

Ethical and Legal Model of the Cybermedia: Case Study in North Sumatra, Indonesia

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Received: April 18, 2024

Accepted: June 16, 2024

Online Published: July 15, 2024

doi:10.11114/smc.v12i3.6873

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v12i3.6873>

Abstract

In the new media era, most violations cases of press ethics and law are made by cybermedia in Indonesia. At the same time, cybermedia is one of the factors driving national stability, as well as a factor encouraging democratization. This study aimed to determine the ethical and legal model indicators of cybermedia from the Indonesia Cybermedia Union (SMSI) of North Sumatra case study. The research is a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Data were collected from interviews with 39 journalists through questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGD) with two press experts, two North Sumatra SMSI administrators and an honorary board member of the press organization. The results of this study indicated that five problems were indicators of models for implementing press ethics and law in cybermedia. *First*, increasing the competence of journalists in several ways, such as encouraging journalists to take the journalist competency tests and conducting training; *second*, encouraging cybermedia verification by the Press Council; *third*, providing legal assistance for journalists who were caught in the law; *fourth*, following the existing rules of press ethics and law. This was done because cybermedia did not have its own rules of ethics and press law; *fifth*, conducting an interaction model with stakeholders through journalist competency test activities.

Keywords: media ethics, press law, cybermedia, implementation model

1. Introduction

The press ethics and law violations in cybermedia reporting often occur in North Sumatra (Sahputra, 2020a). Nationally, cybermedia is the media that commits the most infringements (Republika.co.id, 2023). Several violations were processed at the Honorary Council of journalistic organizations, such as the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI). But some others proceed to court. Even though the press is the fourth pillar of democracy (fourth estate) that provides correct information to the public, if this problem is not addressed, it will further weaken democracy (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2022). Journalists report that online harassment has become commonplace in their work lives (Holton et al., 2021). Even though cybermedia news has become like a news desert (Astuti & Irwansyah, 2022). Ethical violations are exacerbated by adolescent interactions with social media, which still need guidance (Shiratuddin et al., 2021), and nearly 80% of their day is spent virtually (Graciyal & Viswam, 2021). Studies show that only digital media use for religious purposes is carried out wisely (Dwivedi & Narula, 2020). On the other hand, civil society has not been able to be encouraged to use new media as a means of political communication (Adiputra et al., 2023). Even though Indonesian democracy is not doing well because board members are powerless decision-makers, and the decision-making process is controlled by the government and politicians (Apriliyanti & Randøy, 2018). Especially in this digital media era, populism leadership is a menace to democracy (Karim et al., 2021).

The effects of digital technology, such as forms of cyber media, have raised questions about journalistic ethics (Bastian et al., 2021). In general, digital media users do not have sufficient knowledge and awareness about ethics (Hokke et al., 2020). Moreover, there are smugglers media and the use of journalistic methods strategically (Hujanen et al., 2022). The issue of digital media ethics is complex because it is distinct for each country, even though cyber can reach a global audience. Because of this, Global ethical standards are needed (Auman et al., 2020). There is an ethics blind spot regarding privacy and discrimination against traditional journalism ideas (Rydenfelt et al., 2022) so journalist routine and the political context become a matter (Aslan Ozgul & Veneti, 2021). Here, there is also the issue of accountability for

hyperlocal entrepreneurs in carrying out the role of journalism through many hyperlocal news roles in local communities (Tenor, 2018). Cybermedia journalists are defensive and accommodate risks to strengthen and expand journalistic discourse in the digital space (Cheruiyot, 2022). Therefore, updating digital media ethics guidelines in Big Data regulation and inferential analytics is necessary because data analytics and artificial intelligence alone are inadequate (Mühlhoff & Willem, 2023).

The fast-paced changes in digital technology are reshaping journalism in the cyber form (Arregui Olivera, 2021). Digital journalism risks being reduced to fact-checking (Frau-Meigs, 2022) until it encounters a disruption, a significant factor driving journalism to transform (Nurlatifah & Mutmainnah, 2021). Online media, as a form of digital journalism, uses journalistic elements to maintain novelty and clarity (Rizkiansyah et al., 2020) and later became the originator of the presence of cyber law (cyber law) to become a new legal regime that was born in the digital era (Hikmat, 2018). In these conditions, at least three things are needed for journalism to build norms: its transformative communicative capacity, its institutional commitment, and how to apply editorial guidelines (Harrison & Pukallus, 2022). In reality, press law continues to develop. (Sahputra, 2020a). One of them relates to children who conflict with the law, which must be protected (Sahputra, 2019), so the competence of journalists regarding press law is significant (Sahputra, 2022). Therefore, journalists must be tested for their competence in understanding and skills in writing news about children in conflict with the law through a journalist competency test (Sahputra, 2020b). In reporting political news, journalists are also required to follow developments in social media (Sahputra et al., 2020). Because the digital realm can be the evolution of democratic forms and activism (Sumartias et al., 2023), the press, especially the local press, has a role in consolidating democracy in the regions (Indrakrista, 2015). So, it is clear that cyber media, as part of the national press, plays a role in democratization. Because of that, the existing problems within cybermedia, as the newest form of mass media, need to find a solution by implementing ethical and legal models of the press that encourage democratization.

