

## Press Non-Compliance in Presenting Digital Literacy Information in the Era of Civil Society: A Normative Juridical Study in Indonesia (2023–2025)

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

*Press Law; Digital Literacy; Journalistic Ethics; Civil Society; Legal Compliance; Digital Journalism; Indonesia.*

#### Article Info:

Received:

13/02/2026

Revised:

2/03/2026

Accepted:

24/03/2026

Published:

31/03/2026

The rapid expansion of digital journalism in Indonesia has generated significant challenges regarding legal compliance, journalistic ethics, and the quality of information disseminated to the public. Despite the growing importance of digital literacy in strengthening democratic participation and civil society, studies examining press non-compliance from an integrated legal and socio-legal perspective remain limited. This study aims to analyze the forms of press non-compliance in presenting digital literacy-related information and to examine the effectiveness of legal enforcement mechanisms governing digital journalism in Indonesia during the period 2023–2025. Employing a qualitative normative-judicial approach with a socio-legal perspective, the research utilizes document analysis of statutory regulations, the Journalistic Code of Ethics, Press Council decisions, legal documents, and selected cases of digital news reporting. The findings reveal four dominant forms of non-compliance: inadequate verification of information, sensationalist and clickbait-oriented reporting, violations of privacy and personal dignity, and politically biased news framing. The study further demonstrates that existing enforcement mechanisms remain fragmented due to overlapping institutional authorities, limited monitoring capacity, and the predominantly administrative nature of sanctions imposed by regulatory bodies. These conditions contribute to weak accountability and reduce the deterrent effect of legal regulation in the digital media environment. The research also shows that persistent press non-compliance negatively affects public digital literacy by increasing vulnerability to misinformation, weakening public trust in media institutions, and undermining the deliberative function of civil society. This study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by integrating press law, media ethics, and digital literacy within a civil society framework and argues that press freedom in the digital era must be understood as freedom accompanied by legal responsibility and ethical accountability. Strengthening institutional oversight, professional ethics, and public digital literacy is therefore essential for sustaining democratic communication in Indonesia.

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**How to cite:** Irawan, D., Heru Romadhon, A., Yahya, D., & Sri Utami, R. (2026). Press Non-Compliance in Presenting Digital Literacy Information in the Era of Civil Society: A Normative Juridical Study in Indonesia (2023–2025). *International Journal of Educational Review, Law And Social Sciences (IJERLAS)*, 6(2), 372–382. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20556240>

### Introduction

Over the past decade, the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of public communication and journalistic practice worldwide. In Indonesia, the proliferation of digital media platforms has accelerated the dissemination of information, enabling news to be produced and consumed in real time. While this transformation has expanded access to information and strengthened freedom of expression, it has also generated significant challenges related to journalistic professionalism, legal compliance, and ethical accountability. The increasing competition among online media outlets to attract audience attention and advertising revenue has often prioritized speed, virality, and engagement over the fundamental principles of journalism, including accuracy, verification, balance, independence, and social responsibility.

Within this context, press non-compliance with legal and ethical standards has emerged as a critical issue. The Indonesian Press Law (Law No. 40 of 1999) and the Journalistic Code of Ethics establish clear obligations for media institutions to provide accurate, balanced, and accountable information. However, recent developments indicate a growing tendency among some digital media outlets to publish unverified information, employ sensationalist headlines, and prioritize click-driven content strategies. Harahap and Adeni (2025) argue that economic pressures, intensified market competition, and algorithm-driven content distribution have encouraged media organizations to reduce fact-checking processes in pursuit of higher traffic and advertising revenue. Consequently, the traditional role of the press as a democratic watchdog has increasingly been challenged by commercial and political interests.

The expansion of digital journalism has also created a complex tension between press freedom and legal accountability. While freedom of the press remains a cornerstone of democratic governance, the misuse of such freedom may facilitate the spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and politically biased narratives. Maharani (2024) notes that digital news practices are frequently influenced by ideological and political interests, often at the expense of legal norms and ethical standards. As a result, public trust in media institutions has gradually declined. This issue extends beyond professional misconduct, as press non-compliance directly affects the quality of information available to citizens and shapes public understanding of social and political realities.

