

# The Presumption of innocence: Interpretation and application in online journalism

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## Abstract

Implementation of the Presumption of Innocence by journalists has implications for the occurrence of trial by the press and potentially impacts social disharmony. This study aims to explain the interpretation of the presumption of innocence in journalism, and the understanding and application of the presumption of innocence by online media journalists. This research uses qualitative methods by utilizing two data collection techniques. Firstly, documentation that collects some related research about the Journalistic Codes of Ethics of the Press Council, PWI and AJI. Secondly, in-depth interviews with four online media journalists. The result shows that the literal interpretation of the presumption of innocence is a principle not to judge someone even though it is side by side with the principle of objectivity, covering both sides, mention of identity, and legal grammar. Online media journalists have a collective understanding of the presumption of innocence. However, the journalists have an authentic understanding that causes the different implementation of the presumption of innocence. Moreover, demands for faster news production, media agency policies, and personal interest from journalists also impact partial implementation. This research contributes by forming a model for applying the presumption of innocence for online media journalists to avoid trial by the press.

**Keywords:** *presumption of innocence, online journalism, trial by the press, journalistic ethics*

## INTRODUCTION

The press can be a “judicial institution” for a suspect when a journalist judges a suspect as guilty even though the court has not yet decided that he is guilty (Jishnu, 2019; Mayal, 2021). For instance, Detik.com judged Jessica Kumala Wongso as the murderer of Mirna in the Cyanide Poison case (Hapsari, 2018). Tribunnews and Inews online media accused against Aditya Mukti in the Gisella Anastasia involved in porn video case (Syahril et al., 2021). Furthermore, PikiranRakyat.com indicates by accusing Peter Gontha of corruption case in reporting on the Garuda Airlines case (Dewan Pers, 2022); and accusations by online media against Coki Pardede, who made content to cook pork with date sauce on Youtube (Lukman et al., 2021).

Regardless of the court’s decision against the suspect, what the online media press has done to the suspect is already a form of press judgment against someone (Loqman, 2010). When the online media judges their

reporting, at that time, there has done a trial by the press (Mayal, 2021; Mustawa, 2019b, 2019a; Rae, 2020). Press judgment against suspects is carried out by exposing identities, making claims, humiliating, and putting someone on trial by forming a public opinion (Rae, 2020; Steele, 2013). At this point, the online media press has blurred the line between facts and opinions, which judges a suspect as guilty.

The press does have the freedom to produce journalistic works in a democratic country; with this freedom, the press acts as the fourth estate (Felle, 2016; Hansen, 2018). Nevertheless, if the freedom inherent in a journalist is used to prosecute someone, it is important to explore the ethical principles held by online media journalists. Journalistic ethics embody ethical principles for journalists, which become moral guidelines regarding journalists' good and bad behavior at work (Christians et al., 2017; Sujoko, 2021; Syahri, 2018). By committing to applying journalistic ethics correctly, online media press freedom can be ethically accounted for by journalists. (Bettoni, 2021; Joyce et al., 2017; Mateus, 2019; Stanill, 2020).

Journalistic ethics and principles to avoid judgment on suspects or someone in the news (trial by the press) have been explicitly regulated in the Journalistic Code of Ethics (JCoE), especially regarding the Presumption of Innocence (PoI). The ethics code is clearly stated in Article 3 of JCoE (Dewan Pers, 2014), Article 7 of JCoE from the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI, 2014), and the 20th Point of the JCoE from the Alliance of Indonesian Journalists (AJI, 2021). Therefore, proper implementation of the presumption will avoid unfair press judgment of someone or the suspect.

Research on the PoI and trial by the press is also still limited in some countries. Several international researchers, such as Steele (2013), review trials by the press to understand Muslim journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia. Tanoos (2017) reviews the positive and negative consequences of PoI in media practice in America. Rae (2020) reviews the trial by the media in Sri Lanka to counter the judicial process for human rights violations that were not held accountable. Perez and Valera-Ordaz (2021) highlights the coverage of crimes in the Spanish media through the PoI framework. Mayal (2021) explains the judgments of the mass media in India (television and press) that affect public opinion and create hatred among the people. In Bulgaria, Dorak (2021) analyses the PoI in media coverage with special attention given to the public interest and the interests of one's privacy.

