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## The Meaning of Media Independence by Journalists in the 2024 Election

### Pemaknaan Independensi Media Oleh Wartawan Pada Pemilu 2024

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#### **Abstract**

*The 2024 Presidential Election is a political event that the public has been waiting for. At that time, the public can exercise their political rights to elect government leaders for the next five years. Seeing such great public attention, the mass media will place the 2024 General Election and Presidential Election as one of the main portions of the news. However, like the 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections and Elections, it is suspected that it will be difficult for the mass media to stand in a neutral position. Mass media, especially television stations, are owned by entrepreneurs who are affiliated with political parties and support the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates. This research aims to explain the meaning of television journalists regarding media independence ahead of the 2024 general election and presidential election. This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological research method to understand the construction meaning of journalists. The object of this research is the meaning of television journalists regarding media independence ahead of the 2024 general election and presidential election. The research subjects were television journalists from two media groups, MNC Group and Media Group, who were selected purposively. The research data was analyzed using media political economy theory. Findings from the research show differences in the subjective meaning of media independence among television journalists. Although they agree on the urgency of media independence as a guardian of press freedom, differences of opinion arise especially regarding the role of media owners in editorial policy. Some journalists consider the intervention of media owners to be acceptable, while others consider it a violation of the journalistic code of ethics. Different views are also seen in terms of implementing media independence. Some see media independence as the freedom for the media to support political parties or presidential candidates that are in line with the editorial views. On the other hand, there are journalists who believe that media independence should be realized through a neutral and unbiased attitude.*

**Keywords:** independent, journalist, media, phenomenology, television

## Abstrak

Pemilihan Presiden 2024 menjadi hajatan politik yang ditunggu-tunggu masyarakat. Pada saat itulah masyarakat dapat menyalurkan hak politiknya memilih pemimpin pemerintahan untuk lima tahun ke depan. Melihat perhatian publik yang begitu besar, maka tak salah jika media massa akan menempatkan Pemilu dan Pemilihan Presiden 2024 sebagai salah satu porsi pemberitaan utama. Namun, sebagaimana Pemilu dan Pemilihan Presiden 2014 dan 2019, media massa ditengarai akan sulit berdiri pada posisi netral. Sejumlah media massa terutama stasiun televisi dimiliki oleh pengusaha yang memiliki afiliasi dengan parpol dan mendukung paslon presiden dan wakil presiden 2024. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan pemaknaan jurnalis televisi terhadap independensi media menjelang pemilu dan pilpres 2024. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi dalam rangka memahami konstruksi makna para jurnalis. Objek penelitian ini adalah pemaknaan jurnalis televisi terhadap independensi media menjelang pemilu dan pilpres 2024. Subjek penelitian adalah para jurnalis televisi dari dua grup media, MNC Grup dan Media Grup yang dipilih secara purposive. Data-data penelitian dianalisis menggunakan teori ekonomi politik media. Temuan dari penelitian menunjukkan perbedaan dalam pemaknaan subjektif mengenai independensi media di kalangan jurnalis televisi. Meskipun mereka sependapat mengenai urgensi independensi media sebagai penjaga kemerdekaan pers, perbedaan pendapat muncul terutama terkait dengan peran pemilik media dalam kebijakan editorial. Sebagian jurnalis menganggap campur tangan pemilik media sebagai suatu hal yang dapat diterima, sementara sebagian lainnya menganggapnya sebagai pelanggaran terhadap kode etik jurnalistik. Pandangan yang berbeda juga terlihat dalam hal implementasi independensi media. Beberapa melihat independensi media sebagai kebebasan bagi media untuk mendukung partai politik atau pasangan calon presiden yang sejalan dengan pandangan redaksi. Di sisi lain, ada jurnalis yang berpendapat bahwa independensi media seharusnya diwujudkan melalui sikap yang netral dan impartial.

