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# THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN DEFINING PRESS FREEDOM IN INDONESIA

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## Abstract:

For almost 20 years, reforms with strong press performance did not mean it could directly create harmony, it even created “new tensions” between press and the government. Indirectly, the superiority of the press has made the press as its own “angel of judge and rectifier” through various news and opinions published. Until the reform of the press has made the superiority of the press no longer an independent institution and only in favor of the truth of information which is a public right, but the press is made freedom as a new “political actor” in the maintenance of government political communications. The research was conducted with a qualitative approach, involving 20 informants consisting of media actors, government, academics, communication experts, and the general public. The results showed that there was a relationship between the media with the government and society to be built in harmony, then it should be strengthened provided that the press as a function of relationship (social responsibility), the press as a tool of development (development). In this case, the community as readers, viewers and recipients are also active in guarding the media.

**Keywords:** Press freedom-journalist-government-Indonesia

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## INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the New Order, new TV stations started to occur. This was an indication as the cause of democracy euphoria such as explained earlier of the writing (Masduki,2007:64 in Pembayun, 2015). At the same time, media companies began to take action. According to Satrio Arismunandar, currently at least three media corporate groups have been formed. The first media companies were PT Media Nusantara Citra, Tbk (MNC) owned by Harry Tanoesoedibjo who oversees RCTI (PT Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia), TPI (PT Cipta Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia), Global TV (PT Global Information Bermutu), and iNews TV . The second group is under PT Bakrie Brothers (Bakrie Group) which is owned by Anindya N. Bakrie. The Bakrie Group controls ANTV (PT Cakrawala Andalas Televisi) which now shares shares with STAR TV (News Corp, controlling a 20% stake) and Lativi, which has now changed its name to TvOne. The third group is PT Trans Corpora (Group Para). This group controls Trans TV (PT Televisi Transformasi Indonesia) and Trans-7 (PT Duta Visual Nusantara Tivi Tujuh) (Masduki in (Pambayun, 2015).

Currently, there are twelve groups of large media controlling almost all media in Indonesia, including, airing, printing media and online media. They are MNC Group, Kelompok Kompas Gramedia, Elang Mahkota *Teknologi*, *Visi Media Asia*, *Grup Jawa Pos*, *Mahaka Media*, *CT Group*, *Berita Satu Media Holdings*, *Grup Media*, *MRA Media*, *Femina Group* and *Tempo Inti Media*. Kumpulan MNC has three free-to-air television channels - the most owned by any media group - as well as 20 local networks and 22 radio networks under their subsidiary, Sindo Radio. Kumpulan Jawa Pos owns 171 print media companies, including Radar, KOMPAS, Indonesia's most influential newspaper, has expanded its network by establishing a content provider, KompasTV, in addition to 12 radio broadcasters under their company Radio Sonora, and 89 other print media companies. Visi Media Asia has grown into a strong media group with two terrestrial television channels (ANTV and tvOne) and a fast-growing online media platform, vivanews.com. A media company under Kumpulan Lippo, namely Berita Satu Media Holding, has established the Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) BeritaSatuTV, the media channel beritasatu.com and also owns a number of newspapers and magazines. (Nugroho, 2012)

It is this conspiracy or difficult pact that has created a "new prison" for press freedom in Indonesia. Although the case of press closures no longer exists, violence against journalists is on the rise and has even resulted in the death of journalists. In addition to the violence experienced by journalists, the facts stated above have shown that the practice of press freedom in Indonesia is also coloured by various issues of prosecution of journalists with various allegations of defamation (defamation) in relation to the reports he wrote. Thus, all these incidents were recorded in the 15 years of this reform era. (Abdul Manan, 2012)

Throughout 2003, there were recorded cases of the media. For example, the case of *Harian Rakyat Merdeka* editorial leader Karim Paputungan, who was sentenced to 5 months in prison by a South Jakarta State Court judge on September 9, 2003. The case was filed in court for uploading a cartoon of Akbar Tanjung in the *Harian Rakyat Merdeka* edition.

January 8, 2002 which showed a naked and sweaty body part. The cartoon was an illustration of the news entitled "Akbar Sengaja Dihakisi, Golkar Nangis Darah". This case shows an example that there is intervention in the practice of press freedom in Indonesia. (Abdul Manan, 2012)

*Press Harian Rakyat Merdeka* was also sued in the South Jakarta District Court on charges of assaulting President Megawati's honor. The prosecutor used Article 134 Article 65 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code, the subsider violated Article 137 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code Article 65 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code. From the case, it can be seen that although the freedom of the press in Indonesia has been guaranteed by the constitution and the law, but in its implementation it still faces various obstacles.

The obstruction came from the products of colonial law (colonial law) listed in the Criminal Code which until now are still defended and used.