Meanwhile, the issue of PoI in journalism in Indonesia is still debatable. For instance, the application of the PoI in journalism (Mustawa, 2019a); the implementation of the PoI from the perspective of law (Mustawa, 2019b; Pura & Kartika, 2018); "trial by media" from the perspective of legal science (Hapsari, 2018; Sari, 2020); and online media judgments (Lukman et al., 2021; Syahril et al., 2021). Moreover, the Press Council 2010 also issued a report on the practice of APTB. However, this report is not based on field research but on the opinions of legal experts, academics, and senior journalists. (Huda, 2010; Loqman, 2010; Mukantardjo, 2010; Sukardi, 2010).

This research offers a novelty by reviewing the interpretation and application of the PoI in online journalism by asking research questions: First, how is the interpretation of the PoI in journalism practice so far?; and second, what is the understanding of the PoI by online media journalists and how it is applied? This research aims to produce an output model for applying the PoI in online journalism to avoid trial by the press.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Online Journalism Ethics in the Tradition of Communication Studies**

The study of communication science has a tradition that emphasizes the discourse of good and bad communication behaviour, namely the ethical tradition. Griffin (2012) offers this tradition to complete the seven traditions offered by Robert T. Craig (Rhetoric, Semiotics, Socio-psychology, Socio-cultural, Cybernetics, Phenomenology, and Critical). The main premise of the ethical tradition is that for communication activities to influence society, and communication activities must pay attention to the dimensions of good-bad morality.

In the current digital era, the practice of ethical online journalism is of great importance. It is the responsibility of the journalist to look through the ethical perspective when producing or reporting any news

(Bettoni, 2021; Stanifl, 2020; Syahri, 2018). The importance of research on online journalism practices is due to the decline of ideal values and ethics in online journalism (Nurhajati et al., 2018) and also due to the potential power of online journalism to construct news and shape public opinion (Denisova, 2022; Mubarok & Wulandari, 2018).

Recent studies on ethics in online journalism attempt to review several discussions, such as the ethical dilemmas of students who work as online journalists in reporting (Eberholst et al., 2016). The moral-economic causes of online media journalists that violate journalistic ethics; consequences of ethical violations by online media journalists (Dolunay et al., 2022). The relationship between journalistic ethics and the quality of the information in public relations practice (Stanifl, 2020); and the resistance from the online media journalist to inculcate journalistic media ethically. Furthermore, the challenges of implementing a journalistic code of ethics are faced by online media journalists (Lestari, 2019, 2020; Winora et al., 2021a).

This research contributes to the discipline of Communication Science in the realm of ethical tradition (Griffin, 2012), specifically regarding the study of online journalism by examining the interpretation, understanding, and application of the PoI in the JCoC by online media journalists in Indonesia. That way, this research has a clear position scientifically (state of the art), which is to contribute to the study of journalism ethics in the communication discipline.

### **The Presumption of Innocence in the Practice of Journalism**

The term PoI is more popular in the study of law science, but PoI is also in journalism practice (Manan, 2016). The PoI is part of Indonesia's JCoC from the Press Council, PWI, and AJI. The PoI is stated under Article 3 of the JCoE from the Press Council (2014), Article 7 of JCoE from the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI, 2014), and the 20th Point of JCoE from the Alliance of Indonesian Journalists (AJI, 2021). According to Manan (2016), the PoI in journalism contains the JCoE, and it becomes the principle of the press to uphold freedom and human rights. In other words, the press shall not accuse (or portray) someone guilty in the media (trial by the press) but let due process take its course.

The PoI is a principle for a journalist not to judge someone in their reporting, protecting someone from being persecuted by the readers or becoming the forum for the public to form judgmental opinions. Besides, PoI is a moral guide for journalists to act professionally (Jishnu, 2019; Mayal, 2021; Mustawa, 2019a; Steele, 2013). This ethics code shows that the PoI is an effort to prevent trial by the press in the practice of media reporting, which is to become an ethical guide for journalists to report the news, but not to judge. According to Dorak (2021), the PoI is important not only for judges in the judicial process but also for media workers in journalistic activities. The irresponsible or biased media reporting on the ongoing investigation or trial against the suspect/accused leads to prejudicial effects against the suspect/accused, which may also influence the judge, directly or indirectly, in deciding the case. Consequently, the judge's decision may no longer purely based on legal logic but pressure from biased opinion generated by unethical media coverage that disregards the PoI (Dorak, 2021; Haltom & McCann, 2004).