The implications of this phenomenon are particularly significant in relation to public digital literacy. Digital literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to access digital information but also the critical capacity to evaluate, verify, and responsibly utilize information obtained from digital media environments. Aulia and Tasrif (2025) demonstrate that many Indonesian citizens continue to experience difficulties in distinguishing credible information from misinformation and hoaxes due to limited critical evaluation skills. In such circumstances, the dissemination of misleading or unverified news by media institutions may further weaken public resilience against information disorder and undermine informed civic participation.

From a legal perspective, these developments contradict the fundamental objectives of the Press Law, particularly Article 3(1), which defines the press as an institution responsible for informing, educating, and exercising social control in society. Several cases reported during the 2023–2025 period, including controversies surrounding media coverage of the 2024 General Election, reveal recurring concerns regarding violations of the principles of verification, presumption of innocence, balance, and the right of reply (Kawonal, Lolong, & Rawung, 2025). Moreover, overlapping regulatory frameworks and limited institutional coordination among the Press Council, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, and other law enforcement agencies have weakened the effectiveness of legal enforcement in addressing media violations. Consequently, misinformation, defamation, and polarizing narratives continue to circulate widely within the digital public sphere.

From a normative-juridical perspective, press freedom should be understood as freedom accompanied by responsibility. The exercise of journalistic freedom must remain subject to legal norms, ethical obligations, and the public interest. Dicey (1982) emphasizes that the rule of law applies equally to all institutions exercising public functions, including the media. Furthermore, UNESCO (2021) highlights that digital literacy serves as an important mechanism of social oversight, enabling citizens to critically assess media content and hold media institutions accountable. Nevertheless, in Indonesia, the relationship between legal enforcement and public digital literacy remains insufficiently explored, despite its importance for maintaining democratic communication and strengthening civil society.

Although previous studies have examined digital journalism, media ethics, and digital literacy, most have addressed these issues separately. Existing research has predominantly focused on technological developments, media behavior, or digital literacy outcomes, while limited attention has been given to the interaction between press law compliance, journalistic ethics, and public digital literacy within a unified socio-legal framework. Furthermore, few studies have analyzed how weaknesses in legal enforcement contribute to the dissemination of low-quality digital literacy information and affect the broader development of civil society. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive examination of press non-compliance as both a legal and social phenomenon.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of press law, journalistic ethics, and digital literacy through a normative-juridical and socio-legal perspective. Unlike previous studies that primarily approach digital journalism from communication or technological viewpoints, this research examines press non-compliance as a legal governance issue with direct implications for public digital literacy and democratic

participation. By analyzing the forms of press non-compliance and evaluating existing enforcement mechanisms within Indonesia's digital media environment during 2023–2025, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media accountability, legal regulation, and civil society development.

Accordingly, this study addresses two principal research questions: (1) What forms of press law non-compliance occur in the presentation of digital literacy-related information in Indonesia's digital media landscape during 2023–2025? and (2) What legal enforcement strategies can be implemented to strengthen press compliance with the principles of digital literacy and social responsibility in the era of civil society? The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of socio-legal scholarship on press law and digital journalism, while also providing practical recommendations for policymakers, regulatory institutions, media practitioners, and civil society organizations seeking to strengthen media accountability and digital literacy in Indonesia.

