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Ethics In The Communication Process: Freedom Press, Journalists, And Public Relations

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Abstrak

This article examines the role of ethics in the communication process, particularly in the practice of press freedom and public relations. The study shows that freedom to convey information is a right guaranteed in a democratic system, but its implementation cannot be separated from moral values, social norms, and responsibility to the public. Ethics serves as a control mechanism to ensure that freedom of communication remains within the corridor of the common good. In the context of journalism, a code of ethics serves as a professional guideline for journalists in maintaining the integrity, objectivity, and credibility of the media, as well as in presenting accurate and balanced information. Meanwhile, in the practice of public relations, ethics is the main foundation for building healthy relationships between organizations and the public through the principles of honesty, openness, and social responsibility. Without adequate ethical implementation, journalistic and public relations activities have the potential to lead to communication deviations that can harm the public interest and damage public trust. Thus, ethics is an essential element in realizing responsible and public-interest-oriented communication practices.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly rapid development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes to communication practices across various sectors of life, including the press and public relations (Nugroho & Arnold Simangunsong, 2024). The rapid, massive, and easily accessible flow of information demands that communication practitioners, such as journalists and public relations practitioners, master not only technical communication skills but also a strong ethical foundation in every aspect of message delivery (Sucin & Utami, 2020). Without ethics, freedom of communication has the potential to lead to misuse of information, violations of individual rights, and social conflict within society (Fadilah Hamdi et al., 2024).

Freedom of the press is a key pillar of a democratic system, guaranteeing the public's right to access true, accurate, and balanced information (Hidayat, 2025). However, this freedom is not absolute and must be exercised with moral and professional responsibility (Acmas S, 2022).

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Therefore, the existence of a journalistic code of ethics is a crucial instrument in limiting and directing journalists' work practices, ensuring they uphold the values of truth, justice, objectivity, and respect for human rights. This code of ethics serves as a moral guideline governing journalists' relationships with the public, sources, and the media institution itself (Harmoni & Bangsa, 2024).

On the other hand, public relations practice is also inseparable from issues of communication ethics (Sandra & Dewi, 2019). Public relations practitioners play a strategic role in building an organization's image, reputation, and relationships with its publics (Adde et al., 2026). In carrying out this role, public relations practitioners are required to be honest, transparent, and responsible, while avoiding information manipulation that could mislead the public (Kustiawan, 2019). Public relations ethics serve as a normative foundation for ensuring that organizational communication activities are not solely oriented toward institutional interests but also consider the public interest and prevailing social values (Agusta & Tsabit, 2020).

The study of ethics in the communication process is crucial for understanding how values, norms, and moral principles are applied in press communication and public relations practices (Silfia Hanani, 2017). Ethics is understood not only as a set of formal rules, but also as an individual's awareness of initiating responsible communication practices within oneself (Hasan dkk, 2023). Through exploring the concept of communication ethics, students are expected to critically and reflectively analyze various ethical issues that arise in press freedom and public relations practices (Devito, 2011).

METHODS

This research was conducted using the Literature Review method. A literature review is a study of theories, findings, and other research articles obtained from reference materials to serve as a basis for research activities (Effendy, 2015). Research formulated using a literature review allows for the provision of other research obtained from reference materials to serve as a basis for research activities on changing learning paradigms in higher education (Rachmawati et al., 2024; Sugiyono, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ethics of press freedom in the communication process

Understanding Freedom of the Press

Freedom of the press is a fundamental principle in a democratic system, guaranteeing the freedom of the mass media to carry out their journalistic functions without any pressure, intervention, or arbitrary restrictions. This freedom encompasses the right of the press to seek, obtain, process, and disseminate information to the public through various communication media. The primary goal of press freedom is to ensure the public's right to accurate, objective, and accountable information is fulfilled (Muslikhah et al., 2024).