Several studies have revealed the implications of trial by the press, such as slander and defamation (Habsari, 2017; Sari, 2020); and influence judges' decisions on legal cases in court (Dorak, 2021; Haltom & McCann, 2004). Even a trial by the press has implications against human rights because a person has the right to defend himself before he is found guilty. The court must make the judgment, not the press (Mayal, 2021). The role of the press is supposed to be one of the instruments to protect human rights (Maier, 2021; Sobel & McIntyre, 2018), but the press violates human rights through trial by the press.

The adverse implications of trial by the press should not happen if the PoI were strictly adhered to by the journalists. Then, this research discusses the interpretation of the PoI in the JCoE that applies in Indonesia and reveals the understanding and application of the PoI by online media journalists. Furthermore, this research tries to construct a model for applying PoI in online journalism practice to avoid trial by the press.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a constructivist paradigm to help researchers understand the problems regarding the interpretation and application of the PoI in online journalism practice. In addition, the constructivist paradigm helps researchers construct scientific understanding or knowledge by interpreting data regarding research problems (Bryman, 2012). Then, the researcher used a qualitative approach to produce descriptive and in-depth data to explain the interpretation and application of the PoI in online journalism practice. As explained by Neuman & Robson (2018), a qualitative approach is used to explain social phenomena in depth based on natural settings by utilizing descriptive data in the form of verbal and text.

Literature studies with documentation data collection techniques are used to find data related to the interpretation of PoI in journalistic practice. This is also known as doctrinal research, where documents including legal documents are analyzed (Ayub & Yusoff, 2018). The literature for the research includes the data from JCoE documents from the Press Council, AJI and PWI; Scientific articles from the Press Council journal (2010) on "Presumption of Innocence in Press Practices". Moreover, scientific articles from national and international journals examine the PoI in journalism practice.

Another data collection technique is through in-depth interviews with online media journalists, namely Y1 (PikiranRakyat.com), Y2 (Detik.com), Y3 (Suara.com), and Y4 (Liputan6.com) - these four media were chosen because they have verified by the Press Council and has an indication of the PoI problems (Dewan Pers, 2022; Haryadi, 2021; Lestari, 2020; Nurhajati et al., 2018). In-depth interview data were analyzed using an interactive technique from Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana (2014), which included the stages of condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data from the interactive analysis is used to answer research questions regarding the understanding and application of the PoI by online media journalists.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Literal Interpretation of the Presumption of Innocence in the Journalistic Code of Ethics**

The PoI has a substantive interpretation for journalists not to judge a suspect or someone in their journalistic activities. This interpretation is to be observed by journalists to maintain the honour of the journalist profession while protecting the public from unprofessional journalists' reports/news actions. The substantive interpretations of the PoI are found in the JCoE from press institutions such as the Press Council, AJI, and PWI, as follows:

"Indonesian journalists always test information, report in a balanced manner, do not mix up facts and judgmental opinions and apply the principle of the presumption of innocence" (Article 3 of the JCoE version Press Council, 2014). Explicitly, journalists are required to apply the PoI in their reporting. This demand is juxtaposed with other demands, always to test information (verification), to report in a balanced manner (cover both sides), and not to mix up facts and judgmental opinions. So, the interpretation of the PoI in the Press Council version of the JCoE does not stand alone but complementing other guidelines such as verification discipline, covering both sides, and separating judgmental facts and opinions.

Concerning not mixing facts and opinions, the Press Council (2010) explained that this is related to the principle of objectivity in reporting. Here, the PoI is positioned together with the principle of objectivity. The relevance between the PoI and objectivity is to avoid ambiguity between the facts and opinions of journalists. Any ambiguity between the two (i.e., PoI and principle of objectivity) may cause bias in reporting and against the accused. In addition, journalists' opinions that connote judging someone in the judicial process may also have adverse consequences on the trial judges because the opinion of journalists will form a wider public opinion that influences the judge's decision in the judicial process. Consequently, the judge may deviate from deciding based on the evidence and the legal facts, due to the pressure from public opinion on the ongoing case (Dorak, 2021; Haltom & McCann, 2004).

