

Press Freedom and Journalist Independence in Medan, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the application of journalists in carrying out journalistic duties in Medan City. The research method used is descriptive with a qualitative approach. The research informants were ten people who were determined purposively. Observation, interviews, and documentation are data collection. Data analysis refers to the Milles-Hubberman model: data reduction, data presentation, drawing, and testing conclusions. The results of research on the application of journalists in carrying out journalistic duties in Medan City cannot be realized in totality because there are conflicts of interest, such as the interests of media authorities, advertisers, and the government who drive the news and the personal interests of journalists. It is possible to implement the independence of journalists with the style of writing Feature news (typical essays).

Keywords

Press Freedom, Independence, Journalistic Duties, Medan City

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1. INTRODUCTION

Journalists' job in journalism is that people are free to carry out journalistic duties. However, this freedom does not mean unlimited, without rules in reporting or seeking information. It is argued by Luarso (2018, 3) that freedom refers to the freedom to be responsible for his journalistic work. This freedom of responsibility can be interpreted as the freedom of journalists not to depend on someone or media owners when searching for and disseminating facts and data in news packages in the mass media. In general, press freedom guarantees freedom for the media to conduct journalistic activities, from searching for news to publishing news. Freedom of the press is an absolute requirement for the media to properly carry out its journalistic activities. Press freedom is useful not only for the media but also for the public. With press freedom, the public can get reliable information. A free press is vital for a healthy democracy. However, what does press freedom truly mean for journalists on the ground? This article explores the concept of journalist independence and the challenges that threaten it. Journalists



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should be free to pursue the truth and report on issues of public interest without fear or favor. This "freedom of responsibility" allows them to act as watchdogs, holding powerful institutions accountable. However, journalist independence is under constant pressure. Media companies, with their agendas, can influence reporting. Financial constraints can force journalists to prioritize sensational stories over in-depth investigations.

The 2020 Medan City Pilkada elections exemplify this conflict. Journalists faced pressure to favor certain candidates aligned with media owner interests, resulting in biased coverage. The Medan City Pilkada has placed the mass media (press) in the vortex of interests between candidate pairs (*Paslon*) number 1 Akhyar Nasution-Salman Alfarisih and *Paslon* number 2 Bobby Nasution-Aulia Rachman. The battle between the two pairs of candidates is biased towards the interests of media owners who support one of the candidate pairs. The consequence is to assign journalists to do the coverage. At least the news will often show candidate pairs that media owners carry. This can be seen from the news portion, which is more than the news for candidate pairs that media owners do not carry.

Moreover, Finally, journalists will become a successful team for candidate pairs carried out by media owners. Journalists who dare to challenge the status quo can face violence, intimidation, and even legal repercussions. The recent murders and attacks on journalists in Medan highlight the dangers they face.

What Can Be Done? a) Strengthening journalistic ethics, journalists must uphold strong ethical codes, prioritizing public interest over personal gain. b) Building competence, a well-trained and skilled journalist is less susceptible to pressure and can produce high-quality, independent work. c) Supporting independent media and funding avenues outside traditional media ownership can help foster independent journalism.

It is argued by the Press Council (Pers 2014, 141) that because journalists are viewed as historical midwives, guardians of truth and justice, opinion leaders, protectors of people's rights, and enemies of criminals against humanity, their work must be connected to the public interest, not the interests of any individual or institution. like corruptors and rotten politicians. The public interest that journalists must implement in carrying out their journalistic duties by realizing integrity and honesty (fairness), where journalists must act honestly in carrying out 6M duties, namely seeking, obtaining, possessing, storing, processing and conveying information/news to the public. Journalists do not believe/twist information from the facts and data they obtain, so the meaning of independence and neutrality is based on public expectations. Efforts to obtain and convey the truth must be carried out without intervention from any party.

