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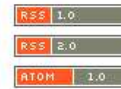## NOTIFICATIONS

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Navigating Ethics and Empathy in Disaster Photojournalism in Indonesia

Abstract

This study is based on the scholars' critique of the Indonesian media reporting on disaster for focusing on vulnerable groups' suffering, sadness, and grief. The absence of comprehensive journalistic ethical guidelines for disaster published photographs in Indonesia, might contribute to the recurring choice and publication of such images in Indonesian print newspapers. Examining major disasters, including the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires, this research provides critical evidence for re-evaluating the Indonesian journalist's codes of ethics, especially concerning the published photographs of disaster victims. Methodologically, this study draws on interviews with six Indonesian journalists and two media practitioners, exploring the ethical practices and dilemmas in photojournalism with a specific emphasis on disaster reporting in Indonesian print newspapers. The transcripts were analysed thematically, emphasising the repeating ideas or patterns present in the text. It also includes an analysis of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption coverage in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The study highlights the complex balance between ensuring truthful reporting and honouring the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It advocates for a nuanced method in disaster coverage that harmonizes journalistic integrity with a compassionate portrayal of victims. This research contributes to the discourse on ethical disaster photojournalism and has significant implications for policy development, journalist training programs, and the revision of journalistic codes of ethics, promoting a more empathetic and responsible approach in the field.

Keywords: Indonesian media, visual ethics, photojournalism, disaster journalism, journalism practice

INTRODUCTION

The media, including print newspapers, extensively covers disasters due to their significant news value, which impacts both human lives and the environment. These media play a crucial role in providing information to readers about the events occurring in a disaster-stricken area and the necessary actions that affected individuals should take. However, unlike

in Japan and Australia, Indonesian media present a distinct representation of disaster by vividly depicting the visible suffering of victims. This portrayal, focusing on moments of despair, pain, and vulnerability, is found to prioritize sensationalism over sensitivity, leading to ethical dilemmas concerning the victims' right to privacy and the exploitation of their trauma for commercial gain (Irawanto, 2018; Lampito, 2015; Arif, 2010; Noviani, 2009; Silva and Eldridge 2020).

The commercial nature of media organizations is evident in disaster reporting. The intense competition among news outlets to be the first on the scene during crises highlights this commercial drive in the industry (Anis, 2022). Such a competitive drive can influence the nature of disaster reporting, potentially exacerbating the focus on sensationalism and the commercialization of human suffering. Griffin (2010) and Ali (2014) have noted that photographs, particularly those depicting shocking events or mass destruction, possess a unique capacity to engage a global audience. This remarkable ability to grab attention also renders these graphic images highly marketable, attracting more readers and viewers, which in turn boosts their commercial value for media outlets. Building on this, Hoijer (2004, p. 516) contends that media reporting on distant suffering is not just about informing the public. It can also be driven by more cynical commercial interests, where media entities commodify human tragedies for sale in a global marketplace. This problem, coupled with the country's frequent encounters with disasters, means that it's crucial to evaluate the ethical implications of disaster photography in Indonesia.

Sensationalism in disaster reporting is often closely linked to the level of professionalism in journalism. In Indonesia, the Journalists' Code of Ethics provides broad guidelines for news photographs publication, as seen in Article No. 4, which advises against creating false, slanderous, cruel, and filthy news reports, and describes 'sadistic' behavior as characterized by cruelty and a lack of sympathy (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 38). Additionally, Article 9 emphasizes the need to uphold the privacy of news sources, barring conflicts with public interest, and defines "private life" as aspects of an individual's life not directly connected to public matters (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 40-41). Despite these guidelines, there is a lack of specificity and enforceability, particularly in the context of published photograph of the disaster's victims, leading to potential violations of rights and dignity.

Photojournalists and editors are at the forefront of these ethical considerations, embodying the principles of both framing theory and gatekeeping theory. They are responsible for determining what to capture, how to frame it, and ultimately, what to publish, carrying a significant weight in shaping public perception and discourse. Framing theory suggests that the

way information is presented (or 'framed') by the media can influence how it is understood and interpreted by audiences. Framing, as explained by Entman (1993, p. 55), describes a selecting process that "call[s] attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions." Photojournalists and editors play a crucial role in this process, making deliberate choices about which aspects of a story to emphasize or omit, thus framing the audience's understanding of the event.

Seelig (2001) characterizes the photo editor as 'the visual elite,' underscoring their important role in determining the visual narrative of news. This perspective aligns with the gatekeeping theory, as expounded by Shoemaker and Vos (2009). They describe how editors function as gatekeepers, crucially determining what information is published and what is omitted. These gatekeepers in charge in evaluating a wide range of stories and images, selecting those that reach the public based on criteria such as newsworthiness, ethical considerations, and organizational policy. Together with framing theory, gatekeeping theory, as elaborated by Shoemaker and Vos, underscores the significant influence of photojournalists and editors in crafting the media landscape and, consequently, influencing the public's perception and response to news events.