Meanwhile, in the Press Law Number 40 of 1999 on the Press, it is stated that the Indonesian press community should be made *lex specialis* so that it is in accordance with the legal basis of *lex specialis derogate lex generalis*. In other words, as far as the disadvantages of the press are concerned, this Press Law can ignore other laws. And the interpretation of the law is strongly influenced by the interpretation of the political interests of power, both by the government (politicians) and industry owners.

However, although the authoritative regime practiced by the New Order rulers who are considered to have hampered press freedom through "banning operations" has collapsed since 1998, press freedom in Indonesia has not reached a stable point to date. The practice of press freedom thus opens up new modes that impede its freedom, whether in the form of threats, violence, or court. This fact is what makes the index of press freedom in Indonesia is declining.

The results of a study by the French international press organization, Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF, Reporters Without Borders) put press freedom in Indonesia in 2002 at a better level than in Thailand and the Philippines. This is in contrast to the assessments of international press observers in the past, who typically rated press life in the Philippines and Thailand as the most independent in Southeast Asia. Of the 139 countries observed by RSF, in 2002 press freedom in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines ranked -57th, 66th and 89th respectively (Tisnadibrata, 2013).

Indonesian press freedom ranks best, or number one, among countries in Southeast Asia. After Indonesia, followed by Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar respectively from 2nd to 9th position for the Southeast Asian region. One of the reasons why press freedom in Indonesia is described as the best in Southeast Asia is because the Indonesian government's pressure and control over the press no longer exists. Precisely since the New Order government ended in May 1998. (Tisnadibrata, 2013)

Over the next two years (2003 and 2004), Indonesia's press freedom at the Southeast Asian level declined to number four and number five.

The best position in Southeast Asia is replaced by the unborn country, Timor Leste (Hendrianayah, Radar Lampung, 11-4-2012).

On the other hand, in subsequent years (2005-2010), the Indonesian press situation rose to number 3 and 2 in Southeast Asia, although still lower than in 2002. However, in 2011 there was a dramatic decline which was ranked 146 of 179 countries. This means that Indonesia is ranked 9th among 12 countries in Southeast Asia whose press freedom was studied by RSF (Ismira Lutfia Tisnadibrata, Khabar Southeast Asia in Jakarta, 23 -2-2013).

According to Mahfudz MD, former Chief of the Constitutional Court (Malaysia: Chief of the Constitutional Court), stated that "Media Owners Threaten Press Freedom" (Mahfudz, 2014). Mahfudz MD's statement above clearly shows that the freedom of the press is greatly influenced by

the interests of capital owners in the press industry. This is also in accordance with the results of a study conducted by Zulhasril Nasir (2009) who examined the freedom of the press from an economic-political point of view. This study shows that press freedom is influenced by many factors including the media owners themselves, namely the owners of capital (Waluyo, 2012). Theoretically, this is in line with the theoretical views of mass society and power. In this theory it is explained that the press does not have full freedom, but its existence is influenced by other factors, among them is the factor of power, both from internal (capital owners) and from external (government).

Based on the description stated above, the fact that the press in Indonesia is experiencing two opposite things is clearly illustrated. On the other hand, the press is run freely (liberally), but on the other hand, that freedom is blocked by the government and community groups who still want the press to run freely. This has caused the press in Indonesia to be unable to establish a harmonious relationship. This is the practical gap in the study, namely the role of employees in press freedom in Indonesia.

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative inquiry is multi-method in focus, therefore the investigation process is carried out with thematic analysis in stages through collecting data by means of in-depth interviews with 20 informants in Jakarta, Surabaya, Malang, and Makassar. Performing data analysis in order to select and combine themes in order to answer study questions as well as headers using the Nvivo10 program to improve the results of the study.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The role of journalists' reactions in understanding press freedom will be stronger and more assertive when by standard adherence to the Code of Ethics. This has led to the existence of various formulations and expected to create a harmonious relationship between the media and the government in understanding the freedom of the press which is always based on professionalism that must be maintained properly and well. Similarly, fair media as one of the prerequisites for check and recheck means that journalists in carrying out their profession must always be based on the main condition, which is quality.

The job of a journalist in the field of journalism is to convey information through various news channels. Starting from the press on the radio station. Therefore, the main task of a journalist is to collect various data to be presented in a news format. Journalists should be able to gather news that touches on a variety of topics, whether topics related to social, political, economic, educational, and others. Therefore, a journalist needs to master all the topics well. This aims to allow the delivery of the news to be easily understood by readers. Journalists have an important role in the world of journalism, because journalists are inseparable from the principles of freedom of the press. Although journalists are given freedom in presenting news, journalists still need to be held accountable when they provide inappropriate news based on

solid evidence and only based on certain problematic ones (Tenda, 2014).

Thus, the news media (newspapers, radio, television, online, etc.) is indeed a channel to convey the rights of the civil society or the people as a whole. The job of a journalist in general is to work to gather news, manage, edit, and then present it to readers/listeners/viewers consciously and responsibly. Nova Tenda states that, "... journalists need to be conscious when providing information to the public so that information can be conveyed accurately, quickly, truthfully, and honestly" (Tenda, 2014 p. 65).