**Kata Kunci:** fenomenologi, independent, jurnalis, media, televisi

## Introduction

The 2024 Presidential Election is a political event that the public has been waiting for. At that time, the public can exercise their political rights to elect government leaders for the next five years. Considering the enormous public attention, it is appropriate that the mass media will place the 2024 General Election and Presidential Election as one of the main portions of the news. However, like the 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections and General Elections, it is suspected that it will be difficult for the mass media to stand in a neutral position. Several mass media, especially television, are owned by entrepreneurs who founded political parties. Surya Paloh (SP), owner of the Media Group (Metro TV), is the General Chair of the Nasdem Party (Farida & Yoedtadi, 2020), Hary Tanoesudibyo (HT), owner of four television stations under the MNC Group, namely: RCTI, MNC, Global and INews, is the General Chair of the Perindo Party (Hariyadi, 2018).

As is known, the Nasdem Party proposed Anis Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar as presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Kompas.com, 2022). Meanwhile, the Perindo Party is part of a coalition of political parties that nominates Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD as presidential and vice-presidential candidates (CNN.com, 2023). It is reasonable to suspect that the direction of the television's

editorial policy supports one of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. We can see this tendency from previous experiences.

The results of a study conducted by the Press Council and Media Concerned Society (MPM) ahead of the 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections showed that a number of mass media showed a tendency to support certain contestants (Wicaksana, 2015). Especially mass media owned by individuals with political affiliations. From MPM's research, significant differences were identified between the media owned by those affiliated with political parties/presidential candidates/vice presidential candidates and those who have no affiliation. Findings from MPM research show that there is a hegemonic relationship between media owners who have the status of politicians and the media under their control.

The latest study conducted by the Media Regulatory and Regulatory Monitor (PR2Media) shows that the situation has not changed, that the mass media not only acts as a medium of expression, dissemination of positive ideas and forming opinions, but has turned into an agent of meaning propaganda through the practice of opinion manipulation, partisanship, and political collaborators. The relationship between media and politics is no longer independent, where media owners are now also political authorities, creating dependency and complementarity between the two (Masduki et al, 2023).

The hope that the media act independently from the interests of media owners has actually been mandated by article one of the Journalism Code of Ethics which states that Indonesian journalists act independently, present accurate, balanced news and have no bad intentions. The interpretation of article one clarifies that independence means reporting events or facts according to one's conscience without interference, pressure or interference from other parties, including media company owners (Dewan Pers, 2023). The consequence of this article emphasizes the need for the media to show impartiality and balance when conveying news as part of its independence. Therefore, maintaining media independence is crucial to ensure objectivity and impartiality in presenting news (Kurniawan, 2019). The aim of this research is to determine the meaning of television journalists regarding media independence in reporting on the 2024 General Election presidential election. It is hoped that this research will provide an evaluation of the performance of television reporting in the 2024 General Election and presidential election.

An understanding of television broadcast media in Indonesia today can be analyzed from a media political economy perspective. This study highlights that the media cannot be separated from various interests, from capital owners, the state, or other groups. In other words, the media is used as a tool of domination and influence over society. This domination process shows that the spread and interaction of mass communication is greatly influenced by the political economic structure of the society concerned. As a result, the reality produced by the media tends to be biased and distorted (Dwita, 2015). The media political economy approach focuses on the main study of the relationship between political-economic structure, media industry dynamics, and media ideology itself. The focus of political economy research is directed at ownership, control and operational power of media markets. From this point of view, mass media institutions are considered as an economic system that is closely related to the political system (Zamroni, 2022). The political economic



approach in media analysis states that media content is more influenced by political and economic forces outside the media's control. Factors such as media ownership, financial capital, and media revenues are considered as determining elements that influence the characteristics of media content. These things are considered to have a crucial role in determining what events or occurrences can or cannot be presented in news reports, as well as the direction trends taken by a media's reporting (Aminudin, 2016).

In general, political economic theory is a field of research that examines social relations, especially the forces that interact reciprocally in the processes of production, distribution and consumption of products (Dwita, 2015). The emergence of this theory was triggered by the significant impact of mass media on changes in people's lives. With its wide distribution, mass media is not only considered capable of influencing social, political and cultural dynamics, both at local and global levels, but also has a very important role in increasing economic surplus. This is rooted in the assumption that mass media acts as a link between the worlds of production and consumption (Aminudin, 2016). Through messages spread through advertising in mass media, increasing sales of products and services becomes very possible when the audience is influenced by the messages conveyed through mass media.

