Press Professionalism, Journalist Competence and Social Responsibility: A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT

Realising press professionalism is a great hope for the Indonesian press community. Various steps have been formulated and implemented to improve the quality of journalists who are at the same time spearheading the implementation of democracy. One of them is the competence of journalists which has been implemented by the Press Council and journalistic professional organisation groups since 2010. Until the end of 2022, as many as 17,000 journalists have taken the Journalist Competency Test (UKW), from more than 200,000 Indonesian journalists. For this reason, the Press Council continues to disseminate competency certification to all journalists and related stakeholders so that all journalists have competency certification. This study found that two things become obstacles in realising the professionalism of the press. First, many journalists still do not understand the competence of journalists and have not mastered journalistic skills or technical pragmatism. Second, journalist competency certification does not affect increasing the welfare of journalists, or pragmatic professionalism has not been fulfilled. This study uses literature studies to obtain research data, then collects and analyses sources from articles, books, and previous research on press professionalism and journalistic competence. Researchers use the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press to formulate research results on the professionalism of journalists and their responsibility to society. This paper discusses the typical application of the concept of Press Social Responsibility so that there is a shared responsibility between the press and the public in realising press professionalism.

Keywords: Press; Professionalism; Journalists; Competence; Social Responsibility of The Press

INTRODUCTION

Discussing journalist competence, press professionalism, and press social responsibility as if looking at the current condition of the Indonesian press. Since the reform era in 1998, every person or group has been free to establish media or publish it in the community. This situation has brought changes in life towards democracy and broad openness in various fields of government and public life. Public space has become more open thanks to the Press Law Number 40 of 1999. Freedom of the press seems to be a mantra for the progress of democracy in Indonesia to this day. Since the reform, the Press Publishing Business License (SIUPP) is no longer valid. Anyone can manage conventional and online media where there are no restrictions by the government. Like mushrooms in the rainy season, the amount of media in Indonesia is abundant (Stellarosa & Silaban, 2020) . Until 2020 the Press Council estimates

that there will be 47,000 press media in Indonesia, consisting of 43,300 online media, 2,000 print media, 674 radio media, and 523 television media. (Mardhiyah, 2022) .

The freedom to establish media resulted in a wide opening of space for anyone who wanted to become a journalist. In Indonesia, anyone can become a journalist. There are no educational requirements or criteria for journalists if they understand the journalistic code of ethics well. In Article 1 and Article 7 of the Press Law Number 40 of 1999, it is stated that the definition of a journalist is a person who regularly carries out journalistic activities with the obligation to comply with the Journalistic Code of Ethics. Press expert Kamsol Hasan said on one occasion that anyone could become a journalist, and journalist competency certification was not required to become a journalist in Indonesia   (Indoviral.id, 2023). Press Council member Jomalul Insan, in a briefing on UKW LKBN Antara published on Wednesday (11/3/2021), explained that in 2021 only 1,683 media companies were verified by the Press Council out of 47,000 existing media. Of the 47,000 media companies, it is estimated that around 200,000 people work as journalists. However, only about 17,000 have competency certification from the Press Council (Beritasatu.com, 2021).

According to (Waluyo, 2018), since the enactment of Law No. 40/1999 on the Press, the number of journalists in Indonesia has proliferated. There are approximately 100,000 journalists in Indonesia, of which 70,000 cannot be considered professional journalists. According to data released by the Press Council in 2018, 8,300 journalists have been certified as young, middle, and prominent journalists.

To maintain the quality of the press, the Press Council issued a regulation requiring all journalists in Indonesia to take the Journalist Competency Test (UKW). This regulation is contained in Press Council Regulation No. 1 of 2010, later updated by Press Council Regulation No. 4 of 2017 on the Certification of Journalist Competence (SKW). There are six objectives of the competency test, namely 1) to improve the quality and professionalism of journalists, 2) to be a reference for the journalist performance evaluation system, 3) to maintain press freedom based on public interest, 4) to maintain the dignity of journalism as a profession that produces intellectual work, 5) to avoid abuse of the journalist profession, and 6) to place journalists in a strategic position in the Indonesian press industry (Pratiwi & Ambardi, 2020). Priyambodo, 2012) SKW measures journalistic professionalism necessary to protect public interests and public and private rights. (Priyambodo, 2012).