The implementation of the PoI and the principle of objectivity by journalists will bring clarity about a criminal incident to the public. In other words, journalists must report the incident with accurate facts and not mix the report with their own opinion. However, journalists can still interpret legal facts in the judicial process. Lestari (2020) explained that there are journalists who do not interpret the facts but present their opinions that have the potential to harm others and have a significant impact on shaping public opinion. Reese & Shoemaker (2016) stated that the presence of journalists' opinions in their report is the strong influence of individual media workers (journalists) on the content of media which is manifested through their opinions.

Relating to the PoI and the introduction of the JCoE from the Press Council, this is an effort to strike a balance between the two, whereby anyone suspected of being guilty can convey his defence in the news. The PoI and the fairness principle to cover news on both sides are also regulated in the JCoE from the PWI. Article 7 states that "Indonesian journalists in reporting suspected of violating the law and/or the judicial process must respect the principle of presumption of innocence, fairness, honesty, and a balanced presentation." The principle of fairness to both sides ideally becomes the responsibility of journalists in reporting controversial issues so that it displays a balance of two sides and there is no tendency to blame someone (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021; Iahin, 2021).

The 2010 Press Council Report also shows the relationship between fair reporting and PoI, namely how a journalist's reporting on a crime or any legal news must display balance so that there is no room for trial by the press to occur against someone. Ideally, the reporting by journalists in the press media has a negative narrative about a person in a crime. In that case, the journalist should try to hold the news within a reasonable period to provide an opportunity for someone to clarify what was done (Sukardi, 2010). Applying this clarification technique is with the aim to bring up fair reporting for both parties and avoid PoI violations that impact one's judgment.

In the JCoE from the AJI, there is another principle juxtaposed with the PoI i.e., "Indonesian journalists in reporting events related to violations of law and/or judicial processes must uphold the principle of presumption of innocence". This principle directs that a journalist has a moral responsibility to respect the judicial process, meaning that legal events become the territory of the judicial process (Mukantardjo, 2010). A journalist's job is to report any violation of the law without judging someone suspected of violating the law (Sari, 2020). Deciding whether someone is guilty is the judge's or the court's duty (Manan, 2016). The PoI must respect the law by following the status and legal decisions. Mukantardjo (2010) dan Mustawa (2019b) explain the relevance of the presumption of innocence and legal decisions to respect the judicial process. Reporting news outside the facts (field facts and legal facts) can influence public opinion and pressure judges in deciding the case before them. Journalists are also not allowed to make opinions that can judge someone through narratives or dictions that label someone, whether it is still in the legal process i.e., making a sub-judice report, or after the legal process is complete.

The interpretation of the PoI must respect legal principles by correctly using legal terms or diction. A journalist must understand the difference between a suspect, a suspect, an accused, and someone who has been found guilty so that journalists do not call someone who has not been found guilty the diction of "*predator*" (Mustawa, 2019b, 2019a). If a journalist intentionally does not use legal terms correctly, then the action is categorized as violating the ethics of the PoI. If a journalist accidentally makes a mistake in using inappropriate legal diction, then it cannot be claimed that a journalist breaks the ethics, but the journalist is incompetent.

Meanwhile, the PoI in the JCoE from the AJI is more complex than the PoI, not having bad intentions, avoiding slander, defamation, and character assassination (AJI, 2021). The PoI is explicitly realized by reporting that does not have bad faith and avoids slander, defamation and character assassination. Implicitly, the PoI aims to protect someone in the news because of the diction of slander, defamation, and character assassination. Several studies have also highlighted the ability of online mass media to carry out character assassination against public figures (Berti & Loner, 2021; Samoilenko, 2021; Samoilenko et al., 2017). Therefore, the ability of the media to form a public opinion against someone through news narratives must be limited through the JCoE.

Defamation and slander cannot be separated from the principle of mentioning identity in reporting, as this is reviewed by Loqman (2010) in the Journal of the Press Council report that the PoI and the mention of identity are integrated into crime news. The mention of a person's identity in a crime event by a journalist gives the connotation of judgment against someone. This mention causes the public will know someone who has committed a crime - whether the status is suspected, a suspect, a defendant, an accused or has been found guilty. Public opinion formed through the news will have implications for the judgment of someone whose identity is called (Manan, 2016). The suspect's identity in a crime must be protected or disguised because the illegal acts or crimes still must be proven and determined by the judge via the judicial process (Pura & Kartika, 2018; Sari, 2020). The mention of the suspect's name clearly by the press will have the potential to influence public opinion to judge the suspect as the wrong party without due process (Loqman, 2010; Manan, 2016). The PoI, as an ethical guideline for journalists, places the suspect as a party whose privacy rights must be respected until the judge's decision has a permanent legal determination. However, there are differences of opinion regarding the mention of a person's identity in reporting crime events (Huda, 2010; Loqman, 2010; Sukardi, 2010), as follows:

