to the COVID-19 vaccination issue, both from within and outside the organization.

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