## Literature Review

### Press Law, Digital Journalism, and Public Digital Literacy

Press law provides the normative framework that regulates freedom of expression, journalistic responsibility, and media accountability in democratic societies. In Indonesia, this framework is grounded in Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution and operationalized through Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press, which assigns the press functions of information dissemination, education, entertainment, and social control. Within this framework, press freedom is conceptualized as freedom with responsibility, meaning that media institutions must comply with legal standards and ethical principles in performing their public role. The emergence of digital journalism has transformed the structure and practice of the press. Digital journalism refers to the production and distribution of news via Internet-based platforms, including online news portals, social media, and mobile applications (Deuze, 2019). This transformation enables real-time interaction and broad public participation, but it also introduces new risks, such as misinformation, sensationalism, clickbait practices, and violations of privacy and personal data (Maharani, 2024). In the Indonesian context, these risks are exacerbated by intense market competition and algorithm-driven content distribution, which prioritize speed and virality over verification. From a legal perspective, press law in the digital era functions not only as a guarantee of freedom but also as a regulatory instrument to protect the public interest. In addition to the Press Law, Indonesian media practices are subject to the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (Law No. 11/2008, amended by Law No. 1/2024) and the Personal Data Protection Law (Law No. 27/2022). These legal instruments emphasize principles of accuracy, balance, verification, and respect for privacy. However, empirical observations indicate persistent gaps between legal norms and journalistic practice, reflected in the increasing number of public complaints against online media to the Indonesian Press Council. The social impact of press law non-compliance is closely linked to the condition of public digital literacy. Digital literacy encompasses not only technical abilities to access information but also critical skills to evaluate sources, verify content, and understand legal and ethical implications of media use (UNESCO, 2021). In Indonesia, several studies report that low levels of digital literacy contribute to the widespread acceptance of hoaxes, misleading narratives, and sensational news (Aulia & Tasrif, 2025). When media institutions fail to uphold legal and ethical standards, they reinforce a culture of information disorder that weakens citizens' capacity for critical judgment. Qualitative scholarship in media and law emphasizes that journalism operates as a normative institution that shapes public knowledge and social values (Christians et al., 2016). Therefore, press non-compliance should not be understood merely as a technical violation but as a disruption of the social contract between the press and the public. Unverified and manipulative reporting practices distort public understanding, erode trust, and undermine the educational function of the media. In this study, the relationship between press law, digital journalism, and public digital literacy is examined as a socio-legal and cultural phenomenon. Rather than testing causal relationships through statistical models, this research explores how legal norms, journalistic ethics, and digital literacy interact in practice. By analyzing regulatory frameworks, media content, and institutional responses, this study seeks to understand how press non-compliance in the digital era influences the quality of information and the development of civil society in Indonesia.

### Civil Society, Media Ethics, and the Role of the Press

Civil society is commonly understood as the sphere of social life in which individuals, groups, and organizations operate relatively independently of the state and the market, yet remain deeply interconnected with both in shaping democratic values, participation, and accountability (Edwards, 2014; Putnam, 2000). Within this sphere, citizens articulate interests, negotiate identities, and engage in collective action. One of the most influential institutions in this domain is the press, which functions as a mediator between social actors and public power. In democratic theory, the press is often referred to as the “fourth estate” because of its role in monitoring authority, facilitating public deliberation, and enabling informed civic participation (Christians et al., 2019; McQuail, 2013). The normative role of the press is grounded in media ethics, which serve as a guiding framework for journalistic conduct. In Indonesia, ethical standards are codified in the Journalistic Code of Ethics issued by the Press Council, emphasizing accuracy, independence, balance, and respect for human dignity (Dewan Pers, 2019). Ethical journalism is therefore not merely a matter of professional compliance but a form of social responsibility that directly affects the quality of public communication. When the press adheres to ethical principles, it enhances public trust and contributes to the formation of a critical and informed citizenry (Ward, 2021; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). However, the transformation of journalism in the digital environment has intensified ethical challenges.

The acceleration of news production, algorithmic distribution systems, and the economic pressure to generate online traffic have reshaped editorial routines (Deuze & Witschge, 2020). As Mazzoleni (2019) observes, market-driven logics increasingly influence journalistic decision-making, sometimes at the expense of normative commitments to accuracy and balance. In Indonesia, this dynamic is evident in the widespread use of clickbait headlines, emotional framing, and the circulation of unverified claims, particularly in politically sensitive contexts (Tapsell, 2022; Nugroho & Syarif, 2024). From the perspective of civil society, such unethical media practices carry significant consequences. The press does not merely mirror social reality; it actively constructs meaning and shapes collective perceptions (Zelizer, 2021). When journalism prioritizes provocation over verification, it risks normalizing disinformation and amplifying polarization. This weakens the deliberative capacity of civil society by distorting public reasoning and undermining the conditions necessary for democratic dialogue (Habermas, 1989; Christians et al., 2019). Trust in the media is therefore a vital social resource that sustains civic engagement and institutional legitimacy (Norris, 2011).