Within the context of national law, press freedom in Indonesia is legally legitimized through Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, which affirms that press freedom is a manifestation of popular sovereignty and a fundamental human right (Baraney et al., 2014). Press freedom is not only defined as the institutional freedom of press companies, but also the professional freedom of

journalists in carrying out their journalistic duties in accordance with legal and ethical principles (Armadila et al., 2026). Therefore, press freedom has a strategic function as a means of social control, oversight of power, and a medium for political and social education for the public.

The Importance of Ethics in Press Freedom

Press freedom cannot be separated from ethics, as the press has significant power to influence public opinion, shape social perceptions, and determine the direction of public discourse (Dani & Andika, 2025). Press ethics are a set of moral and professional norms that serve as guidelines for journalists in carrying out journalistic activities. These ethics serve to ensure that press freedom is not misused, thus harming individuals, groups, or the public interest. The importance of ethics in press freedom is also closely related to the social responsibility of the mass media. A free press without ethics has the potential to spread inaccurate, provocative information, violate privacy, or ignore the principle of the presumption of innocence. These conditions not only harm the values of justice but can also reduce public trust in the media. Therefore, press ethics exist as a moral control instrument to ensure that press freedom remains within the corridor of the public interest.

Limits of Press Freedom

Although press freedom is guaranteed by law and the constitution, it is not absolute. Press freedom has limits that must be respected in order to protect the rights and interests of others and maintain public order. These limits are necessary so that the implementation of press freedom does not cause social conflict, human rights violations, or damage to the morals and ethics of society. Press freedom is the foundation of the journalistic profession, as mandated in Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, Article 2, which explains that press freedom is a manifestation of the sovereignty of the people based on the principles of democracy, justice, and the rule of law. The law sets clear limits in the reporting process regarding information obtained by journalists.

Press freedom criteria are a set of principles or standards that determine the extent to which a country or environment grants the mass media or press the freedom to carry out their duties independently without unlawful obstacles. These criteria cover several important aspects that support the existence and healthy function of the press in a democratic society. Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press regulates press freedom in Indonesia, establishing a legal basis to maintain and ensure that this freedom is protected and respected:

1) The press has the right to seek information from various sources for the benefit of the community;
2) The press has the freedom to gather information from various sources without unlawful obstruction;
3) The press has the freedom to convey information to the public openly, responsibly and without pressure;
4) The press has the right to edit and broadcast information that has been collected in accordance with the journalistic code of ethics and the principle of truth;

5) The press has the obligation and right to maintain the confidentiality of the identity of sources of information that is confidential and important for the public interest.
6) The press has the right to be legally protected in carrying out its journalistic duties, including from any actions that could hinder press freedom.
7) The press is expected to encourage openness and transparency in conveying public information, as well as providing fair and equal access to the public;
8) The press must be able to operate without interference or pressure from any party, including the government or political parties.

Freedom of expression and opinion are essential components of press freedom. These two aspects are fundamental rights that are the main pillars of a democratic system. Without freedom of opinion and expression, democracy cannot be fully realized, although these rights still have their limits. In this context, the freedoms referred to include the establishment of publishing or broadcasting businesses, journalistic activities to access information, editorial freedom, and the protection of journalists' rights. This concept also encompasses citizen journalism, as freedom of opinion and expression is an integral part of the right to have an opinion, the right to obtain information, the right to communicate, and the right to participate in the democratic process that allows citizens to participate in the political affairs of their government.

Code of ethics that limits journalists in the communication process

A journalistic code of ethics is a set of norms, principles, and moral values agreed upon by the press community as a guideline for journalists' behavior in carrying out their profession. This code of ethics regulates how journalists should conduct themselves in the process of seeking, processing, and conveying information to the public. In the Indonesian context, the journalistic code of ethics is established by the Press Council and applies to all journalists and press companies.