- a. Journalists who do not state their identity (name, picture, and full address) will only write down the suspect's initials. This principle is applied to those whose cases are deemed not to have the intention of harming people or harming many people. For example, this opinion is enforced in the case of a kid who stole fruit from someone else's garden.
- b. The PoI applies to cases that are being tried before the court, so before reaching the court, the principle must be applied so that the presentation of reporting before the incident is brought before the court, and journalists are obliged to keep the identity of the suspect secret.
- c. Journalists can state the suspect's identity when someone who has committed a crime has been known to the wider community. For example, a public figure is indicted for drugs or other crimes. This third opinion applies to public officials who commit extraordinary crimes like corruption.

The three opinions above show that the application of the PoI and the mention of a suspected's identity is related to a type of crime or criminality events. Journalists agree to hide the suspect's identity because the crime's characteristics do not result in disharmony or harm to many people. Meanwhile, those who believe that the crime is detrimental to many people and causes social disharmony in society, may reveal the identity of the suspect. In law, it is called extraordinary crime, such as corruption and serious human rights crimes and is committed by someone who is a 'public figure' or public official (Sari, 2020).

### **The Understanding of the Presumption of Innocentness by Online Media Journalists**

This study finds similarities and differences in the understanding of PoI from online media journalists covering legal and criminal events. In constructivist or interpretive paradigm-based research, a process of interpretation and perception is influenced by individual values formed through references and life experiences. In addition, the constructivist or interpretive paradigm aims to build a concept or theoretical knowledge based on natural settings (Bryman, 2012).

The similarity of understanding by journalists lies in the interpretation of the PoI as a reporting guide that does not judge a suspect. Informants Y1, Y2, Y3, and Y4 agreed that the media should not judge a suspect until the court has made a legal decision. The prohibition of judging is stated in the JCoE from the Press Council, PWI, and AJI, which states that the media are not allowed to make accusations or judge someone through their reporting. Here are some excerpts from research informants that reflect this:

"The basic principle is not to judge someone. Journalists' job is to bring information on what is happening in the field and to report events. If judging someone accuses someone, especially if it comes to a decision that he is guilty, it is unethical. I try to adhere to the principle of the presumption of innocence not to judge someone" (Informant Y3).

"The principle of the presumption of innocence is like a directive for journalists in the Code of Ethics. So that this journalist does not carelessly accuse people when making news. His job is to preach, not to accuse

someone of being wrong (Informant Y1).

“The principle of presumption of innocence is a principle in the journalistic code of ethics. The principle I have to follow as a journalist is not to judge someone because the job of journalists/journalists is to report, not to judge (Informant Y2).

“The principle for journalists is not to judge someone when reporting, writing news and informing the facts, not to give a decision that this person is guilty or not guilty.” (Informant Y4).

Journalists, in their activities, convey information based on facts without judging someone. This understanding is in line with the substance of journalism, namely finding facts about a real event that occurred in the field to be later reported to the public (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). Although there are different characteristics between print-based conventional journalism and online media journalism, the substance of journalism as an activity to gather facts about events to be reported to the public is no different. The difference between conventional journalism and online journalism lies in the characteristics of the media used, the pattern of news search activities, and the results of the new products.(Ashari, 2019; Darbo & Skjerdal, 2019).