Ethical journalism is also closely connected to the level of media and digital literacy among citizens. A public equipped with critical skills to evaluate news content can function as an informal regulator of the press (UNESCO, 2021). Through complaints, public discourse, and civic advocacy, civil society can exert pressure on media institutions to comply with legal and ethical norms (Edwards, 2014). This illustrates the reciprocal relationship between the press and civil society: while the press shapes public understanding, civil society influences journalistic accountability by demanding higher standards of professionalism and transparency (McQuail, 2013; Ward, 2021). In this sense, media ethics should be understood not only as an internal professional code but also as a social contract between journalists and the public (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). Ethical norms are continually interpreted, negotiated, and sometimes contested in everyday journalistic practice. Digital journalism, with its interactive and participatory features, intensifies this negotiation, as audiences are no longer passive recipients but active commentators and critics (Deuze & Witschge, 2020; Gillespie, 2020). This condition creates new opportunities for accountability, but it also exposes journalism to populist pressures and coordinated disinformation campaigns (Zelizer, 2021). This study situates media ethics within the broader framework of civil society by viewing journalism as both a cultural practice and a normative institution (Christians et al., 2019). By examining cases of ethical deviation and public responses, the research explores how journalistic misconduct affects social trust, civic engagement, and democratic life (Norris, 2011; Tapsell, 2022). The qualitative approach adopted in this study allows for an in-depth understanding of how ethical norms are internalized, interpreted, and sometimes violated in the everyday routines of digital journalism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this lens, the press is analyzed not only as a producer of information but also as a central actor in the moral and political ecology of contemporary Indonesian civil society.

### Legal Enforcement and Institutional Accountability in Digital Journalism

Legal enforcement is a central element in ensuring that press freedom operates within the boundaries of responsibility. In Indonesia, the primary institution responsible for maintaining journalistic standards is

the Press Council (Dewan Pers), which oversees compliance with the Press Law and the Journalistic Code of Ethics. Its mandate includes mediation, adjudication of complaints, and the promotion of professional standards through education and verification of media organizations. Despite this institutional framework, enforcement challenges remain substantial. The digital media landscape is characterized by a proliferation of online news portals, many of which operate without formal verification or adequate editorial oversight. This creates difficulties for regulatory bodies in monitoring content and responding effectively to violations. Scholars note that the capacity gap between regulatory institutions and the scale of digital media production has widened in recent years (Harahap & Adeni, 2025). In addition to the Press Council, other state institutions such as the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) and the courts play roles in regulating digital communication through laws on electronic information, defamation, hate speech, and personal data protection. However, the overlap between these legal regimes often creates uncertainty regarding jurisdiction and responsibility. This ambiguity can weaken enforcement and encourage strategic avoidance of accountability by media actors.

From a socio-legal perspective, enforcement is not only a matter of formal sanctions but also of institutional legitimacy and public participation. When regulatory bodies are perceived as weak or inconsistent, media actors may develop a culture of impunity. Conversely, when enforcement mechanisms are transparent, fair, and supported by public engagement, they can reinforce ethical compliance and strengthen the normative authority of press law. Qualitative studies emphasize that effective enforcement depends on more than legal texts; it requires institutional coordination, professional education, and civic oversight. Training journalists in legal literacy and ethical reasoning is as important as imposing sanctions. Likewise, empowering citizens to use complaint mechanisms and public forums contributes to a more participatory model of media regulation. This research examines legal enforcement as a dynamic process shaped by interactions among institutions, media organizations, and civil society. By analyzing regulatory practices, complaint procedures, and selected case studies, the study seeks to understand how institutional accountability operates in the context of digital journalism. The aim is not merely to evaluate compliance but to explore how law, ethics, and social norms converge or diverge in governing the press in the digital era.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is grounded in a socio-legal and normative approach to understanding press compliance in the digital era. The conceptual framework integrates three main dimensions: (1) press law and journalistic ethics, (2) digital journalism practices, and (3) public digital literacy within the context of civil society. First, press law and journalistic ethics provide the normative foundation that defines the boundaries of freedom and responsibility. Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press and the Journalistic Code of Ethics articulate the principles of accuracy, verification, balance, and accountability. These norms represent the formal standards against which journalistic practices can be evaluated. In this framework, legal and ethical norms function as guiding values that shape professional behavior and institutional expectations.