2. Literature Review

This research will analyze the journalists' behavior in individuals and the climate of the press companies where journalists work. This journalist's behavior is related closely to his knowledge and understanding of press ethics and law. However, with the new types of media presence in this digital era, ethical journalistic principles are often forgotten (Wibawa, 2020). Behavior can be interpreted as a set of human actions when responding to a stimulus that comes to it (Adventus et al., 2019). As digital media users, children's cognitive responses are influenced by their family's economic background (Maika et al., 2017). Passive ones occur in humans and can indirectly be seen by others, while active ones occur when a behavior can be observed directly (Adventus et al., 2019). In the journalist profession, the internalization of subjective entrepreneurial disciplinary norms is the driving force behind the work of journalists (Pajnik & Hrženjak, 2022). However, institutional factors (media system, country, type of media) are more relevant than content-related factors (Günther & Scharrow, 2014). Journalists generally understand the journalistic code of ethics. However, they do not understand its detailed description (Winora et al., 2021). The Press Council notes that cybermedia is the type of mass media in which violations of press ethics and laws occur most frequently throughout 2022. Of all cases handled by the Press Council, as many as 97 percent were violations committed by cybermedia (Pers, 2022).

In a company climate, a strategy is necessary for achieving organizational goals (Sahputra et al., 2021). In the context of fake news, people have less trust in social media news, but information on social media can contribute to a long-term decline in news trust (Karlsen & Aalberg, 2021). In this digital era, cybermedia makes social media a commodity, a content distribution channel, or spatialization (Muslikhin et al., 2021). News sharing and exchange often occur between mainstream news portals and social media (Saifuddin & Zanuddin, 2021). Utilizing online media features is recognized as a strategic solution for reaching the community (Andryani et al., 2022). On the other, cybermedia relies on the government as an official source of information (Loisa et al., 2019). Apart from using social media, the appearance of cybermedia is also in the form of news aggregator, namely news information taken from sources that have been published, even though news aggregators cannot be called the press (Erawaty & Irwansyah, 2019).

In the current post-truth condition, truth is being attacked by some political interests behind a process (Sugiana et al., 2019). This situation impacts the journalistic world, where the press is in a political dynamic that is speeding up. Under these conditions, violations of journalistic ethics are very likely to occur. At least this is illustrated in several cases involving members of the North Sumatra SMSI (Indonesia Cybermedia Union). There were four cases of ethical and legal violations that occurred. Some of them went to court and jailed journalists. Several questions in this research: First, how to increase the competence of journalists; second, how to improve the quality of cyber media; third, how to provide legal assistance to journalists; fourth, how press ethics and law are applied; fifth, what is the interaction model for cyber media journalists in implementing their competencies

3. Methods

This research is a type of mixed-method approach research that combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

This approach was chosen because it combines empirical data with data based on regulations regarding press ethics and law. Empirical data was obtained from journalists who were respondents, while regulation-based data was collected from the results of FGDs. Mixed methods designs offer several benefits for approaching complex research problems because they are integrated. According to Dawadi et al., (2021), mixing two methods may be superior to one because it is likely to provide rich insights into research. Because it is a phenomenon that cannot be fully understood using only qualitative or quantitative methods. Mixed methods designs can integrate and synergize multiple data sources that can help study complex problems.

The data in this study were obtained through interviews with 39 journalists through questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGD), documentation studies, and observations of North Sumatra-based cybermedia journalists who are members of North Sumatra SMSI. The S-O-R (Stimulus Organism Response) theory was regarded as relevant to this study, which analyzed the components of attitudes, opinions, and human perceptions. If Attitude is related to knowledge and understanding), then Affection is an attitude related to feelings), while Conation is an attitude related to action tendencies (Abidin & Abidin, 2021). Cybermedia journalists as research objects were given a stimulus in the form of an ideal implementation model of press ethics and law in a flow of copy process that an organism that was the core of the movement of the press industry. Furthermore, the expected response was increased knowledge, understanding, and skills of cybermedia journalists in producing ethical and obeying press laws news.

Table 1. List of FGD Participants

N A M E	OFFICE
Nurhalim Tanjung/NT	Press Expert of the Press Council
Rizal Rudi Surya/RRS	Press Expert of the Press Council
M. Syahril/MS	Chairman of Nort Sumatra PWI Honorary Council
Erris Julieta Napitupulu/EJN	Chairman of he North Sumatra SMSI
Zulfikar Tanjung/ZT	Adviser of North Sumatra SMSI

Source: Research Result, 2023

The informants were selected based on their respective competencies and positions in journalistic organizations in charge of press ethics and law. Meanwhile, the respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection was carried out in four research stages as follows: First, it was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 39 cybermedia journalists to identify their knowledge and understanding of press ethics and law. Second, it was carried out in-depth interviews with five informants who participated in the FGD. Third, it was to formulate a design model for the press ethics and law implementation for cybermedia journalists. Fourth, it was conducting workshops to implement indicators of press ethics and law on news presented by cyber media.