Press Law No. 40 of 1999 guarantees press freedom and prohibits censorship and media bans (Article 4). Journalists also have the privilege of legal protection in carrying out their professional duties

(Article 8). However, it is important to note that journalistic independence does not mean unlimited freedom. This independence ensures journalists can carry out their duties objectively, fairly, and neutrally. With independence, journalists are free from pressure or influence from any particular party, ensuring the information conveyed is accurate and factual. Therefore, journalistic independence guarantees information accuracy and is a fundamental pillar of a healthy democracy. Related to the above, (Smartt, 2020) argues that the independence of journalists is very important and interesting, when journalists carry out journalistic duties. Objectivity, fairness, and neutrality from reporting to making journalistic works and disseminating information are important because journalists must be independent. The independence of journalists is necessary so that the information conveyed is based on the facts or facts that exist and are not fabricated.

The practice of pressure or intervention against journalists in carrying out their journalistic duties has become a blurry portrait of the life of the press. This phenomenon contradicts the elaboration of the Journalistic Code of Ethics (KEJ) and the Press Law (Tumengkol, etc, 2021:37-49. Fenced from the role of journalists, which is the fourth pillar of democracy, journalists must inform an event or fact that happened in society according to their conscience, without interference or coercion and intervention from other parties, including media/press owners. Journalic activities or journalistic tasks carried out by journalists in seeking, obtaining, possessing, storing, processing, and conveying information (6M) using media channels must contain the principle of idealism in journalism known as the existence of facts. Journalists must present facts as they are, not to be reduced or exaggerated, not to mention manipulating facts. The fact must be "sacred". The press must treat facts independently (Lestari, 2019: 142-150)

In their duties, journalists must comply with the Journalistic Code of Ethics. Complying with the KEJ is also a mandate of Law No. 40/1999 concerning the Press, as Chapter III Article 7, paragraph 2 states that "Journalists own and obey a journalistic code of ethics". The KEJ is a standard of behavior for journalists in carrying out journalistic duties according to the needs and demands of journalists. KEJ is a collection of ethics in journalism created by, from and for journalists themselves. Moreover, this underlies the emergence of a journalistic code of ethics as a professional behavior guideline. Related to the above (Tumengkol, etc, 2021:37-49). The principle of independence for journalists in their duties is stated in KEJ Article 1, namely, "Indonesian journalists act independently, produce news that is accurate, balanced and not in bad faith." The truth value in the information/news that is broadcast is said to be accurate, by the journalistic code of ethics. It can be interpreted that accuracy in the journalistic code of ethics is believed to be true, by the objective circumstances when the event occurred (Anggese, etc. 2019; 170-183). Anggese (2019; 170-183) emphasized "don't add things that don't exist. Don't make it up or make it up." Of course this is by the notion of truth which is included in the element of accuracy.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach to investigate the independence of journalists in carrying out journalistic tasks in Medan city. This approach is chosen because it enables researchers to delve into a phenomenon deeply and contextually, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of individuals or groups (Moleong 2000, 3). The study utilizes a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling to select journalists for interviews. In purposive sampling, researchers select journalists based on specific criteria, such as experience, expertise, and involvement in the research topic. Snowball sampling, initially interviewed journalists will recommend other relevant journalists for participation. Researchers will conduct semi-structured interviews with the selected journalists. Interview questions will be designed to explore their experiences, perspectives, and opinions on the research topic.

The study employs Robert K. Yin's (2009) case study analysis to analyze the collected data. This analysis involves: (a) Developing case studies, researchers will construct profiles of each journalist and document their experiences related to the research topic. (b) Identifying patterns and themes, researchers will seek patterns and themes emerging from the interview data. (c) **Concluding**, researchers will draw conclusions based on the identified patterns and themes. The study employs data triangulation to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data. Data triangulation involves (a) method triangulation, which compares data obtained from interviews with data from other sources, such as documents or observations. (b) Source triangulation, comparing data from diverse journalists with different backgrounds and experiences. (c) Data triangulation, comparing data obtained from initial and follow-up interviews with the same journalists.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Medan City Journalists