This research focuses on the role of journalist competencies in achieving press professionalism in Indonesia. However, can applying journalistic competence achieve a professional press in Indonesia? To get this answer, we need to look at the role of the media in Indonesia using the concept of social responsibility as a model adopted by the national press and the dimension of professionalism as a measurement tool for journalists' professionalism (Syafriadi, 2018; Rumetor et al., 2019).

According to the social responsibility theory of the press, society is the estuary of all public interests. According to this social responsibility theory, the press is responsible for providing such information and collecting all ideas or discourses from all levels of intelligence. To fulfil all these responsibilities, professionalism is required to complete the welfare of journalists. In his book titled Indonesian Journalism, (Haris Sumadiria, 2005) (Rumetor, 2019) says that a person can be called a professional if he fulfils six variables of professionalism, one of which is to receive a salary, honorarium, or decent material reward according to his expertise, level of education and experience gained.

In this study, we will see that there is still a gap in applying the concept of social responsibility of the press, where journalists still find it challenging to meet welfare standards. In fact, according to the definition of professionalism, these things need to be fulfilled for journalists to be professional in their work.

Despite 23 years of press freedom, signs of improvement in the welfare of journalists still fall far short of expectations. A survey conducted by the Press Council found that the standard salary of journalists in Indonesia is still much lower than other professions. According to Wina Armada (2009) in (Putra & Slamet, 2011), the survey results show that 85.5% of journalists receive a salary from their workplace. However, only 55.3% of the respondents rated their salaries as good or very good. A seminar in Bali also revealed that the welfare of journalists in Indonesia is the lowest in Asia. Indonesian journalists' salaries are only a quarter of those of Thai journalists or a third of Filipino journalists (Putra & Slamet, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Professionalism of The Press

The issue of press freedom is always directly related to the professionalism of the press. The higher the level of press freedom in a country, the higher the professionalism of the media. In Indonesia, the level of press freedom could be better but not too bad. In 2022, Indonesia was ranked 117 out of 180 countries with a Press Freedom Index score of 49.27. This ranking is also 4 points compared to 2021, where Indonesia, according to Reporters Without Borders, which released the 2022 World Press Freedom Index on May 3, 2022, is in 113th position with a score of 62.60 (Kompas.id, 2022) . This ranking is measured by several political, legal, economic, social and security indicators.

From these data, it can be seen that the professionalism of the press in Indonesia is also in a "mediocre" position, especially regarding the values of commitment, autonomy, expertise and responsibility. (Mari, 2015) describes four types of characteristics of professional journalists, namely: 1) Having autonomy, namely being free to control oneself in making judgments and determining the organisation; 2) Having a high commitment to public service, not just personal economic gain; 3) Having high skills based on intellectual skills and systematic knowledge; 4) Responsible for fulfilling obligations by implementing a journalistic code of ethics. (Katerynych, 2021), in his journal entitled *Professional Competence of a Journalist of Modern Education*, professionalism mentions professionalism as something that has specific material or spiritual values, including social responsibility, professional identity, ethical principles, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and always strive for self-improvement and development.

Et al.(Amin, 2004; Rumetor et. al, 2019) also said that a person could be called a professional if he fulfils the following six characteristics: 1) Has specific expertise obtained through experience, training, or special education in his field; 2) Receiving salary, honorarium, or material rewards according to expertise, level of education, or experience gained; 3) All attitudes, behaviours and work activities are protected and influenced by moral and ethical attachment to the professional code of ethics; 4) Willing to voluntarily join one of the professional organisations according to their expertise; 5) has great love and dedication to the chosen field of work in the profession; 6) not everyone can carry out work professionally because to deepen it requires mastery of specific skills or expertise. Regarding the six conditions above, journalists are a field of work that demands professionalism.