In the economic and political context, mass media is able to spread and strengthen certain economic and political systems and often reject other economic and political systems. However, one aspect that should not be ignored is that the mass media also indirectly carry out certain ideological functions held by media owners (Yoedtadi et al., 2021). Therefore, to view the media as a whole, an approach that includes both economic and political aspects is essential. That is why the study of political economy has become so relevant. Furthermore, in a further perspective, Murdock and Golding (Baran & Davis, 2012) explain that political economy emphasizes the study of groups that control economic institutions such as banks and market shares, and how this control influences other social institutions, including mass media.

As a comparison, there are several studies that have examined the independence of press reporting during the election period. However, according to the author's observations, there has been no research that specifically explores journalists' perspectives regarding independence in reporting on the 2024 election. Hariyadi's research was conducted to explain how HT, owner of the MNC Group, uses its mass media network as a business platform as well as a channel for political expression for the Perindo party in the context of the 2019 presidential election. This research substantively forms the basis of this research in order to look at HT's actions. and the media in the 2024 presidential election. This study has weaknesses because it only uses literature studies which have a tendency to suspect media power behavior carried out by HT (Hariyadi, 2018).

Dahlia & Permana's research examines the political aspects of media oligarchy in the 2019 Presidential Election. The research aims to describe the factors that encourage media oligarchs to support presidential candidates, and also to understand how media oligarchs implement this. This research is different from the author's research because it explores data from interviews with several non-

journalist sources, while the author's research explores data by interviewing journalists regarding the independence of reporting on the 2024 election (Dahlia & Permana, 2022).

Noerdin's study focuses on the aim of explaining the impact of media conglomeration on reporting on the 2014 and 2019 elections on TV One and Metro TV. This research has almost the same focus as the author's research but differs in choosing research methods. This research uses a case study method with literature review, while the author's research uses a phenomenological method and interviews with television journalists (Noerdin, 2020).

Muchlis' research outlines trends in the content of political messages conveyed through news programs on TV One, MetroTV and RCTI television stations ahead of the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia. Substantially, this research has a major theme in common with the author's research, namely the independence of television news in the presidential election. However, the research method differs, this research chooses news content analysis, while the author's research focuses on the phenomenology of journalists in interpreting independence in reporting on the 2024 election (Muchlis, 2021).

Referring to previous research, research on media independence predominantly examines the role of media conglomerates in influencing election reporting. Previous research also tends to predominantly use literature studies and media content analysis. The differences and novelty of the author's research with existing research are: 1. the author's research aims to explain media independence in reporting on the 2024 election and presidential election from the perspective of the perpetrators, namely journalists in two television groups, MNC Group and Media Group. The author chose MNC Group and Media Group because the owners of these media groups have affiliations with political parties. The author is of the view that media independence is largely determined by the interpretation made by journalists. Media independence is also related to individual aspects of journalists. 2. If previous research used content analysis and literature study methods, this research uses the phenomenology method. Therefore, research on the independence of television media in the 2024 presidential election can be revealed through phenomenological methods. This method was chosen because phenomenology is a method for assessing the extent of a person's views, experiences and interpretations of reality (Qutoshi, 2018). This phenomenological research seeks to elucidate the meaning and understanding journalists attribute to media independence. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2014), theories in the phenomenological tradition posit that individuals actively interpret their experiences and attempt to comprehend the world through their personal perceptions. This tradition emphasizes conscious experience, treating real experiences as the primary data of reality. Phenomenology aims to reveal things as they truly are. It is a research approach where researchers investigate the essence of human experiences related to specific phenomena (Creswell, 2018). Assumption from phenomenology is human nature actively interpreting their experiences by giving meaning to something what he experienced. Therefore, Interpretation is an active process giving meaning to an act of making meaning (Biu et al., 2022). The phenomenological theory of Alfred Schutz, one of the figures in phenomenology, explains human experience and behavior in the

world everyday social life as a meaningful reality. Schutz contended that meaning can be categorized into two types: subjective and objective (Qutoshi, 2018). Subjective meaning pertains to how individuals construct reality, focusing on aspects they find significant. On the other hand, objective meaning encompasses the meanings that exist and operate within a cultural framework that is collectively recognized and understood (Muhaemin & Darsono, 2021).