Medan City,, the capital of North Sumatra Province,, has many business activities and industrialization to support the economy. One of the business activities is to engage in the publishing business of the press or mass media. Many mass media outlets, print, electronic, and online media, have established their offices in Medan. It is certainly interesting for the mass media to set up offices in Medan to make it easier for journalists to cover. Even the national mass media published by the capital city of Jakarta and Java Island also formed media representatives or journalists in Medan City, such as national private TV, national private radio, national print media and online media published on Java Island to facilitate access to the various information needed by the mass media. The presence of various mass

media in the city of Medan, both local and national, shows that the community highly anticipates the high mobility of information.

Based on information from the Secretary General (Secretary General) of PWI North Sumatra, Sahat Rahmat Hamonangan Pangabea revealed that by the end of 2022, the number of Medan City journalists would be around 600 out of 850. Of the 600 journalists for Medan City, around 250 people have been declared competent or have passed the Journalist Competency Test (UKW) at the youth, middle and primary levels from print media, electronic media and online media. Meanwhile, based on data from the Press Council website. Alternatively, the number of journalists who have passed UKW until 17 October 2022 throughout Indonesia has reached 23,300 journalists. The large number of certified journalists in Medan and the large number of mass media, especially online media, is an interesting phenomenon to study to see independence in carrying out journalistic tasks.

Table 3
Mass Media Data in Medan City

No	Media Name	Media Type
1	SKH MIMBAR UMUM	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
2	SKH WASPADA	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
3	SKH ANALISA	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
4	SKH SINAR INDONESIA BARU	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
5	SKH MEDAN POS	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
6	SKH SUMUT POS	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
7	SKH METRO 24	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
8	SKH BERITA SORE	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
9	SKH POS METRO	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
10	SKM GERBAK	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
11	SKM SUARA MASSA	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
12	SKM BARISAN BARU	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
13	SKM PRESTASI REFORMASI	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
14	SKM KORAN WAKTU	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
15	SKM AKTUAL	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
16	SKM MONITOR	WEEKLY PRINT MEDIA
17	TVRI MEDAN	ELECTRONIC MEDIA TELEVISION
18	RRI MEDAN	ELECTRONIC MEDIA RADIO
19	RADIO KISS FM	ELECTRONIC MEDIA RADIO
20	TRANS TV	ELECTRONIC MEDIA TELEVISION
21	METRO TV	ELECTRONIC MEDIA TELEVISION
22	MNC TV	ELECTRONIC MEDIA TELEVISION
23	TV ONE	ELECTRONIC MEDIA TELEVISION
24	KORAN LKBN ANTARA MEDAN	DAILY PRINT MEDIA
25	TRIBUNMEDAN.COM (TRIBUNNEWS NETWORK)	ONLINE MEDIA
26	WASPADA.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
27	WASPADA.ID	ONLINE MEDIA

28	KABARMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
29	ORBITDIGITALDAILY.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
30	ANALISADAILY.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
31	SENTRALBERITA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
32	INTIPNEWS.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
33	METRO24JAM.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
34	METROPUBLIK.CO	ONLINE MEDIA
35	MEDIADELEGASI.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
36	MEDANHEADLINES.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
37	SUMUT24.CO	ONLINE MEDIA
38	INDOSATU.ID (INDOSATU NETWORK)	ONLINE MEDIA
39	BERITASUMUT.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
40	HARIANMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
41	DIGTARA.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
42	ANALISAMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
43	PEWARTA.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
44	REKATAMEDIA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
45	MIMBARUMUM.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
46	MEDANPOSONLINE.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
47	SUMUTPOS.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
48	TERRITORIAL24.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
49	OKEMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
50	SEPUTARSUMUT.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
51	MEDIAAPAKABAR.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
52	SUMUTCYBER.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
53	MEDANBISNISDAILY.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
54	HARIAN24NEWSONLINE.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
55	MEMBARANEWS.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
56	GOSUMUT.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
57	INIMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
58	ASARPUA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
59	ASABERITA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
60	SENTRALBERITA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
61	BATAKPOS.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
62	GARDA.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
63	REALITASONLINE.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
64	MATATELINGA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
65	KALDERA.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
66	INILAHMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
67	SUMUT.ANTARANEWS.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
68	FOKUSMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
69	MEDANHEADLINE.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
70	HALLAMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
71	GENPISUMUT.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
72	ANDALASONLINE.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
73	WANITAMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
74	METRO-ONLINE.CO	ONLINE MEDIA
75	POSROHA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA

76	AKTUALONLINE.CO.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
77	PORTIBL.ID	ONLINE MEDIA
78	LINTASANMEDAN.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
79	INFORMASITERPECAYA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
80	HARIANBERSAMA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
81	ANALISISMEDIA.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
82	HARIANSIB.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
83	BUSERONLINE.COM	ONLINE MEDIA
84	TOPMETRO.NEWS	ONLINE MEDIA
85	ARN24.NEWS	ONLINE MEDIA

Source: Summarized from Various Sources 2022

Application of Press Journalism in Carrying out Journalistic Duties in Medan city.

The application of journalistic press journalism can be seen from the quality of the news presented, whether it relates to public interests or certain interests, or journalists do not report the information they obtain when reporting. However, the journalistic application of journalistic press can be felt in its embodiment in making news with a distinctive or feature essay writing style. This feature writing style gives journalists the freedom to be creative based on coverage in the field from a human perspective on an event that is happening. The coverage carried out got little intervention from various parties. The independence of journalists will be seen from the time of reporting to processing and making news.

RRI Medan journalist, Faizal Syahputra Lukman stated that the actual application of journalistic press journalism is difficult to implement due to the influence of certain parties. Excerpts of the interview as follows:

“Though press journalism is vital for journalist freedom, its real-world use can hinder independence, making it sometimes difficult. Journalists strive to find knowledgeable sources; even single-source info is confirmed elsewhere. Comprehensive reporting is key to ensuring news independence aligns with journalistic ethics”.

Journalist for the Daily Newspaper Analisa Syafitri Tambunan also said that many factors influenced the application of journalistic press journalism. The results of interviews with researchers are as follows:

“While I practice press journalism daily, true journalistic freedom remains elusive. Theory and practice go hand-in-hand, yet editorial limitations often restrict independence in the field. Control is inevitable from data collection to presentation, especially with sensitive issues”.

Agustina journalist News Daily Newspaper told researchers as follows:

"Good press journalism goes beyond presenting interesting facts. It delivers valuable information that resonates with readers. By reporting critically and independently, journalists can spark public concern and awareness".

Waspada Daily Newspaper reporter, Muhammad Ferdinan Sembiring independence practices can be counted. Excerpts of interviews with researchers in the editorial room of the Waspada Daily are as follows:

"The inherent tension between journalistic independence and external pressures is undeniable. Company owners and advertisers often exert undue influence, hindering objective reporting. Journalism can flourish only when press outlets are free from such pressures".

Medan Pos Daily journalist, Baringin MH Pulungan said an understanding of independence is necessary even though independence is difficult to do because it is mortgaged by necessity. The results of the interviews with researchers are as follows:

"Journalists understand the importance of freedom of the press, but reality is not always ideal. The necessities of life can interfere with independence. When offered material incentives to protect certain interests, news coverage becomes biased. As a result, many aspiring journalists are forced to "find food" first."

North Sumatra TVRI journalist Kirwanto said implementing independence would be difficult if journalists did not socialize in the field. Interviews with researchers are as follows:

"Journalists strive for independence, but let us face it, they must put food on the table too. Balancing this ideal with reality is the challenge. Just like a symbol of justice that looks perfect in a picture, true independence can be a precarious act, especially for those without institutional support."