According to Field (Tumengkol, 2021), the press's professionalism in Indonesia has developed well. This is marked by the increasing number of emerging media, both print, electronic and online. The community has more choices in following the latest information developments. However, the rise of new media does not mean that all of them convey information correctly, accurately and educate. There is also much negative press in the sense of carrying out their duties without heeding journalistic ethics due to the low quality of

journalists and unprofessional press companies. A former member of the Press Council, Hendri Ch Bangun (2021), said that many news titles that are close to porn, unbalanced news, false news, partisan news, and judgmental opinions often appear, and information that mentions the identity of children. This makes people question what is wrong with the professionalism of the Indonesian press.

Unlike Indonesia, Hong Kong's press professionalism is better. Despite constant interference from the government and capitalist pressures, press professionalism is highly respected by the public (Chan, 2017). Press professionalism, consisting of objectivity, balanced reporting, and religious adherence to factual reporting, has long been seen as a bulwark against Chinese government oppression and capitalist interference in newsrooms. In the context of the Hong Kong government's 'half-baked' democratisation, the independence of journalists and the spirit of social control have been seen as bulwarks of democracy. Meanwhile, in Africa, the professionalism of the press continues to be challenged by the low quality of journalists. According to (Nyarko & Teer-Tomaselli, 2018), most African journalists still need more professional training.

Similarly, in India, issues of accuracy and privacy are significant obstacles to maintaining the professionalism of the press. As noted by Belsey and Chad Wick (1994) in (Nyarko & Teer-Tomaselli, 2018), journalism is an honourable profession. Still, many journalists in India who are supposed to protect it are defaming the work.

Journalist Competence

The United Nations (UN) states that quality journalism is essential and contributes to sustainable development goals (Pratiwi & Ambardi, 2020). On World Press Freedom Day 2021, the UN raised the issue of information as a public good. The UN calls for respecting information as a public good and exploring what can be done in content production, distribution, and reception to strengthen journalism and deepen transparency and empowerment without leaving anyone behind.

As explained (Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015), quality journalists emerge from a free, independent, pluralistic press that provides society and government with reliable information to make the right decisions. Therefore, journalists play an essential role in sustaining democracy. Costera Meijer and Bijleveld (2016) explain that the vitality of democracy depends on the presence of good journalists. The competence that all journalists possess makes journalism no longer limited to its place but as an ideology that can infiltrate everywhere so that the work of journalists remains relevant to people's lives (Deuze, 2019).

Journalism is seen as a set of values embodied in breaking news, revealing the truth, and serving society. These values will give meaning to news culture, organisations, and media in every time (era) and place (country). Every journalist will apply these values in daily routines and working practices. The news industry will become more socially acceptable, with mainstream media and news organisations becoming the leading destination for news and competent news sources. (Deuze, 2019) mentions that quality journalism is the most reliable where hard-working journalists can work safely.

Discussing quality journalism starts from the notion of journalism itself, which is more complex than it seems. Journalism delivers information and serial conversations about events, trends and public issues disseminated through various media to inform, entertain, and connect citizens in society. Journalists must serve the public interest in a natural way through writing that is supported by in-depth research. Journalists provide appropriate instruments and information so that people can become good citizens.

Journalism has a vital role in maintaining the vitality of democracy. The spirit of democracy depends on the existence of prominent journalism. In democracies, newspapers and supporting forms of journalism and the media have long been the "fourth pillar" as an essential element of developing and contemporary democracies around the world (Flick, 2018). In the United States, the legislature, executive, and judiciary of government are included in the first three pillars. The fourth pillar is a press that operates independently. Independence ensures the integrity of the media "to report, report and draw public attention to other institutions…." In general, the media, as the fourth pillar, is affiliated with political parties, which reduces bias and provides a more independent reporting (Costera Meijer & Bijleveld, 2016).

To produce a professional press, every journalist must work according to competency standards that are acceptable to the public. Journalists must work with high expertise, uphold the values of commitment, have autonomy, and be carried out with full responsibility. So only professional professionals carry out the mandate of press freedom (Manan & Harijanti, 2016) . According to (Mahendra Gautama & Purwanto, 2020), journalist competency standards are needed because it is a step to maintain the profession's honour and increase public trust. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, abbreviated as UNESCO, pays high attention to the competence of journalists. UNESCO places journalistic education as a field that must be the focus of all countries to realise the professionalism of journalists worldwide. In the Journalistic Education Curriculum Model, UNESCO emphasises that journalistic education needs to be developed to produce the competent journalists required by the mass media industry.