It is mandatory for journalists to produce quality news appreciated by the public. In addition, a journalist must be held accountable for his or her misconduct. Because of the fact, a journalist is a member of society, whose decisions and actions taken should not affect others. Personally, journalists are responsible to society for delivering news accurately, honestly, and truthfully. In addition, journalists need to be able to build the soul and instinct to do good.

Findings of the study related to the Reactions (Nature and Views) of Journalists in Defining Responsible Press Freedom based on the True Press enforced by Professional Press, Educating Press, and Independent Press of Interest, overall clarify that media must convey information correctly and prioritize in through information product process, the inner strength of the media should maintain dignity, based on True Press, Should Be Limited. Therefore, practicing the Press properly should be enforced by professional press practices, press officers throughout the media have an educating soul, and employees are free from all sorts of interests.

The professional requirement for a career in journalism is to convey real and authentic information with mutual control between the media, society, and government. In addition, media freedom should be based on improving the quality of journalists. This is at the same time able to control the results of journalistic work in print form correctly and comprehensively from the stage of collecting news material until the material is published to the public. All of these processes should be a shared responsibility.

As a guide and restriction towards professionalism means that the focus of the media must cover both sides and must not interfere, also limited provided the skills of press workers and media practitioners must not have an element of interference, so must control by declining; 1) media practitioners who do not understand the profession, 2). The press must be non-partisan (not biased), and 3). No media owner intervention.

In identifying the reactions (attitudes and views) of journalists in understanding press freedom, journalists must undergo a test of competence or skills in journalism because if they are not skilled, the journalist cannot perform his duties as a press officer. This is based on the view of the informant stating,

"Journalists now need to possess quality and professional because now everyone wants and can be a journalist. Therefore, to distinguish between professional journalists and community journalists (citizen journalism) depends on the credibility of the information. We do not deny that in the

new media world, everyone is a journalist because the process of sharing and disseminating an event is now part of the community's journalistic activities ”.

In analyzing the reactions (attitudes and views) of journalists in understanding press freedom in Indonesia, it was found that journalists must practice healthy media professionally. Journalists should perform their duties with professionalism, quality and journalistic skills should be supported by skills tests conducted by the Press Council as enshrined in the mandate of Press Law number 40 of 1999 as enforcing the 1945 Constitution Articles 28 and 28F, independent is for the sake on the existence of institutions that can trusted, reducing political instability, increasing the effectiveness of government, reducing regulations that promote social development, law enforcement, and the prevention of corruption ”. (UNESCO, 2008: 24-25)

The reaction (attitude and views) of a journalist in interpreting the freedom of the press individually becomes the responsibility of the journalist himself in carrying out his profession, as the Press Theory of Social Responsibility. However, constitutionally, the media is also responsible and even needs to safeguard the security of the government and society as stated in the press theory of development and democratic participation.

The main principles in the Press Theory of Democratic Participation can be summarized as follows; a) Individual citizens and minority groups have the right to use the media (the right to communicate and obtain information objectively) and the right to be served by the media in accordance with the needs they determine themselves; b) The organization and content of the media need not be subject to centralized political control or state bureaucratic control; c) Media should exist primarily for its audience and not for media organizations, members or customers or owners of the media; d) Local groups, organizations, and communities need to have their own media; e) Small -scale interactive, and participatory forms of media are better than large -scale, one -way, and professionalized media; f) Certain social needs related to inadequate mass media are only expressed through the demands of individual consumers, not even through the state and its main board recognition; g) Communication is too important to be ignored by experts.

## **CONCLUSION**

Referring to the findings from research on the discussion of media freedom with a focus on creating cooperation between the mass media, government and society with mutual understanding, the communication forum is a platform in efforts to prepare draft guidelines, ensure implementation of joint guidelines, create MU ( mutual understanding) nor control continuously and professionally. For analysis of previous press theories (authoritarian, libertarian, communist, and social responsibility, development and democratic participation), Press Theory of Social Responsibility is found to be more appropriate in establishing harmonious relations, consistent with the function of the press as a medium or function

of relations. The research findings reinforce the Social Responsibility Press Theory and previous press theory by prioritizing the terms of mutual understanding.

The previous analysis of the press with its special feature that there is a relationship between the media with the government and society to be built in harmony, then it should be strengthened provided that the press as a function of relationship (social responsibility), the press as a tool of development (development). In this case, the community as readers, viewers and recipients are also active in escorting (democratic participation). In order for the work of journalism to conform to the rules, there is an awareness that the press cannot act freely in managing and publishing news also prioritizes development, social responsibility. There is a communication forum to strengthen harmonious media relations (new model), then joint guidelines on press freedom are needed between the media, government and society by enforcing mutual understanding in the new model.

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