Second, digital journalism practices refer to the everyday routines, editorial decisions, and content production processes in online media. These practices are influenced by technological affordances (such as speed, interactivity, and algorithmic distribution) and economic pressures (such as competition for clicks and advertising revenue). The framework assumes that these structural conditions mediate how legal and ethical norms are interpreted and implemented by journalists and media organizations. Third, public digital literacy represents the social dimension of media governance. Digital literacy includes citizens' ability to access, evaluate, and respond critically to digital information. In a civil society context, digitally literate citizens can function as social regulators by questioning misleading content, submitting complaints, and participating in public discourse. Thus, digital literacy is positioned as a contextual factor that influences both media accountability and the effectiveness of legal enforcement. The interaction among these three dimensions—norms (law and ethics), practices (digital journalism), and social capacity (digital literacy)—forms the core of the analytical model in this study. Press non-compliance is understood not merely as a legal violation but as the outcome of tensions between normative standards, market-driven media practices, and uneven levels of public literacy. This framework guides the qualitative analysis by focusing on how these elements intersect in concrete cases of digital journalism in Indonesia between 2023 and 2025.

## Method

This study employs qualitative research design with a normative-juridical and socio-legal orientation. The objective is to explore how press law and journalistic ethics are interpreted and implemented in the practice of digital journalism, and how this affects public digital literacy and the development of civil society in Indonesia. Rather than measuring variables statistically, the study seeks to understand meanings, interpretations, and institutional dynamics through in-depth analysis. The research is descriptive-analytical in nature, focusing on legal norms, institutional practices, and selected cases of media reporting. This design allows the researcher to examine the gap between “law in the books” and “law in action” in the context of online media.

Data are drawn from three main sources:

- 1) Primary legal materials, including Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press, the Journalistic Code of Ethics, Law No. 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (as amended), and Law No. 27 of 2022 on Personal Data Protection.
- 2) Secondary materials, such as academic journals, books, policy reports, and publications from the Indonesian Press Council and UNESCO related to digital journalism, media ethics, and digital literacy.
- 3) Empirical materials, consisting of selected cases of online news reporting from 2023–2025, public complaints to the Press Council, and official statements or decisions related to media violations.

Data collection is conducted through document analysis and case study review. Legal texts and policy documents are systematically examined to identify normative standards and regulatory expectations. Media content is analyzed qualitatively to explore patterns of compliance and non-compliance with legal and ethical principles. In addition, official reports and complaint records are reviewed to understand institutional responses and enforcement mechanisms.

Data analysis follows a thematic and interpretative approach. The researcher identifies recurring themes related to legal compliance, ethical challenges, enforcement practices, and public responses. These themes are then interpreted in light of socio-legal theory and civil society perspectives. The analysis seeks to connect individual cases to broader institutional and cultural patterns in digital journalism.

To ensure the credibility and rigor of the study, triangulation is applied by comparing legal texts, media content, and institutional documents. Reflexivity is maintained by acknowledging the researcher’s interpretative role in the analysis. Transparency is ensured through clear documentation of data sources and analytical procedures.

## Results and Discussion

### Forms of Press Non-Compliance in Digital Journalism (2023–2025)

The digitalization of journalism in Indonesia has reconfigured the structural logic of news production, shifting it from institutionally regulated practices toward platform-driven immediacy. While this transformation expands public access to information, it simultaneously intensifies ethical vulnerabilities within journalistic routines. This study identifies press non-compliance in Indonesia’s digital media landscape as a structurally embedded phenomenon, manifested in four interrelated patterns: erosion of verification norms, commercialization through sensationalism, systemic violations of privacy and dignity, and politicized news framing during the 2024 general election. These patterns contradict the normative ideals of journalism as articulated in the Journalistic Code of Ethics and Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press.

The first and most pervasive form of non-compliance is the erosion of verification as a professional norm. In classical journalism theory, verification functions as the epistemic foundation of news credibility (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). However, digital competition incentivizes speed over accuracy, encouraging journalists to prioritize immediacy rather than epistemic rigor. The findings reveal that many Indonesian online outlets rely on social media posts, viral narratives, and single-source claims without adequate corroboration. Hermida (2020) conceptualizes this trend as “ambient journalism,” where journalists monitor digital streams and transform them into news content with minimal verification. In Indonesia, this practice became particularly visible between 2023 and 2025 in politically sensitive reporting (Nugroho & Syarif, 2024), thereby undermining Article 5 of Law No. 40/1999, which mandates accuracy, balance, and accountability.