Following are some of the competencies of journalists according to the UNESCO version: 1) Intellectual abilities and general knowledge; 2) Able to investigate facts and process the resulting facts through various forms of production, editing and other content designs; 3) Using various journalistic tools and adaptability to technology; 4) Knowledge of journalistic ethics; 5) Knowledge of the role of journalism in society. However, according to (Ritonga, 2019), the ability of journalists in Indonesia can meet UNESCO's standard of expertise. The efforts of Indonesian journalists can only meet the journalistic competency standards set by the Press Council. Where he became the only level marker to determine a competent journalist.

Regarding the level of competence of journalists, the Press Council requires that every journalist must be able to master competence in the performance of their journalistic duties. In the Press Council's formulation of competence standards, there are three main aspects that a journalist must understand, possess and master: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Awareness refers to a journalist's mastery of ethics and the law, journalistic sensitivity, and the importance of having a vast network and lobbying skills. Knowledge means that every journalist must master journalistic theories and principles, general and specialised knowledge. Skills then include the journalist's skills in journalistic reporting activities (seeking, obtaining, possessing, storing, processing, and disseminating information), skilled investigation, skilled analysis of news direction, and skilled use of information technology tools (Priyambodo, 2012). To illustrate the formulation of the journalist competency standards, see Figure 1.
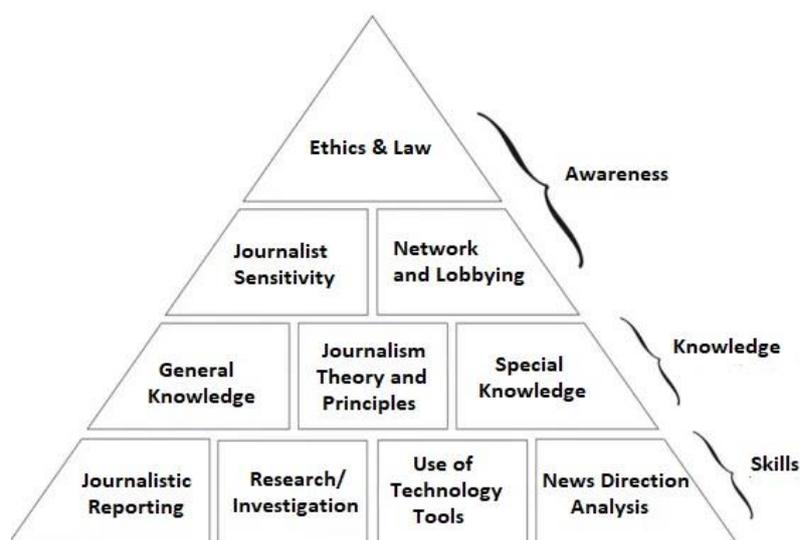
FIGURE 1. Journalist Competency Framework

Social Responsibility

The Social Responsibility Theory, an idea developed by media practitioners and the work of the Press Freedom Commission, states that the press aims to bring conflict into the arena of debate in addition to informing, entertaining and seeking profit. In addition, this theory also emphasises the importance of satisfying the public's need for entertainment and maintaining financial autonomy from interests and influences (Triyono, 2013).

This theory states that the press can be used by anyone with ideas to express but is prohibited from violating privacy rights or disrupting social structures. This theory emphasises freedom of the press and encourages media professionals to adhere to certain social norms. It opposes media regulation but believes that public opinion automatically controls the press (Alvo, 2021).

According to (Alvo, 2021), social responsibility in journalism makes the media responsible for providing broad information and gathering ideas or opinions from different segments of society. Media that adopt this theory will adhere to ethical standards and aim to build a socially responsible press that reflects both the majority's views and opposition groups' views. Democratic countries usually adopt this approach in their governance.