All informants believe online media journalism is no different from conventional or print media journalism. The Journalistic Code of Ethics by the Press Council is a general guideline for every journalist, while the journalistic association’s code of ethics is specific to members of the association. This specificity has led to different translations of the PoI. The following articles show unequal translations related to the principle of the PoI;

- a. Indonesian journalists always evaluate information, report in a balanced manner, do not mix judgmental facts and opinions, and apply the PoI (Article 3, JCoE, 2014).
- b. Indonesian journalists, in reporting on events suspected of violating the law and or the judicial process, must respect the PoI, fairness, honesty, and a balanced presentation (Article 7, PWI’s version of the JCoE, 2014)
- c. Journalists uphold the PoI, not having bad intentions, avoiding slander, defamation and character assassination (Number 20, JCoE from the AJI, 2021)

The theory of hierarchical levels by Reese & Shoemaker (2016) states that media workers potentially influence media content. The implementation of the PoI potentially has a bias at the level of journalists in the field. Informant Y3 said that there is no difference in the meaning of the regulations of the three institutions, but when in the field, it can be influenced by the journalist’s interpretation process and the existing situation. This interpretation bias shows that an institution with authority cannot monopolize the PoI. However, journalists as individuals will have a different understanding from other individuals. The authentic understanding of journalists in interpreting events can cause irregularities in journalistic practice.

All informants interpret the PoI as a moral responsibility of the profession they are living, understanding that four informants have understood the code of ethics from a philosophical perspective, namely good and bad moral guidelines, which are the basis for someone to act with full awareness (Graham, 2018; Haryatmoko, 2007; Sujoko, 2021). The four informants understand the responsibility to comply with the JCoE as a form of honour from the profession carried out or called by Y2 to maintain the ‘dignity’ of a journalist. Understanding the PoI inherent in their profession as journalists, indirectly, journalists have understood the essence of deontological ethics inherent in the journalistic profession (Bettoni, 2021; Lynch, 2021). The following is an excerpt from an interview that explains the PoI part of the honour of the journalist profession:

“Reporters/journalists must adhere to a code of ethics; why is that? For example, there is no principle of presumption of guilt, and journalists can accuse people arbitrarily through their news. It cannot be like that [...], a good profession, with a good code of ethics, but low salary, the guarantee is big” (Informant Y1).

“This principle is part of my profession as a journalist, and I have to obey it, especially since this ethics is related to a person’s moral character. So, the Code of Ethics is maintained as much as possible, despite

many temptations” (informant Y2).

“I try to comply with that principle because it is not to judge someone, and journalists have no right, no authority to judge someone, and that should not be done by a journalist who understands his profession” (Informant Y3).

“It is a really heavy responsibility of journalists. The first is the responsibility of our profession, but the responsibility of this profession is also related to our legal responsibilities later” (Informant Y4).

Informant Y4 also revealed that the PoI is preventive for the practice of journalists, which, if not implemented properly, will have the potential to construct a reality that deviates from the facts. The impact of this news will be difficult to control even though there is a right of reply mechanism. However, it will not be able to control the impact on the public fully as Mulyana (2014) says that one of the principles of communication is irreversible, that the impact or effect of communication cannot be reversed. The spirit of the PoI is a form of prudence from the Press Council, PWI and AJI. They do not only show professionalism but also the integrity of journalists. However, according to informant Y4, it turns out that in the practice of reporting, there are cases of violations, usually due to accidents or accidents.

Individual journalists’ bias can be caused by the spirit of creativity or the understanding of each individual’s high honour. According to Informant Y1, the authentic understanding of the PoI personally is not a principle that forbids a journalist from suspecting someone is guilty in a legal case or criminality – even though there has been no final legal decision. Meanwhile, informant Y2 chooses to respect someone in a criminal or legal event, understanding that when someone has not been found guilty, he will put forward the Presumption of Guilt Principle so as not to rush to suspect the person is guilty.

Findings regarding the authentic understanding of journalists towards the PoI strengthen the statement of Reese & Shoemaker (2016), which explains that personal/individual has influence at the initial level in a media industry. The understanding and ideology of a media worker will dominantly affect his performance and the media content he produces. Furthermore, this study succeeded in mapping the understanding of four field journalists about the PoI as follows:

**Table 1. The understanding of the PoI by online media journalists**

Collective Understanding
The PoI as a code of ethics attached to the profession aims to maintain the dignity of journalists/journalists.
The PoI is a principle for journalists not to make journalistic products that harm others by judgment or accusation (trial by the press).
The PoI applies to all journalists who work in online and print media because of the nature of the rules that generally bind the journalist profession without distinguishing journalists from online and print media.
Authentic Understanding
A journalist’s moral responsibility is to comply with the PoI. When a journalist intentionally or unintentionally commits a mistake that leads to a trial by the press, he must be held responsible (Y1).
The PoI is not only a moral responsibility dealing with the ethics council/ Press Council. Still, it becomes a legal responsibility when it becomes defamation and slander against someone (Y3).
The PoI is not a prohibition for journalists not to suspect someone is guilty in a criminal incident, but the principle for writing journalistic products (Y1).
Although the PoI is also used for gathering facts, a journalist should not rush to suspect someone guilty because it will create a tendency to corner the sources in the search for news and facts (Y2).