## **Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach, as explained by Creswell (2018), who stated that qualitative research aims to analyze and describe individual experiences related to a phenomenon in the context of everyday life. This research chose a qualitative approach with the aim of being an interpretive study to explore the research problem, namely gaining a comprehensive understanding of journalists' meaning of media independence. This research uses the phenomenological method. The aim of the phenomenological method is basically to look closely at the phenomenon being studied to explore the complex world of lived experience from the perspective of the actors or those who live it (Qutoshi, 2018). Phenomenology is a research method in which researchers recognize the core or essence of human experience related to a specific event (Creswell, 2018). In this research the author uses Alfred Schutz's phenomenology, which understands that individuals always construct their world through a process of meaning from continuous experience. Schutz's phenomenology tries to seek understanding as humans construct meanings in intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity because an individual's understanding of the world is shaped by the individual's relationships with other people (Eberle, 2014).

The object of this research is the meaning of television journalists regarding media independence in the 2024 general election and presidential election. The research subjects are six television journalists from two media groups, MNC Group and Media Group. The author chose MNC Group and Media Group with the consideration that the owners of these media groups have affiliations with political parties. The six journalists consist of one Metro TV journalist, two RCTI journalists, two INews TV journalists, one MNC TV journalist. The six journalists who were selected purposively using the criteria of journalists at the level of editorial policy makers, namely program producer, editor-in-chief and news director.

The data collection technique used in this research was by means of in-depth interviews with sources and documentation. The data from the interviews were processed so that the research findings could be described and then analyzed using a literature study that had previously been carried out by the researcher. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles et al., (2018) model which consists of four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification and drawing conclusions. Data from interviews with informants will first be converted into an interview transcript in complete paragraph form. In this process, the researcher does not reduce the data, so that the informant's views which may be different from other informants are still maintained to be used as material for

dialogue. After that, the data will be analyzed and coded into main ideas, developed into themes, and grouped into appropriate categories. After all these steps, data synthesis from the analysis results is carried out to draw conclusions.

Data validity was carried out through triangulation of data sources, where information obtained from interviews was compared between informants. In addition, researchers carry out membership checks by returning research results to informants, ensuring that the research results are accurate (Candela, 2019).

## Results and Discussion

Based on research, journalists generally interpret media independence as freedom and autonomy in determining their media's editorial policies. In their view, media independence is free from pressure, influence and interference from parties outside the editorial team. The editorial policy in question concerns the choice of issues and events to be covered, the facts to be reported, the news format to be published and the determination of the media agenda setting. The informants agreed that media independence was important for editorial staff to determine reporting policies in the political year. In essence, journalists understand the importance of the principle of media independence for editorial staff because this is one of the conditions for press freedom.

Source	Meaning of Media Independence
All informants	Agree that media independence means freedom and autonomy in determining editorial policies.
	Agree that media independence is free from pressure, interference and influence from parties outside the editorial team.
	Agreed that media independence was important for editorial staff to determine reporting policies in the political year.
	Agree that media independence is a prerequisite for press freedom.

**Figure1:** Informant's Opinion Regarding Meaning of Media Independence  
 Source: Processed by Researchers

However, there were differences in subjective meaning between informants regarding the implementation of the concept of media independence. Especially regarding the involvement of media owners. Some consider the participation or interference of media owners in determining editorial policies to be normal because they consider media owners to be part of the editorial team. Meanwhile, there are those who hold the view that media owners' interference with editorial policies is considered a form of excessive intervention. They believe that media owners' intervention should only be limited to providing opinions and not forcing them to determine editorial policies.

These differences in views were not only expressed by journalists working in different media groups, but were also expressed by journalists working in the same media group. As stated by an informant who works in one of the media groups, media editorial policies absolutely follow the directions of the media owner. According to the informant, journalists working in this media group should have been aware from the start of their work that interference from media owners in setting editorial policies was something that could not be rejected. "If you refuse, please just get out. The choice is clear," he stressed.