Meanwhile, North Sumatra Bureau of Metro TV journalist Usrizal Pulungan also said the same thing to researchers: there must be pressure on implementing independence. However, you have to be very clever in reporting in the field so that information can be obtained. Interviews with researchers are as follows:

"Journalists on the ground face unique challenges. Sometimes, access to information is restricted, like being blocked by police or security. In these situations, journalists need to be resourceful. They might join official visits or delegations to gain entry, or patiently explain their role and legal right to report on events. Public awareness relies on journalists, and some people simply don't understand the legal protections that allow journalists to investigate and report on what's happening in their communities."

Journalist for the online media digtara.com, Sugiatmo emphasized that he must understand independence if it cannot harm certain parties. Excerpts of interviews with researchers are as follows:

“Journalists need independence to be truly objective. Without it, their reporting becomes biased to favor certain interests. Even when covering situations with potential harm, journalists cannot pick sides. Reaching true independence requires verifying information from all parties involved.”

Hamdani Nasution from sumutcyber.com online media journalist stated that it is difficult to exercise independence in straight news reporting because of orders. However, when writing features there is more freedom for creativity. The results of interviews with researchers are as follows:

“Journalistic independence suffers when pressured to suppress information, especially on sensitive topics. Ideal reporting involves covering all sides, sparking reader interest. However, media policies can restrict creativity and force obedience, hindering true independence.”

Discussion of Research Results

A strong journalistic code of ethics is essential for journalists. It acts as a moral compass, guiding them towards ethical practices and preventing unprofessional behavior. (Suwadi 2019, 82) This code fosters healthy competition by discouraging unethical tactics and ensures balanced reporting through journalist independence. (Sukardi, Due Diligence of 350 Questions and Answers on the Press Law and the 2012 Journalistic Code of Ethics, 325-326).

Here is a paraphrase of the passage focusing on the role of the code of ethics in fostering journalist independence: “The Press Council views the journalistic code (KEJ) as a crucial tool to ensure journalists act professionally. Article 1 emphasizes independence, allowing journalists to report based on facts and their conscience, free from pressure or manipulation, including from their employers.” The obligation to comply with a code of ethics became stronger with the 1999 Press Law. As a response, journalist organizations created the KEWI code in 1999, revised in 2006 to fully comply with the Press Law. This code of ethics, which is now legally binding, applies to all journalists in print, electronic and online media. This journalistic code of ethics was enacted by the Press Council through Press Council Decree No. 03/SKDP/III/2006 and reinforced by Press Council Regulation No. 6/Regulation-DP/V/2008.

Following the KEJ code offers journalists legal protection against criminalization for actions aligned with ethical journalism practices. It also discourages outside interference in their work. The KEJ serves as a self-governing code, created by and for journalists, outlining ethical principles and potential consequences for violations handled by their professional organizations (Anam 2009, 64). Incompetent journalists create shallow, inaccurate news. This leads to a loss of audience and competition with better media outlets.

Conversely, skilled journalists deliver quality information that the public craves. They understand the gravity of their work, knowing their reports are scrutinized and can spark public

backlash if not based on facts and ethics. Ultimately, competent journalists produce trustworthy and accountable journalism.