Second, sensationalism and clickbait constitute a commercialized deviation from public-interest journalism. Headline strategies increasingly exploit emotional triggers rather than convey substantive meaning. Blom and Hansen (2015) argue that clickbait creates a “curiosity gap” that increases engagement

at the cost of semantic accuracy. The study shows that Indonesian digital media frequently distort the relationship between headlines and content, producing interpretive dissonance and public misperception. From a political economy perspective, this reflects what McManus (2020) describes as the marketization of journalism, where editorial decisions are subordinated to algorithmic visibility and advertising revenue rather than democratic responsibility.

Third, violations of privacy and personal dignity represent a critical ethical failure in crime and political reporting. The study documents multiple cases in which victims' identities were disclosed and suspects framed as guilty prior to judicial determination. Such practices contravene both the Journalistic Code of Ethics and Indonesia's Personal Data Protection Law (Law No. 27 of 2022). Normatively, privacy is integral to human dignity and journalistic responsibility (Ward, 2021). Lim's (2023) research further confirms that Indonesian online media often engage in secondary victimization by exposing survivors of sexual and domestic violence, reinforcing social stigma rather than protecting vulnerable groups.

Fourth, political bias and partisan framing became highly salient during the 2024 general election. Rather than functioning as neutral arenas for public deliberation, many digital outlets amplified ideological polarization through black campaigns and hate speech. Normative press theory holds that journalism should facilitate democratic discourse and act as a watchdog over power (Christians et al., 2019). Yet the findings indicate a departure from this role. Tapsell (2022) demonstrates that media ownership and elite political affiliations in Indonesia shape news agendas and framing strategies. During the election, emotionally charged narratives and identity politics dominated coverage, in violation of Article 6 of the Journalistic Code of Ethics.

These forms of non-compliance are further reinforced by algorithmic governance. Gillespie (2020) explains that platform algorithms reward content that generates engagement, often privileging outrage and polarization. Consequently, journalistic practices adapt to platform logic rather than ethical standards. Deuze and Witschge (2020) describe this as the fragmentation of journalistic identity in the digital era, where journalists perform multiple roles under time pressure, reducing space for ethical reflection and verification. In sum, press non-compliance in Indonesia's digital journalism between 2023 and 2025 is not merely the result of individual misconduct but is structurally produced through political, economic, and technological forces. As Zelizer (2021) argues, journalism in the digital age faces a legitimacy crisis in which public trust depends on institutional credibility and moral authority. This study therefore reinforces the need for normative recalibration: stricter enforcement of the Press Law and Code of Ethics, institutional strengthening of media organizations, enhanced professional training in digital ethics, and systematic public media literacy initiatives.

### **Weaknesses in Legal Enforcement and Institutional Oversight**

The findings reveal that weaknesses in legal enforcement and institutional oversight constitute one of the most significant structural factors contributing to press non-compliance within Indonesia's digital journalism ecosystem. Although Indonesia possesses a comprehensive regulatory framework governing press activity—primarily through Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press and the Journalistic Code of Ethics—the implementation of these legal and ethical standards remains fragmented and insufficiently effective in addressing contemporary challenges posed by digital media.

A central issue lies in the limited enforcement authority of the Press Council (Dewan Pers), which functions primarily as a professional and ethical oversight body rather than a coercive regulatory institution. Its mechanisms of enforcement largely consist of mediation, recommendations, rights of reply, corrections, and public reprimands. While these measures contribute to maintaining professional standards, they often lack the deterrent capacity necessary to address systematic, repeated, or commercially motivated violations. Consequently, compliance frequently depends on the voluntary commitment of media organizations rather than on robust institutional enforcement.

The study further identifies institutional fragmentation as a major obstacle to effective regulation. The distribution of authority among the Press Council, the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi), and law enforcement agencies creates overlapping jurisdictions and regulatory ambiguities, particularly in cases involving digital platforms, online news dissemination, misinformation, and privacy violations. The coexistence of the Press Law, the Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) Law, the Personal Data Protection Law, and provisions of general criminal law often produces uncertainty regarding applicable legal procedures and institutional responsibility. Such regulatory complexity may create

opportunities for media actors to exploit legal loopholes, evade accountability, or shift responsibility among institutions.