According to the informant, media owners have the right to participate in regulating the editorial policies of their media networks. Including editorial policies to support the political party he founded. The informant admitted that the news on his television ahead of the 2024 elections was heavily colored by support for political parties affiliated with media owners. According to the informant, there was no news on television that criticized the political party. All news about political parties has a positive tone.

Apart from that, there is almost no news space provided for other political parties, except political parties that form coalitions with political parties that own the media. For example, the Perindo Party coalition with PDIP, Hanura Party and PPP which of course gets a portion of the news. Likewise, when the coalition supported Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD as presidential and vice-presidential candidates, the news on television fully supported the two pairs of candidates. Meanwhile, for the presidential and vice-presidential candidates from other political party coalitions, Prabowo-Gibran and Anis-Muhaimin, the informant emphasized that there were almost no news slots at all. Even activities for other candidate pairs will not be covered. Although events involving other candidate pairs have high news value. "No, no, there are no news slots at all." he stressed.

Different opinions were expressed by journalists who worked on other television stations. According to the informant, media owners' interference with editorial policies is something that should not be done because it is contrary to the journalistic code of ethics. The journalistic code of ethics regulates the independence of the media, free from influence, pressure and interference from press company owners. However, the informant admitted that it was difficult for journalists in his media to reject this because it had become an unwritten rule to comply with the directions and wishes of the media owner. The informant's position is a news program producer who still has higher superiors, including executive producer, department manager and editor in chief. As news program producers, informants must comply with the policies set by their superiors. The informant admitted that attempts had been made to negotiate reporting policies that were not based on the principle of independence but were never successful. "Efforts are still there. Ants are small, but we still try to bite. But so far it has always failed." he said.

Source	Implementation of Media Independence.
Informant 1,2,3	Agree with the media owner's intervention regarding editorial policy because he is part of the editorial team.
Informant 4,5,6	Disagree with interference from media owners. It is recommended that media owners' intervention in editorial policies be limited and not violate editorial autonomy

**Figure 2:** Informant's Opinion Regarding Implementation of Media Independence  
 Source: Processed by Researchers

The position of the informant ultimately determines the attitude towards the principle of media independence. Journalists who are not in the highest positions in the editorial hierarchy are more critical of the interference of media owners. Meanwhile, journalists who occupy top positions in the editorial structure are cooperative with the political interests of media owners. Therefore, journalists who disagree with the owner's attitude do not have a strong bargaining position considering that their position is not that high. Even though they realize this practice is wrong. "Can I open it up sir? That's scary, sir. In my place the term is partisan. There is a tendency to support one of the candidate pairs. Automatically there is an editorial policy that must be followed." he said.

Efforts to move away from policies supporting the political interests of media owners can sometimes still be made when economic interests are much stronger to prioritize. The economic importance of television is determined by program ratings. The high rating obtained is correlated with the number of incoming advertisements. Rating and advertising considerations are usually an antidote to the political policies of media owners. A research informant who is a producer of an afternoon news program said that the news program he manages has a loyal audience of women and housewives, so political news is rarely shown on his news program because survey results show that political news will reduce ratings. Moreover, the news program he manages is a leading program in achieving television ratings. Political news ordered by media owners is often rejected for broadcast for reasons of ratings. "Television is also an industry. There is a pragmatism factor, namely rating and share." he explained.

The meaning of media independence for some journalists varies when viewed from the aspect of neutrality and balance. A journalist believes that media independence does not mean having to be neutral and balanced. According to him, being non-neutral and unbalanced cannot be questioned because it is part of media independence. Media independence means that the media has the right to determine its position, whether neutral or not neutral and taking sides or not taking sides. Therefore, the editorial team is free to support political parties and candidate pairs as long as they have a vision and goals that match the editorial vision. In this way, political parties and presidential candidates receive a larger and more positive portion of the news. On the other hand, political parties and candidate pairs who are deemed not to have a vision and goals that are in line with the editorial vision will

receive a small portion of the news, and may not even be covered at all. "Before the coalition occurred, everything was the same, equal. Once there is a coalition, of course there will be judgment. Why does judgment become common sense because of course there is the same judgment, not the interests of the cooperative. But there is a common vision. Lots of similarities. Because we have limited space, of course we will prioritize those that are suitable." he explained.