4. Result

SMSI was nationally established at March 7, 2017 in Banten. Meanwhile, the North Sumatra SMSI then was declared in Medan at April 25, 2017. As chairman, Ir Zulfikar Tanjung from mimbarumum.co and Heru Kurnia from Elsinta.com were elected as the secretary for the 2017-2022 periods. Furthermore, the management of North Sumatra SMSI for 2022-2027 elected Chairman Erris Julieta Napitupulu from topmetro.news. As elected chairman, Erris served as a communicator with voters and cybermedia journalists in North Sumatra. Febriana & Puspa (2021) stated that cybermedia had given rise to perspectives in interacting, forming connections, participating in, and carrying out tasks in society that changed perceptions of conversational texts, social interactions, and the nature of language. Internally, this cybermedia company organization still has problems.

First, journalists did not fully understand at least four products of press ethics and law, namely Law Number 49 of 1999 concerning the Press, Journalistic Code of Ethics, Child-Friendly Reporting Guidelines/Pedoman Pemberitaan Ramah Anak (PPRA), and Cybermedia Reporting Guidelines/Pedoman Pemberitaan Media Siber (PPMS).

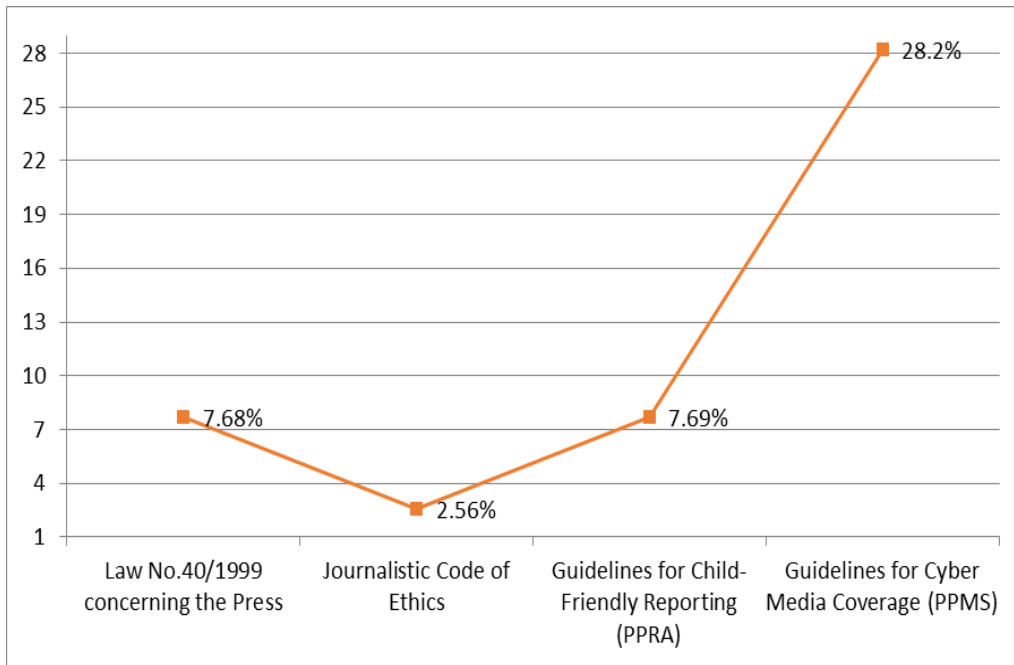


Figure 1. Journalists Who Don't Understand Press Ethics and Laws

Source: Research Result, 2023

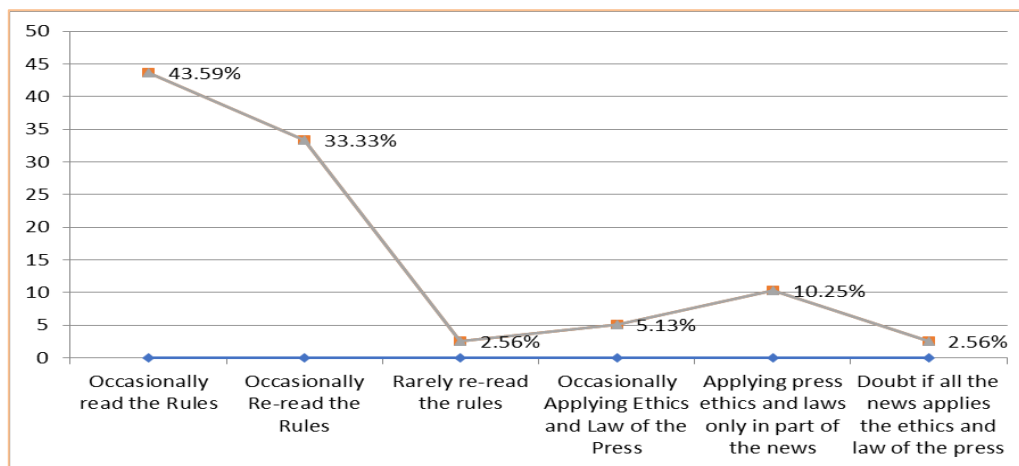


Figure 2. Journalist Interaction with the Press Code of Ethics & Law

Source: Research Result, 2023

Violations of journalistic ethics that lead to criminal acts also still occur. Cybermedia journalists took advantage of their status as journalists to scare dishonest entrepreneurs into paying them a certain amount of money so that journalists shut up and did not broadcast news about violations of rules by entrepreneurs. Intervened straightforwardly by people from various backgrounds caused the profession of journalists to make this thing happen.