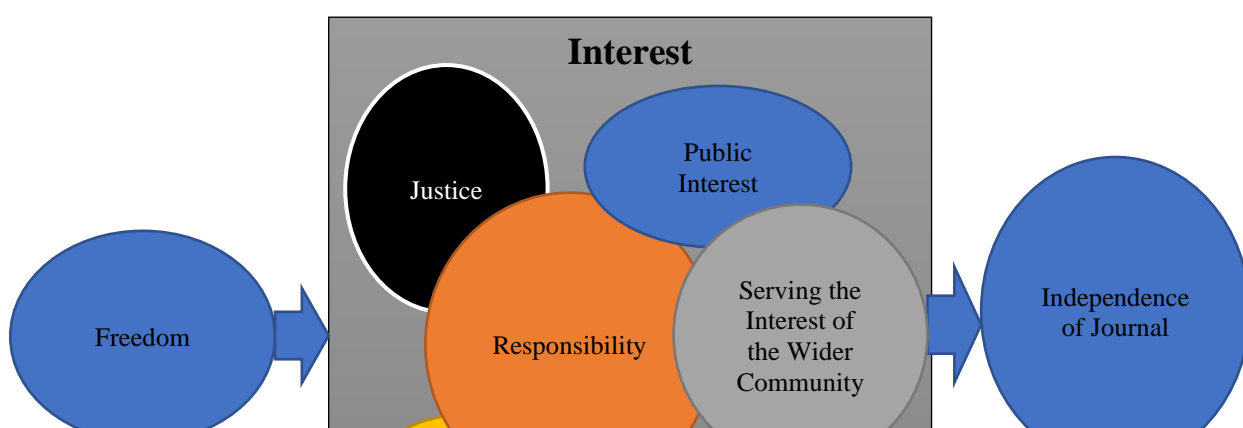
These best quality journalists (<https://romeltea.com> 2021) according to Mary Dowd from Minnesota State University on the Houston Chronicle website stated the following:

- 1) **Ethics and Integrity.** Professional journalists hate fake news based on unverifiable rumours, innuendo and anonymous tips. Journalists are not opinionated in writing news. Journalists may only share opinions in newspaper editorials – articles and editorials.
- 2) **Courage.** Good journalists push themselves to dig deep and ask the tough questions. They put aside their feelings to reveal newsworthy truths about people, places, and events. Courage is essential to investigate what happened at the scene. They do not settle for calling from the comfort of their desk in the newsroom when covering big events.
- 3) **Skilled Communication.** In addition to perfect character traits, journalists must be skilled communicators to interview sources and write in-depth stories.
- 4) **Tech Smart.** Journalists must master knowledge of technology. Journalists follow and use social media appropriately to provide live and transparent coverage of events as they occur.
- 5) **Investigation Skills.** Especially newspaper reporters, good journalists have an analytical mind and base stories on evidence and facts, not emotion. They are astute observers and instinctively sense when there is more to the story than what is being shared at a press conference. Critical thinking skills are essential when weighing conflicting reports of an incident and assessing the credibility of sources. They use good judgment when blogging or writing unverified information on newspaper websites during headlines.

The skills needed for quality journalism, as outlined by Nurudin (2009:169), align with Ignas Kleden's view of journalism as intellectual work. Journalists require unique tools and abilities beyond mere intelligence. This intellectual work necessitates a strong skillset. Without these skills or competence, journalists cannot function effectively. Competence allows journalists to grasp, master, and uphold the profession, giving them the authority to make decisions within the field. Ultimately, a journalist's skills and competence unlock their creative potential.

Chart 1 Research Findings

Independence of Journalists in Carrying Out Journalistic Tasks in Medan City



No	Aspects	Findings	Novelty
1	Freedom Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Journalistic Freedom = Responsibility. - Accompanied by responsibility for truth, justice, and the public interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not unlimited freedom
2	Role of the Press Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Press Council (Pers 2014) - Journalistic freedom is related to the public interest - Journalists' work must serve the wider community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combination of academic sources and regulatory agencies. - A holistic perspective on "freedom"
3	Journalist Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Journalist accountability - Responsible for the truth and accuracy of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relationship between freedom and accountability. - Emphasizes the importance of journalistic ethics

Table 4 Research Novelty Independence of Journalists in Carrying Out Journalistic Tasks in Medan

CONCLUSION

A study in Medan City shows that journalists there recognize the significance of ethical journalism in their daily work. This aligns with the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics (KEJ), the profession's moral compass. The KEJ, particularly Article 1, which emphasizes journalist independence, ensures balanced and accurate reporting. Understanding the KEJ reinforces their commitment to independence, driven by their conscience to serve the public good rather than individual interests.

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