Meanwhile, other journalists see that balance and neutrality must still be maintained when the media reports on contestations between political parties and candidate pairs. According to him, media independence will be reflected when the reporting is balanced and impartial. The informants' reasons for public trust will be lost when media reports tend to be one-sided and not neutral.

Source	Media independence from a neutral and balanced aspect
Informant 1,2,3	Media independence does not mean that the media must be neutral and balanced.
Informan 4,5,6	In reporting on political contestations, the media must be neutral and impartial.

**Figure 3:** Informant's Opinion Regarding Media Independence From A Neutral and Balanced Aspect

Source: Processed by Researchers

## Discussion

In phenomenology, it is assumed that humans actively give meaning of what is happening around and try to understand it through personal experience. The process of meaning can be called interpretation, interpretation is very important and central thing in phenomenology (Suddick et al., 2020). Schutz argued that there are two types of meaning, namely subjective meaning and objective meaning. Subjective meaning refers to the formation of reality by individuals in determining aspects of reality that have significance for them. Meanwhile, objective meaning includes a series of meanings that exist and take place within a cultural framework that is collectively understood (Muhaemin & Darsono, 2021). The interpretation of the principle of media independence put forward by journalists as a subjective meaning cannot be separated from the objective meaning that has been mutually agreed upon.

Media independence as interpreted collectively was born from the axiomatic thinking of liberal democracy. Media independence is considered a key element in the functioning of a democratic society (Bennett, 2015). He acts as a watchdog over the three pillars of power, namely the executive, judiciary and legislature. In this position, independent mass media is placed as the fourth pillar (Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020). The press as the fourth estate is one of the requirements for a checks and balances mechanism in the democratic division of power and is important for the protection of civil and political rights. (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2022).

However, in the subjective meaning of the principle of independence, there are differences between journalists. Especially the role of media owners in setting editorial policies. Some accept and some reject. The root of the problem is understanding the role of media owners, whether they are limited to being financiers with pure business goals or participating in determining editorial policies that better reflect personal political interests.

It has long been realized that the obstacle for journalists in realizing media independence, especially as the fourth estate of democracy which is always critical, is the domination of the role of media owners. As stated by Tapsell (Luddy, 2022), media conglomeration is the main problem in achieving autonomy in journalistic work, related to decisions regarding what information should or should not be reported, as well as how the media frames the news.

Media conglomeration cannot be rejected when the media enters the industrial system. Especially in television broadcast media. Establishing and operating a television broadcasting company requires large capital that can only be funded by strong entrepreneurs. Ironically, media conglomeration tends to harm the ideal function of the media as a pillar of democracy. McChesney has long pointed out that the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few entrepreneurs ultimately eliminates democracy (McChesney, 2023). The media tends to serve the interests of media owners rather than the interests of the public (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021).

In the context of the political economy of the media, it appears that the media cannot be neutral and objective as idealized. Media is closely related to and influenced by the ideology of its owners. Media owners play a role in determining the point of view, direction and method of presenting the news content to be published (Knoche, 2023). Media that is related to economic and political interests will reflect that its content always reflects the interests of those who fund it (Musfialdy, 2019).

Media independence is very dependent on the relationship between journalists and media owners. Referring to the theory of media political economy, Vincent Mosco views that there is an imbalance in the relationship where journalists are only placed as a means of production in the media industry. Media owners commodify the labor of journalists (Yoedtadi et al., 2021). Commodification of labor is a condition where mass media companies make their workers as commodities (Haryono, 2018). Workers are the driving force production activities. In this case commodification workers provide a description of how the process of utilizing energy and thoughts them to the maximum by constructing workers' thoughts about how It's fun to work in a mass media institution, even though they are controlled by media owners. Working in the mass media, especially on television, gives workers a sense of pride, pleasure, and comfort (Ursell, 2000).

Commodification is a crucial element in the theoretical framework of media political economy. Commodification shows how the capitalist political economic system of mass media seeks to achieve both economic and political profits (Knoche, 2023). To achieve this goal, the media industry generally involves commodification practices throughout its production process (Putri & SM, 2018) .