“Nowadays, becoming a cyber-media journalist is very easy. By having a little capital, you could set up a cyber-media company. New cybermedia journalists were generally not paid and equipped with knowledge and understanding of press ethics and law, not even a few who did not have skills in writing news following journalistic rules.” (Informant RRS)



Figure 3. News on Extortion by Journalists

Source: timenews.co.id

Things like this had an impact on various things. For example, in political news coverage, journalists like this tended not to know that they violated press ethics and laws. Even when warned, they didn't even notice. The examples below were some news that news links disseminated in the WhatsApp group filled with journalists. The reports violated press ethics and law, and the news writer had been warned of the violations. However, he did not realize his mistake.



Figure 4. News about Violations of Journalistic Ethics in Sumut24.com

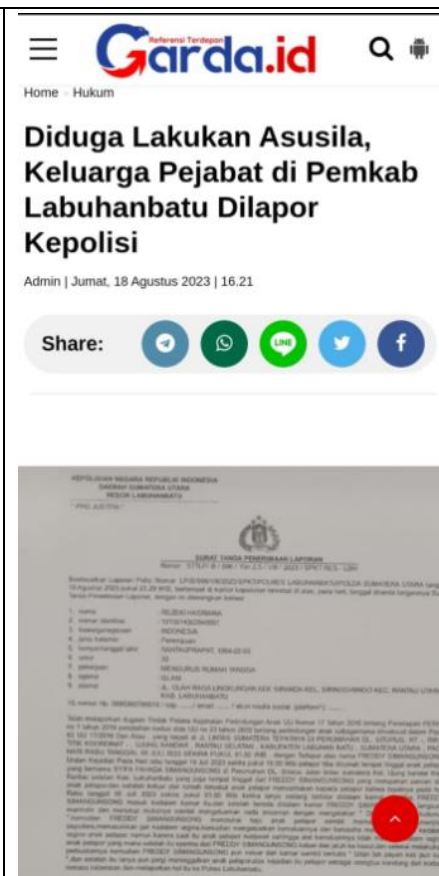


Figure 5. News about Violations of Journalistic Ethics in garda.id



Figure 6. News about Violations of Journalistic Ethics in halomedan.com

Figures 4,5,6, was news that violated the Child-Friendly Reporting Guidelines (PPRA) because the news content revealed the mother's identity as a victim of child abuse. Even worse, the news was spread into different media and published with the same semicolon article.

This news first appeared on sumut24.com and then aired by garda.id with the same editorial from the title to the end. Furthermore, the same was published by halomedan.co with a different title, but the news content was the same as both previous media. Indeed, the practice of cloning journalism in North Sumatra and Indonesia, in general, was a common

thing. Journalists released a story that was then published by other cyber-media. But not infrequently, the shared news was published without prior censorship.

Second, press companies still did not fully meet the requirements of competent cybermedia to produce journalistic products that support democratization. Until the end of 2002, North Sumatra SMSI had 145 cybermedia company members. Only 33 were legal entities and factually and administratively verified by the Press Council. The rest had not been factually verified; had not been administratively verified; and had not been factually and administratively verified at once. The development in the quantity of cybermedia in Indonesia has raised the vulnerability to implementing a journalistic code of ethics by journalists (Kencana & Junaidi, 2019). It was because it's for legality. The Indonesian press was required to have a legal entity registered with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. Meanwhile, as a prerequisite for the quality of journalistic products, the media in Indonesia were voluntarily verified factual and administrative by the Press Council.