As a professional boundary, the journalistic code of ethics sets clear boundaries regarding what journalists may and may not do. In journalistic practice, journalists are not permitted to convey information that has not been verified as true, mix facts and opinions, or manipulate data for certain interests. These limitations are important to maintain the accuracy and credibility of the news conveyed to the public. The code of ethics also limits journalists in terms of news gathering methods. Journalists are required to obtain information in ethical and legal ways, such as not using misleading disguises, coercing sources, or using methods that harm others. With these limitations in place, journalists can still carry out their duties professionally without sacrificing the values of justice and honesty.[5]

Along with the emergence of the reform era, demands for press freedom have become stronger from various levels of society, especially among press managers. Journalism organizations, which had previously been dominated by the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI), began to face press lawsuits and no longer wanted to be accommodated solely within one journalist organization through PWI. Various demands emerged to establish other journalist organizations. Journalists, both from print and electronic media, fought to establish new journalist organizations outside of PWI. This struggle bore fruit with the emergence of new journalist organizations, such as the Independent Journalism Alliance (AJI), the

Indonesian Private Television Association (ATVSI), the Reform Journalists Committee (KWRI), the Indonesian Professional Tracking Journalists Committee (KOWAPPI), the Indonesian Press and Writers Association (IPPI), the Federation of Journalists Unions (FSP), and many other journalist organizations on a smaller scale. Perhaps the proliferation of journalist organizations was due to political euphoria in press freedom. Through the spirit of press freedom that is turbulent in the midst of Making society so enthusiastic in establishing journalistic organizations However, in reality, in terms of quantity and quality, it seems that only PWI still exists and has a concrete program in the community With the aim of advancing Indonesian Journalism in the era of press freedom. More clearly according to Ermanto (2005:167-168), the seven points of the Indonesian journalist code of ethics are as follows:

1. Indonesian journalists respect the public's right to obtain correct information.
2. Indonesian journalists follow ethical procedures to obtain and broadcast information and provide identification to information sources.
3. Indonesian journalists respect the principle of the presumption of innocence, do not mix facts with opinions, are balanced and always examine the truth of information and do not commit plagiarism.
4. Indonesian journalists do not broadcast information that is false, slanderous, sadistic or obscene, and do not mention the identities of victims of sexual crimes.
5. Indonesian journalists must not accept bribes and must not abuse their journalistic profession.
6. Indonesian journalists have the right to refuse, respect embargo provisions, background information and off the record in accordance with the agreement and serve the right of reply.

The formulation of this new code of ethics is expected to provide a solution to the anxiety that journalists have faced in carrying out their profession in the community. The existence of various pressures, whether from the Government on journalists, media consumers on journalists, or from journalists to sources, is a concern that has always worried journalists, especially before the reform era. Due to technological advances and human mindsets, various issues related to the code of ethics are increasingly complex. The problem not only concerns the public's assessment that is still often wrong about the journalism profession, but also from press institutions themselves often make mistakes in the community. Moreover, with the increasing proliferation of "bodrek" journalists in the community, it is clearly very detrimental and damaging the image of journalists in the community.

The birth of the seven-point code of ethics for Indonesian journalists agreed upon by 26 journalist organizations in Bandung, is considered to still have several shortcomings that need to be completed, so that it can accommodate various press issues that are currently developing. The government also has serious concerns related to the life of the press in the country. Through Presidential Decree No. 143/M/2003, dated August 13, 2003, the membership of the Press Council was formed for the 2003-2006 period. The decision of the Plenary Session I of Workshop V attended by 29 press organizations, the Press

Council, and the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, successfully decided on a new journalistic code of ethics (Council
Pers, 2006:23-27), as follows:

1. Indonesian journalists are independent, produce accurate, balanced news and do not have bad intentions.
2. Indonesian journalists use professional methods in carrying out journalistic duties.
3. Indonesian journalists always check information, report in a balanced manner, do not mix facts and judgmental opinions, and apply the principle of presumption of innocence.
4. Indonesian journalists do not create fake, slanderous, sadistic or obscene news.
5. Indonesian journalists do not mention or broadcast the identities of victims of sexual crimes and do not mention the identities of children who are perpetrators of crimes.
6. Indonesian journalists do not abuse their profession and do not accept bribes.
7. Indonesian journalists have the right to refuse to protect sources whose identity or whereabouts are not known, respecting the provisions of the embargo, background information, and "off the record" in accordance with the Agreement.
8. Indonesian journalists do not write or broadcast news based on prejudice or discrimination against someone on the basis of differences in ethnicity, race, skin color, religion, gender and language, and do not demean the dignity of the weak, poor, sick, mentally or physically disabled.
9. Indonesian journalists respect the rights of sources regarding their private lives, except in the public interest.
10. Indonesian journalists immediately retract, correct and rectify erroneous and inaccurate news accompanied by an apology to readers, listeners and/or viewers.
11. Indonesian journalists serve the right of reply and the right of correction professionally.[6]

Public relations ethics in the communication process

Public relations ethics

Public Relations (PR) ethics is a set of values, moral principles, and professional standards that serve as guidelines for public relations practitioners in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. These ethics govern how PR practitioners behave, make decisions, and communicate with both internal and external publics of an organization. The primary goal of public relations ethics is to ensure that all communication activities are conducted honestly, responsibly, and respectfully with the public interest.

Public relations, as a management function, plays a strategic role in building, maintaining, and enhancing an organization's image and reputation. Therefore, ethics is a fundamental aspect of PR practice, as every message and information conveyed to the public has the potential to influence public opinion, attitudes, and beliefs. Without a strong ethical foundation, public relations practice can become a tool for information manipulation that harms the public interest.

Ethical Principles in Public Relations

Public relations ethics are based on several core principles that serve as professional guidelines. One of the most fundamental principles is honesty. PR practitioners are required to convey information that is true, accurate, and not misleading. The information conveyed must reflect the true situation and must not be manipulated to serve the organization's narrow interests.

The next principle is responsibility. PR practitioners are accountable not only to the organizations they represent, but also to the public, the media, and society at large. This responsibility requires PR practitioners to consider the social impact of every communication policy they adopt. Furthermore, the principle of transparency is also an essential part of PR ethics, particularly when conveying information related to the public interest.

Public Relations Ethics in Communication Practice

In communication practice, public relations ethics require a balance between organizational interests and the public interest. PR practitioners are not permitted to conceal important facts that could harm the public, even if such information could potentially damage the organization's image. Ethics emphasize that the public interest must be the primary consideration in all communication activities.

Public relations ethics also govern the relationship between PR practitioners and the media. This relationship should be built on professionalism and mutual respect, not through bribery, rewards, or pressure. Information provided to the media must be accurate, clear, and verifiable to avoid misunderstandings within the public. Furthermore, PR ethics also relate to the use of digital and social media. In the digital era, PR practitioners are required to be more careful in disseminating information because its impact can spread widely and quickly. The spread of false, manipulative, or unethical propaganda can damage an organization's reputation and undermine public trust.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that ethics plays a fundamental role in the communication process, particularly in the practice of press freedom and public relations. Freedom to convey information is a right guaranteed in a democratic system, but this freedom cannot be exercised absolutely without regard for moral values, social norms, and responsibility to the public. Therefore, ethics serves as a check to ensure that freedom of communication remains within the bounds of the common good.

The journalistic code of ethics serves as the primary guideline for journalists in carrying out their professional duties. The code of ethics is not intended to restrict creativity or press freedom, but rather to maintain the integrity, objectivity, and credibility of the media. By adhering to the code of ethics, journalists are expected to present accurate, balanced information that does not harm any particular party or the wider public.

Furthermore, public relations ethics also plays a crucial role in building healthy relationships between organizations and the public. Ethical public relations practices require honesty, openness, and social responsibility in all communication activities. Without an ethical foundation, public relations activities have the potential

to become a means of information manipulation, which can undermine public trust in the organization.

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