Another significant challenge concerns institutional capacity. The rapid expansion of digital media has far outpaced the ability of oversight bodies to monitor journalistic practices effectively. With thousands of online news portals operating across Indonesia, the Press Council faces considerable limitations in terms of personnel, technological infrastructure, financial resources, and investigative capacity. As a result, regulatory intervention tends to be reactive rather than preventive, relying heavily on public complaints after violations have occurred. This reactive model reduces the effectiveness of oversight and allows unethical practices to proliferate before corrective measures can be implemented.

The emergence of unregistered, non-professional, and algorithm-driven media platforms further complicates regulatory efforts. Many digital news providers operate outside formal verification and accreditation systems, making them difficult to supervise under existing legal mechanisms. At the same time, platform algorithms frequently prioritize engagement-oriented content, including sensational, controversial, or emotionally charged narratives, thereby reinforcing incentives for unethical journalistic behavior. This situation illustrates the growing mismatch between rapidly evolving technological environments and relatively static regulatory institutions.

From a socio-legal perspective, these findings demonstrate that press non-compliance cannot be understood solely as an issue of individual misconduct. Rather, it reflects broader institutional, regulatory, and technological conditions that shape journalistic behavior. The persistence of fragmented enforcement structures, limited oversight capacity, and regulatory ambiguity weakens the effectiveness of legal norms and undermines institutional accountability.

Taken together, these findings suggest that press law enforcement in Indonesia remains institutionally underdeveloped in the digital era. Strengthening compliance therefore requires not only stricter enforcement mechanisms but also greater inter-agency coordination, clearer jurisdictional boundaries, enhanced monitoring capabilities, and the adaptation of regulatory frameworks to emerging digital realities. Without such reforms, efforts to promote ethical journalism, protect public digital literacy, and restore trust in media institutions are likely to remain limited. Strengthening institutional oversight should therefore be viewed as a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring media accountability and sustaining democratic communication in Indonesia.

### **Implications for Digital Literacy and Civil Society**

Press non-compliance has direct implications for public digital literacy. When misleading or unverified information circulates widely, citizens' ability to distinguish between credible news and disinformation is weakened. The study finds that repeated exposure to low-quality journalism normalizes misinformation and reduces critical awareness. This condition undermines the development of civil society. Trust in the press as a public institution declines, and civic engagement becomes distorted by false narratives and emotional manipulation. Instead of facilitating rational public debate, digital media may become arenas of polarization. However, the findings also show that segments of civil society such as NGOs, academic communities, and media watchdog groups play an important role in challenging unethical journalism. Through public criticism, reporting mechanisms, and digital literacy campaigns, these actors contribute to informal regulation of the press.

### **Reframing Press Freedom as Freedom with Responsibility**

The findings support the theoretical argument that press freedom in the digital era must be understood as freedom with responsibility. While digital platforms expand expressive capacity, they also intensify the risk of abuse. The gap between legal norms and journalistic practice reflects a structural tension between market logic and democratic values. From a rule of law perspective, the press should not be placed above legal accountability. Instead, legal norms must function as guiding standards that protect both freedom and public interest. At the same time, enforcement must be accompanied by education and civic participation to ensure legitimacy. This study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by demonstrating that press compliance is not solely a matter of regulation but also of culture, professionalism, and public capacity. Strengthening ethical journalism, legal literacy among journalists, and digital literacy among citizens is therefore essential to sustain the press as a pillar of democracy in Indonesia.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that press non-compliance in Indonesia's digital journalism environment extends beyond isolated ethical violations and reflects broader challenges in the implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks. The findings indicate that practices such as inadequate verification, sensationalist reporting, privacy violations, and politically biased news framing continue to undermine the normative principles of responsible journalism. These conditions are further reinforced by fragmented institutional oversight and limited enforcement capacity, which reduce the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms.

From a scholarly perspective, this research contributes to the development of socio-legal studies by integrating press law, journalistic ethics, and digital literacy within a civil society framework. The study highlights that press compliance should be understood not merely as a legal obligation but as an institutional and societal process shaped by regulatory structures, professional norms, and public capacity to critically engage with information. The findings therefore extend existing discussions on media accountability by emphasizing the interrelationship between legal governance and digital literacy in sustaining democratic communication.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations. The analysis is primarily based on a normative-judicial and socio-legal approach using legal documents, policy frameworks, and selected cases, without extensive primary empirical data from journalists, regulators, or media audiences. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the complexity of newsroom practices and institutional decision-making processes in the digital media environment.