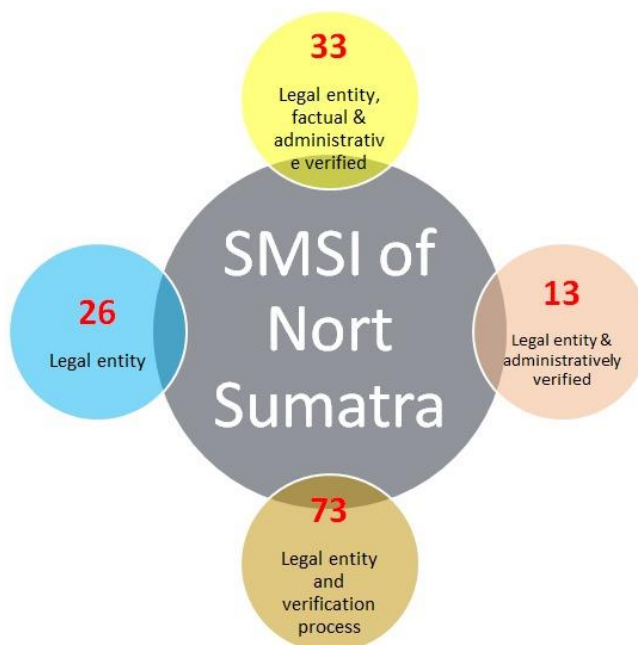


Figure 7. Membership of SMSI North Sumatra

Source: Research Result, 2023

“For the establishment of media in Indonesia, a mechanism was regulated. The first was that press companies might have a legal entity with legal standing, and they might have journalists who carried out journalistic duties daily. In addition, to be verified by the Press Council, media companies might have journalists with the primary competency levels as editor-in-chief.” (Informant EJN)

“To control the cybermedia members of 145 press companies was not easy. There were those hosting had expired and were no longer operational. Some journalists switched media amid the proliferation of cyber media. They needed coaching (including in political coverage in election years).” (EJN informant)

Third, there were still cases of press ethics and law. From the inventory of data on media ethics, four incidents were reported, that occurred cases within the North Sumatra SMSI membership. The first case involved insulting the Regent of Batubara in the form of hate speech and slander. The news was disseminated on social media via a Facebook account. This case brought the journalist to court and sentenced to prison. The second case occurred in Deli Serdang Regency involving a member of parliament. Then, news content was about the inauguration of a parliament member that the wife of a member of parliament fell accidentally. This news attracted attention because it turned out that the woman was suspected of being involved in a legal violation in the form of gambling. It was forwarded to the Facebook account and eventually became a legal case with the police. The third case occurred in Pematang Siantar city, which became a criminal case because journalists were victims of murder by people who felt they were being blackmailed because they were involved in a drug case. The fourth case concerned news about illegal gold mining, which occurred in the Mandailing Natal district by two journalists becoming victims of beatings from ordered thugs. This case continued until the court trial. This was relevant to Abrar & Syafrizal (2021), who questioned that the journalism crisis was not due to external factors but could be caused by the journalists themselves in the new media era.

Fourth, SMSI, as a cyber-media company organization that houses journalists within it did not have a code of ethics

and press law. Journalists, as a profession, had their organizations. It's just that when there were problems with press ethics and law violations, media companies would be affected.

"As a profession, journalists were not under the auspices of SMSI. So journalists became members of professional organizations that were bound by press ethics and law, and no new ethics were created. SMSI oversaw or was responsible for members complying with these ethics." (Informant ZT)

Journalistic ethics in the Journalism Code of Ethics (KEJ) and press law in Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press was indeed the product of regulations that bound journalists as a profession and a press company at once. For example, the article involved media policy regarding News written by journalists in Articles 10 and 11 KEJ. Article 10 on ethics to immediately revoke, correct, and repair false or inaccurate News accompanied by an apology addressed to readers, listeners, and viewers. Article 11 regarding the right of reply and the right to correction in a proportional manner was the journalist's obligation. These two articles could not have been created by the journalist covering them in the field without the support of the press company policies where he worked.

Likewise, Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press bound journalists and press companies together. For example, Article 1 number (10) regulates the Right to Reject, number (11) the Right of Reply, number (12) the Right to Correction, and number (13) the Obligation of Correction. The rights and obligations of journalists cannot be exercised if they are not in line with the policies of the press company.

In addition, not all SMSI members had journalists who were professional journalist organization members. So, they did not receive guidance of knowledge, understanding, and skills in press ethics and law. Commonly, journalists who do not understand the press ethics and law are not members of professional journalism organizations. They are press card holders but do not understand journalists' duties, so they are prone to violating ethics and the law of the press.

"Several press ethics and law incidents, such as in Pematang Siantar and Medan, were not related to the press directly. Because of the incident that led to the death of a journalist, he was not a member of the PWI professional organization. He was associated with a press company, which then did journalistic activities. Meanwhile, the events in Medan were not members of the PWI (Association of Indonesian Journalists) journalist professional organization and were also not journalists but selling on behalf of journalism." (Informant MS)

This showed that members of SMSI North Sumatra, a press company, not all of their journalists were members of the journalism profession or people who understand press ethics and law. Since the era of press freedom in 1999, marked by the enactment of Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, new publications started to flourish. In the current digital era, the tendency for the emergence of new cybermedia is even higher, so the journalism profession has become a more convenient job field for some people. The identity of the journalists they bore did not match their knowledge and understanding of press ethics and law.

Fifth, the legal process between violations of journalistic ethics and press law was still not a common understanding. Press law in Indonesia referred to Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press and the Journalistic Code of Ethics, which regulated the mechanism for the right to reply. This meant that there were no criminal law sanctions such as imprisonment. However, in the new media era with the social media presence, a gap exists between information on social media and mass media, making the law enforcement process uncertain. Fundamental questions were whether journalists could be sued because of the news they wrote, could be punished because of the ones they wrote, and what responsibilities media companies have.