In some developing countries, efforts have been made to implement the basic principles of social responsibility theory. These principles include several vital aspects, such as providing information that is accessible to the public, encouraging the public to act, and protecting individual rights through government oversight (Alvo, 2021).

According to Oluwasola (2020), the premise of this theory is that freedom and duty always go hand in hand, where the press is responsible to society for carrying out certain vital functions. However, at the same time, the press is also accountable to the government.

According to (Obagwu & Idris, 2019), three elements control the media: public opinion, consumer behaviour and professional ethics. These three elements influence each other. Therefore, the responsibility of the media in a system of social responsibility is challenging to define due to the complex tug-of-war between the interests of the government, media owners or journalists, and society. For this reason, it is often said that this system is on the borderline between authoritarian and libertarian systems.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to write this paper consists of two stages: the literature search and the evaluation of literature reviews with topics related to journalistic competence and press professionalism. The literature search is done by searching for sources from various media types, both online and offline, such as journal articles, book chapters, and material from online databases such as Science Direct, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus. The focus of the search was limited to the topics of journalist competence, press professionalism, and the social responsibility of the press, paying attention to references in the form of journal articles, book chapters, and complete text documents. However, limited database resources can affect the limitations of this paper. The reference is not limited to the development of the Indonesian press. This paper also considers references to the development of the press in several countries (Fadhli, 2020).

In obtaining research data, researchers collect, analyse, and organise sources from articles, books, and previous research on journalism, especially the competence of journalists. Then the researcher concluded and described the role of journalist competence in creating press professionalism.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From all the discourses described above, the author argues that the press development in Indonesia is still on the right track, where the press community continues to uphold democracy by maintaining the independence and dignity of the media. The existing press freedom is a fertile ground for the growth of democracy and can undoubtedly create a professional press. Skilled media is born from the quality of journalists in carrying out their daily duties and functions. Qualified journalists will produce good information that will contribute to the development of Indonesia (Syafriadi, 2018).

The press must have strong determination and commitment and the ability to perform their duties as journalists to find, process and produce news professionally. In other words, professional journalists are responsible for their work, not based on the will of outsiders, but because it is based on fulfilling their obligations as journalists. Furthermore, journalistic responsibility is a consequence every journalist must accept (Wibawa, 2020).

Press Professionalism

According to (Wibawa, 2012), the professionalism of journalists is the willingness to focus on serving the community by disseminating journalistic works through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television where they work. This means that the work of journalists is aimed at meeting the community's information needs because journalists are public servants. Not the fulfilment of personal economic gain. If the news is likely to attract public attention, it must be reported immediately because it benefits many people. Journalism is a noble profession because it is the most powerful tool for shaping public opinion. The media has a huge responsibility towards society (Chakravorty & Tilak, 2019).

Do journalists meet the criteria of a profession? Before further discussing the role of journalistic competence in the professionalism of the press, it is better to begin the discussion with the most fundamental question about the status of journalism as a profession. According to (Nasution, 2017), two main views answer this question. The first view is that journalism is a profession because it meets the job criteria. The field of journalism has at least four

requirements to become a profession, namely: a) body of journalism knowledge taught in universities; b) professional code of ethics, in this case, the journalism code of ethics; c) professional organisation, in this case, all journalists already have a professional organisation and a professional ethics committee; d) journalist accreditation test, where in Indonesia there is already a journalist competency test.

However, those who argue that if the criteria of a profession are strictly applied, then journalism is not yet a profession. (Liljegren, 2012) states that professionalism consists of two things: technical and pragmatic. Generally, do people who work in a field have specialised skills and fulfil their practical professionalism? If not, then the work does not meet the criteria of a profession and will not achieve professional status.

Formal Education of Journalists

Journalism has become a university subject. It started at the University of Missouri in the United States and has proliferated since then. Journalism is now taught at all higher education levels, from diplomas to doctorates. Globally, there are currently 3,000 journalism programmes spread evenly across North America, Europe, and Asia, according to the journalism education census report conducted by the World Journalism Education Council (WJEC) since 2007 (Nasution, 2017).