## Application of the Presumption of Innocence by Online Media Journalists

The ideal application of the PoI has been described in the initial sub-discussion, namely juxtaposing the PoI with other principles such as verification, objectivity, mention of identity, following legal diction and legal grammar. However, whether online media journalists can apply the ideal application with all the demands of the current information age becomes a question. This research finds PoI practices in online journalism, from implementation to challenges online media journalists face, are as follows:

First, the application of the PoI by online media journalists is related to the verification principle. The verification principle is the most basic thing in journalistic activities because this is the basis for news and facts conveyed by journalists with a high level of trust/legitimacy (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021; Sujoko, 2022). The verification principle is related to the PoI because when online media journalists do not verify, the news displayed becomes a lie and corners other people (giving accusations to someone). Journalist violates the position of the PoI, either intentionally or unintentionally.

The four journalist informants from online media explained that verification techniques have now developed by adjusting to the 4.0 era. From in-depth interviews with four field informants, several online media journalism verification techniques were obtained to avoid violating the Presumption of Guilt or making fake news which could lead to ethical violations and criminal and civil law offenses. Some of these verification techniques include:

- 1) 1) Utilizing a network of fellow media and journalists to verify a controversial event. As explained by Y1 and Y3 that utilizing networks from media institutions and journalists' networks will make verifying the information they get easier than without networks.
- 2) 2) Utilizing press releases from trusted institutions as a news verification technique. As explained by Y1, Y3, and Y4, trusted institutions such as the KPK, Police, Ministries, and Institutions have high credibility.
- 3) 3) Utilize social media, which can be a news verification tool. However, informant Y4 did not agree with online media journalists who used social media as a news source, let alone used it for verification media. However, three other informants, namely Y1, Y2, and Y3, agreed with the use of social media as a source of news and verification media, but on the condition that the social media account referred to has a good track record, not a robot account. This finding also strengthens the study from Sujoko & Larasati (2018), which explains that social media has interfered with the work of online media journalists.
- 4) 4) Utilizing intuition, carried out by journalists because online media demands must be up to date, so verification is not easy, especially in certain cases, sources for verification are difficult to obtain and have to wait for time. For example, in cases of sexual harassment, it is often difficult to obtain the truth of information.

The second is applying the PoI and objectivity (not mixing facts and opinions). This application received various responses from the informants of this research. Informants, such as informant Y4, determinedly supported the separation of facts and opinions to support the application of the PoI so that news products departed from the facts of an event. The interpretation of the facts obtained cannot be avoided in news writing. As reflected in the following interview excerpts:

“Do not mix facts and opinions when writing. [...] journalists may not express opinions but may interpret facts, interpret such events” (Informant Y4).

The other three informants also applied the interpretation of facts to avoid opinions that caused judgment to someone. However, according to Y1, Y3, and Y4, opinion on an event is inevitable in news production, related to journalists' intentions towards a case. Informant Y1 gave an example of himself when covering a corruption case and writing a news story. Opinions and facts will be mixed. For example, opinions will be realized through diction that never comes from news sources. Informant Y2 also explained that opinions would increasingly

appear to colour the facts when a journalist's ideology conflicts with the crime that occurred. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

You can tell the difference between the writing of a feminist journalist and a man who views journalism as a profession. This difference will appear when they cover, and report incidents of sexual violence committed by men to a woman. A feminist female journalist tends to make very strong accusations. Moreover, the presumption of innocence may have no place for a male journalist. There will be potential for violations when there is a strong personal interest in one's ideology (Informant Y2).

The explanation above also explains that mixing facts and opinions will lead to using bad diction or demeaning someone in the coverage of crimes or crimes. Diction, such as the use of the words "bejad" (very bad behaviour), "garong" (greedy theft), loser, "maling" (theft), obscene, and other dictions with negative connotations, is part of the confusion between facts and opinions. Mukantardjo (2010) dan Sukardi (2010) explain that the use of the word labeling, stigmatization, stamping, and accusations that are not based on facts are part of the ATB violation. However, informants Y2 and Y4 explained that such diction could be due to the personal intentions of journalists and the policies of online media agencies who want to get viral logic and clickbait with economic motives, as Fadillah (2015) dan Denisova (2022) found.