"Sometimes, when the police had cases related to journalists, they asked because it was still unstable and there were administrative procedures up to the Press Council. The prosecutor staffs were just the same, wondering and afraid whether they had taken the wrong step. Most of the cases involving journalists were not forwarded." (Informant NT)

"In fact, journalists cannot be sued personally because of the news. But if you want to be sued, it's the responsibility of the media. In one case involving a police official, it was reportedly resolved using restorative justice with mediation to reconcile the problem." (Informant NT)

The Press Council had divided the media in handling this ethics and law press case based on four quadrants.

"At the Press Council, there was a quadrant system. So, the media was divided into four levels. The first quadrant was verified media with its journalistic work followed KEJ standards and complied with the rules of ethics and press law. In the second quadrant, some media were not verified and legally incorporated. This included the student press and the newby media. For example, Najwa Shihab's narratives were considered a new media following journalistic standards and were very professional but were not a legal entity and were not protected. In the third quadrant, there were fake media, no permits, no legal entities, and no journalistic standards. The fourth quadrant, media with legal entities and verified, but the work was fake, like extortion." (Informant NT)

Legal regulations further differentiate between media having a legal entity and were verified by the Press Council. The use of press ethics and law only applied to legal media. Meanwhile, media verification was not related to the process in the police.

"The legal process for journalists who get to the police report was easy. It had to be distinguished whether the reported media was a legal entity/not. If it was a legal entity, even though it had not been verified, the right of reply mechanism applied, and the police could not process it. If it was not a legal entity, it might be processed by the police using rules other than the Press Law. (Informant RRS)"

Journalist competence seemed to be the keyword for ethics and law press issues for cybermedia incorporated in SMSI North Sumatra. In a political year, coverage Journalists would come into contact with increasingly heated political issues. This was indeed able to cause various legal consequences in addition to being a determinant for democratization in Indonesia. However, according to Waluyo (2018), the problem was journalists and cybermedia companies, for various reasons, were still not committed to increasing their competence through journalist competency tests.

5. Discussion

The five cybermedia problems would impact political news reports during the general election. It could be seen that in the new media era, the relationship between democracy and cybermedia has become increasingly dynamic. As Adiputra et al., (2023) stated, democracy is the action of civil society in a more open political communication process. The problem became more complicated because of the oligarchic media emergence (Iannone, 2022), which was not only caused by the existence of mass media affiliated with political parties but also because of easily influenced cybermedia by political interests through money approaches.

The North Sumatra SMSI approach model in reducing press ethics and law problems among cybermedia was important as an overview of the national press not only to reduce potential violations that may occur but also to see weaknesses and deficiencies in handling this problem. About coverage encouraged democratization, the produced journalistic products might comply with these applicable regulations. However, in the era of new media freedom, where cybermedia was mushrooming, the model for increasing the quality of journalists might balance the quantity that continues to grow.

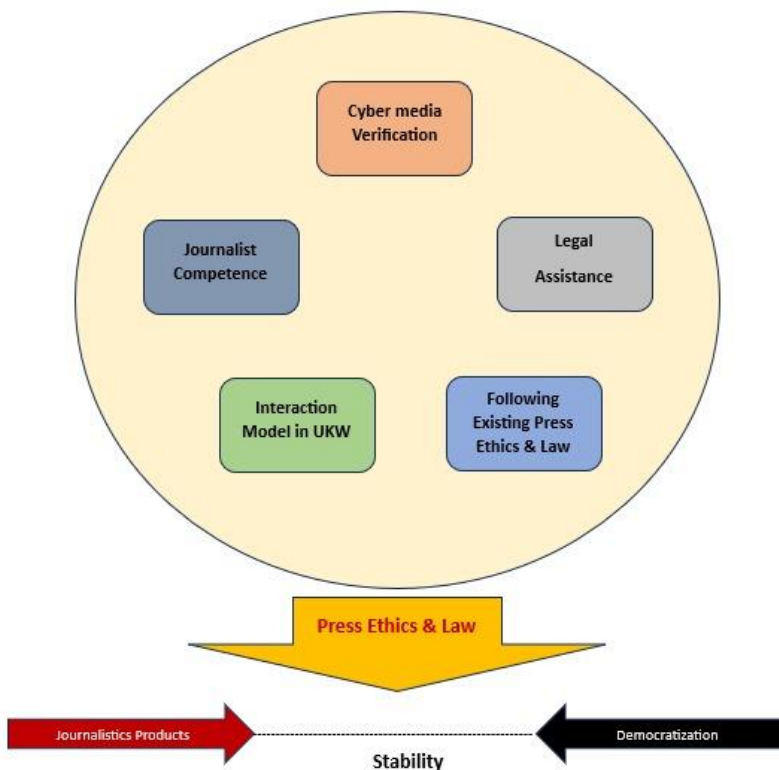


Figure 8. Cybermedia Press Ethics and Legal Model

Source: Research Result (2023)

First, in increasing journalists' understanding of at least four products of press ethics and law, they were encouraged to take the Journalist Competency Test (UKW). In this test, the press ethics and law were some of the things tested. Failure

to demonstrate understanding of this material would cause journalists to be declared incompetent. At UKW, this would usually be preceded by pre-UKW material, which provided input to journalists who participated in UKW on an understanding of press ethics and law.