The informant said that the media would side with one political party as long as it had the same vision as the editorial staff. The reason the media is free to support certain political parties or presidential candidates is part of media independence, which in the researcher's view is an inappropriate excuse. The existence of journalism from the beginning has been in the interest of the public or society (Nyarwi, 2020). The public interest is the main reason and basic legitimacy of journalism's existence. Therefore, independence is a crucial element in carrying out the journalist profession. The existence of media independence to ensure that news is produced based on the public interest. When the media sides with one of the political parties or presidential and vice-presidential candidates, it becomes partisan media and a propaganda tool. According to MacQuail, partisanship will destroy public trust (Farida & Yoedtadi, 2020). Public trust is essential for journalists because it will influence how people choose media (Suiter & Fletcher, 2020). A study conducted by Suiter and Fletcher shows a correlation between media bias due to being partisan and the loss of public trust or the emergence of media distrust.

The opinion that equates media independence with absolute media freedom in the author's view is a wrong opinion. Media freedom has two faces at once, namely freedom from and freedom for. Freedom from indicates freedom from intervention by parties outside the media, while freedom for is the freedom of the media to devote itself to the public interest. In other words, media independence cannot only be understood superficially as freedom from, more than that it must also reflect freedom for (Tambini, 2021).

Independence was formulated by Kovach and Rosenstiel as the fourth of the nine elements of journalism (Yoedtadi & Pribadi, 2018). The fourth element emphasizes that journalists must maintain independence from the parties who are the focus of their reporting. In other words, journalism's primary obligation is to seek the truth, and journalists are expected to maintain their independence from the subject of the news. This shows that a journalist should be able to work objectively and independently. Kovach said that a further meaning of independence is journalism's first loyalty to the public. Journalists' wrong understanding of media independence is regrettable because it damages the idealism of the profession as a public servant. As concluded by the results of the PR2Media study, there has been a decadence of journalists' ethical commitment as a result of unequal power relations between journalists and media owners, as well as journalists' personal career ambitions. (Masduki & et al, 2023) .

The principle of independent media emphasizes that the Indonesian press follows universal journalism principles, which are rooted in a democratic perspective, rather than prioritizing journalism as a propaganda tool (Wicaksana, 2015). The Indonesian press does not play a role as propaganda, as mandated by Article 6a of the Press Law, where its role is to fulfill the public's right to obtain information (Prasetyo, 2018). According to McQuail (Hajad, 2018), mass media has the capability to act as an ideological tool, because it is able to attract attention, influence opinions and beliefs, change attitudes, provide status, and establish legitimacy and views of reality. Therefore, mass media is often used as a tool for various purposes related to people's lives, in this case political interests. It cannot

be denied that in the 2024 election the media will still be a hidden propaganda tool for political parties.

## Conclusion

There are different interpretations of the subjective meaning of media independence among television journalists. They agreed that media independence is freedom and autonomy in determining editorial policies. They agree on the importance of media independence in maintaining press freedom. However, they have different views on the involvement of media owners in editorial policy. Some journalists understand the intervention of media owners as normal. Others believe that the intervention of media owners is too excessive and has violated the journalistic code of ethics. Unfortunately, journalists do not have a strong bargaining position against the intervention of media owners in directing editorial policy.

Different views are also seen on the implementation of media independence. Some consider a form of media independence to be the media's freedom to side with political parties or presidential and vice-presidential candidates as long as they have the same vision as the editorial team. Meanwhile, other journalists are of the view that media independence must be realized through neutrality and impartiality. Media independence by journalists is often interpreted superficially as freedom from or absolute autonomy of the media to determine editorial policy. Meanwhile, other journalists see media independence as a form of freedom for the public interest.

This research should be continued by examining the content of television media that is affiliated with the political interests of media owners to prove the extent of violations of the journalistic code of ethics on the principle of independence committed by journalists.

The research results show that the journalist profession is a vulnerable group of workers in Indonesia. Pressure on the journalist profession can occur from an economic or political perspective. Economic pressure comes from tough competition in the media industry, political pressure as a result of intervention by media owners or parties outside the editorial team. This should be of concern to the Press Council which is tasked with maintaining press freedom.

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