Third, the PoI and revelation of identity. In its application, all informants have the same perception in the revelation of the identity of a suspect. The mention or revelation of identity has many interpretations. Considering the extraordinary crime act, the suspect is a law enforcer or public official and a public figure whose actions impact the public, and the suspect's identity can be revealed. The following are points related revelation of identity the suspect in reporting crimes:

1. Public officials, politicians, leaders of the National Police, and the TNI who commit extraordinary crimes such as genocide, murder, and corruption will be identified – because they work for the public interest, and their actions are detrimental to the public.
2. Public figures such as artists can be identified if their crimes impact many people and they have become public consumption. However, identifying the identity remains with consideration of criminal acts, such as extraordinary crimes.
3. Ordinary people can only be identified if the crime they committed is connected to a group of public officials (politicians, public officials, police, and other public institutions). However, it is still necessary to consider whether to create commotion or disharmony in the community. Apart from these three points, ordinary people's identity is closed in the news.

Fourth, the PoI and the principle of balance (covering both sides). This study found problems in enforcing the PoI in covering both sides. The demands of online media to be updated faster and in real-time often need more time for journalists to covering both sides. If this type of news is packaged as running news, according to all informants, if covering both sides cannot be done, and the news must be uploaded immediately, then the next news can display a balance that has not been shown in the previous news. This study found three things that hindered the application of covering both sides to support the PoI, namely:

- 1) Online media demands to be up to date in news production, hampering the application of cover both sides in news production.
- 2) Resource persons to cover both sides are difficult to contact quickly, whereas, on the other hand, speed is the demand of online media journalists.
- 3) Journalists are not persistent in covering both sides because covering both can be done through other media reports or using trusted social media.

The application of the PoI and covering both sides is a fundamental problem in the practice of journalism. In several studies, field journalists often ignore the application of covering both sides due to the demands of deadlines from the editors and the speed of news updates (Darbo & Skjerdal, 2019; Juditha, 2016; Larsen, 2021; Nurhajati et al., 2018). Clarity of balance (covering both sides) is carried out with confirmation or direct

information from the 'negative' party concerned or from other sources who can provide positive information about someone negative. However, it should be understood that covering both sides is a technique of showing two sides in the news, not the principle of neutrality or impartiality of the media towards a crime or crime case (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021; Şahin, 2021).

Based on the findings regarding the application of the PoI by online media journalists and the literal interpretation of the JCoE document from of the Press Council, PWI, and AJI, this research succeeded in conceptualizing the trial by the press avoidance model with the application of the PoI juxtaposed with other journalistic principles. The model is as displayed below:



Figure 1. Model of Avoiding Trial by The Press

## CONCLUSION

This research provides several conclusions: First, the PoI is the principle to prevent and avoid any trial by the press against a suspect in a crime/criminal event. The PoI does not stand alone but has relations with other principles such as a revelation of identity, verification, fairness by covering both sides, objectivity, and following the judge's decision/legal grammar. Second, journalists have a collective understanding of the PoI, which refers to the interpretation of the PoI in the JCoE from the Press Council, PWI, and AJI. However, journalists also have an authentic understanding of the PoI based on their personalities. Third, the demands for up-to-date news production (the logic of market competition) from online media make it difficult for journalists to apply the PoI due to difficulties verifying and covering both sides. The application of covering both sides in one news content will hinder the performance of online media journalists. Personal interest affects the application of the PoI and objectivity in news production, so it has implications for judgmental dictions with bad notations. Journalists need to gain more understanding of legal grammar to ensure the application of the PoI in news production. Then, the avoid trial by the press model produced by this research can guide journalists and editors in applying the PoI in online journalism practices.

Recommendations for further research are to identify indications of violations of the PoI (revelation of identity, critical opinion/diction, legal grammatical errors, covering both sides) in online media news content through qualitative content analysis. Further research can also explore the personal interest of female journalists in cases of sexual harassment/violence in applying the PoI with a phenomenological approach framework analysis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia for providing grant funds for Master Thesis Research (PTM) with contract number 1071.4/UN10.C10/TU/2022. We also declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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