“We encouraged institutional media companies and individual journalists to take part in UKW. The approach was taken with local governments or non-binding sponsors to collaborate in implementing UKW, together with the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI). Currently, there are still journalists who do not understand press ethics and law, but compared with the previous years, it was much better.” (EJN informant)

North Sumatra SMSI has been behind in recent years in organizing UKW in North Sumatra. The implementation of UKW in North Sumatra was classified as aggressive because the duration was quite dense. Throughout 2022 to 2023, it was recorded that 19 batches of UKW have been implemented in various regions in North Sumatra. All UKW implementations collaborated with local governments as sponsors' activity.

Table 2. List of Journalist Competency Test Implementation (UKW) for 2022-2023

BATCH	DISTRICT	DATE
57	Pematang Siantar	July 17-18, 2023
55-56	Medan	December 27-28, 2022
54	Mandailing Natal	December 23-24, 2022
53	Padang Lawas Utara	December 20-21, 2022
52	Batubara	December 18-19, 2022
50-51	Asahan	December 11-12, 2022
48-49	Simalungun	December 6-7, 2022
46-47	Medan	November 15-16, 2022
44-45	Medan	October 31 - November 1, 2022
43	Mandailing Natal	September 3-4, 2022
41-42	Medan	July 29-30, 2023
40	Batubara	June 26-27, 2022
39	Medan	May 26-27, 2022

Source: Research Sesult (2023)

Second, one of the requirements for establishing a cyber-media company verified by the Press Council was the status of the editor-in-chief, who might have a main-level competency certificate. Meanwhile, in complementing this, there was an intermediate certificate for editors and a junior certificate for journalists (Nurhajati et al., 2018). However, the number of journalists who had primary level certificates was still limited and was not level certificates was still limited and was not comparable to the growth in the number of cyber media. The website dewapers.or.id recorded 136 journalists in North Sumatra who had primary-level competency certificates (Pers, 2023). The distribution of primary-level journalists was also uneven, because in one media there were five primary-level journalists, but there were also cybermedia that did not yet have primary-level journalists. Several cybermedia companies borrowed journalists who had core-level competencies to be listed as editor-in-chief in the editorial box, even though technically, they were not involved in the editorial process. The process of borrowing the name of a top journalist was based on two things, namely friendship and a paid method. Cybermedia needed to be verified by the Press Council as a condition for cooperating with third parties such as local government. Furthermore, a journalist with a primary level at most may only be the chief editor of two different media in the same area. Based on Press Council Regulation Number: 1/PERATURAN-DP/1/2023 concerning Data Collection of Press Companies, it is stated that the chief editor or person in charge of the media is a person who must have journalist competency certification for the main level in at most two media that are in the same area (Peraturan Dewan Pers Tentang Pendataan Perusahaan Pers, 2023).

“If a cyber-media does not list the editor-in-chief or the person in charge as a journalist who has a competency certificate at the primary level then the cybermedia cannot submit a verification process to the Press Council but can still register their legal entity at the Ministry of Law and Human Rights.” (Informant ZT)

The consequence of borrowing journalists to be listed as editor-in-chief or persons in charge in the editorial box was that cyber-media was deemed incompetent in producing journalistic products that supported democratization. Because an editor-in-chief or person in charge was considered not to have understood the press ethics and laws, he cannot distinguish news based on journalistic rules.

Third, press law cases involving journalists in the membership of SMSI North Sumatra and PWI North Sumatra were responded to in several approaches: First, journalists who were reported to the police and followed the legal process would receive legal advisory assistance, especially for cases involving journalists as victims who were being tried in court, lawyers appointed by this media organization would be assisted. “We assigned lawyers to accompany journalists who were

being tried in court because of the journalistic products they wrote. Apart from that, it also defended journalists who were victims of violence, such as what happened in Pematang Siantar some time ago.” (Informant MS). Apart from nationally, legal cases have befallen journalists who would involve the Press Council through appointed press experts. There were five press experts in North Sumatra, all of whom had journalist backgrounds. Even though they were domiciled in Medan City, North Sumatra, the press experts appointed by the Press Council could be assigned to all regions in Indonesia.

“Not only the police but also prosecutors in court would ask for an explanation from the Press Council if a case was related to journalists. In this case, the Press Council appointed existing press experts and bore all costs incurred in assigning press experts process. Thus, the independence of press experts would be maintained.” (Informant RRS)

“There are five press experts in North Sumatra and nationally of 136 people, some of whom are inactive for various reasons. The number of active press experts nationally was around 115-120 people whose domiciles were spread across Indonesia unevenly.” (Informant NT)

Fourth, as a cyber-media company, SMSI followed the code of ethics and press law issued by the National Press Council. As the formulation of press ethics and the law followed met the requirements to encourage democratization, it is still relevant to do so. Press ethics and laws would become a shield in political news coverage so that cybermedia could avoid the political polarization that occurred during the general elections that continued to happen from 2014 to 2020 (Jati, 2022). A deeper understanding of press ethics and law would create products journalism became more stable and was in the corridor it should be. In other words, if democracy is stable, it will reduce the corruption index (Azwar & Subekan, 2022). Subsequently, journalists who produced journalistic products following press ethics and law would push for a stable democracy.