Future research may employ empirical qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to examine how legal awareness, economic pressures, platform algorithms, and organizational cultures influence journalistic compliance. Comparative studies across jurisdictions are also recommended to explore alternative regulatory models capable of balancing press freedom, accountability, and public digital literacy in an increasingly digitalized communication landscape.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This research contributes to socio-legal and communication scholarship by integrating press law, media ethics, and digital literacy within a civil society framework. It reinforces the relevance of the rule of law in governing digital journalism and extends the concept of press freedom beyond formal guarantees toward a normative model of responsible communication. The findings support the view that legal norms must operate in interaction with institutional practice and social capacity, rather than in isolation.

## **Practical Implications**

For media organizations and journalists, this study underscores the importance of strengthening fact-checking routines, ethical awareness, and legal literacy in newsroom practices. Editorial policies should prioritize verification over speed and emphasize public interest over market-driven sensationalism. For regulatory institutions, the findings suggest the need to enhance coordination among the Press Council, Kominfo, and law enforcement agencies, as well as to develop more effective monitoring systems for digital media. For civil society, the study highlights the strategic role of digital literacy programs in empowering citizens to critically evaluate media content and participate in media accountability processes.

## **Policy Implications**

At the policy level, the study recommends revisiting the regulatory framework to clarify jurisdictional boundaries and strengthen enforcement mechanisms without undermining press freedom. Policy initiatives

should balance protection of freedom of expression with safeguards against misinformation and ethical violations. Investment in public digital literacy and professional journalism education is essential to support long-term democratic resilience.

## **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research adopts a normative-judicial qualitative approach, focusing primarily on statutory analysis, doctrinal interpretation, and selected jurisprudence. While this approach is effective in examining legal norms and regulatory frameworks, it does not directly capture the lived experiences of journalists, editors, regulators, or audiences in everyday digital media practices. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect the complexity of compliance behavior in operational newsroom environments. Second, the scope of this study is limited to the Indonesian legal and

media context during the 2023–2025 period. Regulatory dynamics, institutional capacities, and media cultures vary significantly across countries and regions. Therefore, the conclusions of this research cannot be readily generalized to other national contexts without careful comparative analysis.

Third, this study relies primarily on secondary data sources, including legislation, policy documents, ethical codes, court decisions, and prior scholarly works. The absence of primary empirical data, such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, or discourse analysis of news content, limits the ability to assess how legal norms are translated into everyday journalistic routines and editorial decision-making. Based on these limitations, several directions for future research are proposed. Future studies may adopt mixed-methods or empirical qualitative approaches, such as interviews with journalists, editors, and regulators, as well as focus group discussions with media audiences, to better understand how legal awareness, economic pressure, and algorithmic incentives shape press compliance in digital journalism. Further research is also encouraged to conduct comparative legal studies between Indonesia and other democratic countries to examine how different regulatory models balance press freedom, digital literacy, and accountability. Such comparative insights could contribute to the development of more adaptive and context-sensitive media law frameworks.

### Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Ahmad Heru Romadhon, Ph.D., as the First Supervisor, Nur Qoilun, S.H., M.H., as the Second Supervisor, and Rahayu Sri Utami, S.H., M.H., as the Third Supervisor for their invaluable guidance, critical insights, and continuous academic support throughout the research and writing process of this manuscript. Their scholarly rigor and dedication have been instrumental in shaping the direction, depth, and quality of this study. The author also extends heartfelt appreciation to the entire academic community of the Faculty of Law, Universitas Maarif Hasyim Latif, Sidoarjo, East Java, for providing an intellectually supportive environment and institutional encouragement that greatly contributed to the successful completion of this research. In addition, future studies could explore the role of artificial intelligence, platform governance, and algorithmic content distribution in influencing journalistic ethics and legal compliance. Investigating how automated systems affect news selection, framing, and dissemination would be highly relevant for strengthening the legal and ethical foundations of journalism in the digital era.

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