In Indonesia, formal journalism education has been taught in several universities. However, becoming a journalist is not limited by formal journalism education or a specific school. This profession has no special requirements so that anyone can become a journalist (Ritonga & Nugroho, 2017). Therefore, all citizens, anyone, can be involved in journalism and work as a journalist. As a result, those who work in this profession are not filtered and create problems.

For this reason, the Press Council must take a screening step by carrying out the Journalist Competence Test (UKW). The certification of journalists' competence is expected to be the first step in improving the status of journalism so that people think it is challenging to become a journalist. In the future, it is hoped that only journalists who pass the competency test can perform journalistic functions (Bangun, 2021).

On the other hand, according to Kamsol Hasan, a press expert at the Press Council, nothing in the press regulations says you must have a journalism competency certificate to become a journalist (Indoviral. id, 2023). UKW is not a requirement for someone to work as a journalist in Indonesia. UKW is implemented based on the regulations of the Press Council and is not an order or mandate from the Press Law. The definition of a journalist under Press Law No. 40/1999 Article 1(4) states that "a journalist is a person who regularly engages in journalistic activities". The UKW does not serve as an entrance examination for those who wish to pursue this profession. The Press Council entrusts several journalistic institutions and universities with the organisation of aptitude tests, and these institutions conduct the UKW only for working journalists. This means that anyone can become a journalist in Indonesia.

Journalist Welfare and Community Engagement

According to Nasution (2017), journalism still needs to solve the problem of pragmatic professionalism. Despite being journalists today, some journalists only do it part-time because they still must do other jobs. This is linked to the inadequate salaries of most journalists. A 2009 survey by the Press Council showed that many journalists still earn less than the minimum wage. This is due to the low financial capacity of media companies, which means that many

cannot pay journalists properly. The media uses unprofessional ways to survive (Antaranews.com, 2023).

Most people complain about pragmatic professionalism in Indonesian journalism, namely the welfare or material rewards given to journalists. It should be noted that the welfare level of journalists in Indonesia is the lowest in Asia, according to data released by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) in 2013. Even in areas far from the capital, journalists earn only around Rp 500,000 monthly. This figure certainly affects the professionalism of journalists. As a result, journalists are very vulnerable to accepting bribes and violating the journalistic code of ethics (Beritasatu.com, 2021).

The author offers a reciprocal model in the press social responsibility concept on this issue. The problems facing the press today are not entirely the fault of media practitioners. Many mass media companies need help to compete with social media companies. Media companies have shrinking advertising revenues, and newspaper sales have hit rock bottom. Meanwhile, employees (journalists) must live and improve their journalistic skills. The same goes for journalists working in low-end media. Many do not receive a regular salary anymore. They need help even to afford the Journalist Competency Test fees that the Press Council requires of all journalists.

This reciprocal model is based on Press Law No. 40/1999 Article 17 on public participation that can carry out activities in developing press freedom and guaranteeing the right to obtain necessary information. It is time for the public to get involved in this issue without compromising the principle of national press freedom. We do not allow idealistic journalists to go astray by covering up the basic demands of their lives.

The opportunity for public involvement in assisting the press in realising press professionalism exists because Article 17, paragraph 2 of Press Law Number 40 of 1999 states that the public can submit suggestions and input to the Press Council to maintain and improve the quality of the national press. The form of community participation requires specific and more comprehensive further research.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the development of the above literature research, implementing journalistic competence is essential for realising professionalism in Indonesia's world of the press. Everyone who works as a journalist must be competent. Previous research has proven that capable journalists can strengthen their professional behaviour, mainly journalistic and technical professionalism. On the other hand, the problem of professionalism and pragmatism in Indonesia has yet to be answered because it depends on the ability of media companies, the business climate in the mass media sector and government regulations. Thus, the issue of press professionalism still needs to be resolved. However, through the concept of social responsibility theory, there is an opportunity for a solution, namely by involving the community, which is associated with Article 17 of the Press Law No. 40 of 1999. This research found a visible gap between the competence of journalists and the professionalism of the press and provides an overview of solutions that can be tested through further research.

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