As a new media, cybermedia has characteristics that distinguish it from other types of mass media, such as print media, radio, and television, especially in the speed of presenting news and news writing models, which are influenced by digital prerequisites such as search engine optimization (SEO). As Lopezosa et al., (2020) emphasized the sector's urgent need to attract readers by applying search engine positioning techniques and, therefore, the need to ensure future journalists are well trained in SEO techniques as well as in the use of SEO analysis and auditing tools and the ability to identify search trends, so they have the skills necessary to win the battle for more readers.

Moreover, when it comes to sensitive news, such as information about suicide, due to increasingly widespread mental health problems in society, especially among young readers of digital media, they published in the mass media would menace people suffering from mental health disorders. An open and detailed presentation of suicide news would increase the potential for mental disorders in sufferers. Kencana & Junaidi (2019) found them in cybermedia related to reports of suicide attempts that were presented that did not follow press ethics and laws. This resulted in the emergence of behavioral effects, namely copycat suicide, on people with mental health.

Because of this, it would impact the application of press ethics and law as the guiding rules of the game. Therefore, several conditions allowed for the application of press ethics and law for cybermedia journalists. 1) Cybermedia followed the existing rules of press ethics and law. 2) Cybermedia has press ethics and laws that specifically regulate the dissemination of information through this platform. 3) Cybermedia used existing press ethics and laws with its pattern. This pattern seemed to be due to the need to present news quickly, so correction of errors was also possible on the same day. Even though the cybermedia Reporting Guidelines (PPMS) had regulated this matter in terms of ethics and law, it needed to be further emphasized with ethical sanctions. This is important considering that there must be anticipatory steps from the increasingly rapid development of new media.

Fifth, the journalist competency test (UKW) implementation model usually involves law parties, such as the police, the prosecutor's office, and lawyers. They would become resource persons who became news sources in the simulations that were carried out or became resource persons in the network. On various occasions of UKW implementation, the interaction between legal officers in activities like this would increase awareness about the existence of press ethics and legal rules that were legally applied to journalists and were protected by law. The competency test conducted on journalists in Denpasar City has had an impact. It can be seen the emergence of awareness by journalists so that they know more about the ethics and laws of the press Adnyana (2015). By increasing the competence of journalists, awareness of press ethics and law among journalists would also improve to be applied in journalistic tasks. Likewise, legal officials had a broader perspective on the rules in cases of law violations involving journalists.

Through interactions like this, stakeholders would better understand journalists' activities in producing journalistic products covered by press ethics and law. Thus, the legal process between violations of journalistic ethics and press laws would become a common understanding. In several cases, it was known that the legal officers involved did not know about legal products and mechanisms for journalists' work and the rules that covered their work in producing journalistic products.

In essence, based on Agustini's (2019) research, journalists' awareness of press ethics and law would make it easier for them not to make mistakes in writing news and disseminate the truth of the information based on accurate and complete facts. The

community needs information like this. In the Journalistic Code of Ethics, existing news or issues might be confirmed through competent sources. Journalists must always maintain the objectivity of the items they present as a profession so that they are always factual and attractive. This makes the task of journalists in carrying out them and producing journalistic works a primary duty in national life. However, political issues often become an obstacle to journalists' jobs because of the reason for the longevity of power. Based on this description, it can be seen that the strategic involvement of legal officials in journalistic activities can create a common perception in addressing issues of press ethics and law.

6. Conclusion

The research found five problems faced by SMSI North Sumatra, which were challenges to democratization. When journalists still have problems understanding press ethics and law, the journalistic products produced would be counterproductive to democratization. The identity of the press is called the fourth pillar of democracy (fourth estate). In the case of SMSI North Sumatra, these five problems were at once an indicator of the ethical and legal implementation model of the press in cyber media. *First* is increasing the competence of journalists in several ways, such as encouraging journalists to take the journalist competency tests and conducting training. For this purpose, local governments, both at the provincial and city district levels, were strategic partners; *second*, encouraging cybermedia verification by the Press Council. One of the verification requirements was to have a primary journalist competency certificate for the editor-in-chief or person in charge. Due to the imbalance in the number of cybermedia and journalists who have main competencies, SMSI North Sumatra members usually borrow journalists with main competencies to be listed in the editorial box; *third*, providing legal assistance for journalists who were caught in the law. In several cases, journalists involved in legal incidents were accompanied by lawyers who were prepared and also given the opinion of press experts who sided with the interests of journalistic duties; *fourth*, following existing press ethics and legal rules. This was done because cybermedia did not have its own rules of ethics and press law; *fifth*, conducting a model of interaction with stakeholders through UKW to reduce different understandings among legal officials by communicating in the form of simulations within UKW.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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