Studies shows that the selection images for publication is close related to the concept of newsworthiness, which is defined by several factors that determine whether a story is worthy of being reported (Bednarek and Caple 2017). Galtung and Ruge (1965) propose a set of criteria that journalists often use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a story, which includes criteria such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, human interest, impact, prominence, and novelty. Bednarek and Caple (2016, pp. 447–448) detail how news values in visual journalism are constructed through elements like such as eliteness, impact, novelty, personalization, consonance, and aesthetic appeal, among others. Each news value is linked with key devices in image-making: content elements like the presence of high-status individuals or scenes of destruction, and camera techniques such as angles and framing that convey significance or emotional resonance. For instance, eliteness is conveyed through images of recognizable figures or symbols of authority, while impact is highlighted by capturing the significant effects of events, such as destruction or emotional aftermath. This complex interplay of content and technique in visual storytelling shapes the news value and the audience's perception of a story.

While the broad ethical challenges in photojournalism, including staging, accuracy, editing, and the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI), are increasingly scrutinized, this study narrows its focus to the ethics of portraying victims in disaster imagery within Indonesian print newspaper. With Scopus data indicating limited scholarly attention to disaster

photojournalism ethics in Indonesian newspapers, this research aims to fill this gap and make a significant scholarly contribution to the field. It investigates photojournalism ethics as applied to disaster reportage in Indonesian print newspapers. Specifically, the study identifies the norms and regulations followed by news photographers, highlight the most significant professional ethical issues they encounter in capturing and selecting images of disaster victims. In addition, the study sought to stimulate discourse regarding the necessity of regulating the ethical standards of photojournalism.

To address these aims, the study poses the following research questions. First, what ethical dilemmas do Indonesian photojournalists and editors face in portraying disaster victims in print newspapers, particularly with regard to respecting victims' rights and dignity? Second, how do Indonesia's Journalists' Code of Ethics influence photojournalists during disaster coverage, and how effective are these codes in guiding ethical practices in the depiction of victims in print newspapers?

In the following section, the paper provides an overview of the research methodology used. It then delves into three main themes that were identified from the interview transcripts: the sensationalism often associated with disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and the ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism. The paper concludes up by summarising the main findings, offering suggestions to tackle the identified challenges, and suggesting areas for further research.

METHODS

This study employs in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed information from six Indonesian journalists (reporter, photojournalist, and editors) from both national and local newspapers in three cities: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Riau. Additionally, two Indonesian media practitioners from Dewan Pers and the Indonesian Ministry of Communication are included in this research. Conducted in July – August 2018, these interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into journalistic experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, particularly in the context of disaster reporting. The focus was on how print newspapers in Indonesia report disasters and adhere to journalistic ethics and professionalism. This included a specific examination of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The selection of journalist participants was based on their experience in covering at least one major Indonesian disaster event, ensuring a knowledgeable and relevant group of respondents. Major disasters discussed included the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra

Forest fires. These discussions provided a platform to explore the ethical considerations and practices influencing journalists' decision-making processes in disaster reporting.

For the analytical approach, this research employs thematic analysis to examine the transcripts of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and highlighting recurrent ideas or patterns within the text. The theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The study systematically organizes these patterns into emerging themes and further analyse and interpret them through the lens of the gatekeeping process, newsworthiness, and ethical considerations in journalism. By doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in disaster reporting in Indonesia. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive and detailed insight into the intricate complexities and challenges specific to disaster reporting in Indonesia.

Thematic analysis is selected for its notable advantage of effectively summarising key features of a substantial amount of data. In addition, it facilitates the identification of similarities and differences across the data set and can bring out recurrent themes and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. To enhance the primary data collected from interviews, this research also incorporates relevant secondary sources, including books and articles, to enrich the analysis.

DISCUSSION

This section discussed three main themes derived from the interview. These themes include the the issue of sensationalism in disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism.

The Sensationalism of Disaster Reporting in Indonesia

This section discusses three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption as featured in the national and local newspapers, *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, analyzing the responses of research participants to these images. These photographs exemplify the ethical challenges inherent in disaster coverage, which holds significant news value due to its profound effects on human lives. A representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication has highlighted the dilemma that, while dramatic images might capture public

attention and boost newspaper sales, they also risk crossing into sensationalism and exploiting the suffering of victims. He emphasized the potential for a 'double disaster,' with his statement: "The first disaster is the real, physical one. The second disaster is born from the way it is reported, leading to double the trauma and sorrow. This is what we must avoid; this is the essence of journalistic ethics."

Echoing her sentiment, a chief editor from a local Yogyakarta newspaper sheds light on the motivations behind sensationalist disaster reporting in Indonesian media. He points out that the frequent use of dramatic, emotionally charged images might be motivated by commercial interests aimed at sustaining newspaper sales. Meanwhile, the depiction of suffering in photographs remains a controversial topic within journalism globally (Santos Silva & Eldridge 2020, Arif 2010). Some journalists defend such imagery as a truthful representation of the harsh consequences and a means to humanize the event. However, critics argue these images can sensationalize tragedy, harm those depicted, and unnecessarily disturb readers.

In an interview, a local journalist from Riau conveys the importance of photographs in local newspapers. He states, "Photos are an important part of the newspaper. At *Riau Pos*, there's always a question and discussion about 'what's the photo of the day?". This highlights how photographs are essential elements that define the quality and appeal of the publication. Further elaborating on the competitive aspect of the newspaper market, he notes:

> "We sell newspapers if our product is good, otherwise it won't sell. Meanwhile, we have competitors like *Tribun Haluan Riau* and others in this region. If we are selling and our goods aren't good, how will people want to buy? This means competition with other newspapers."

These insights convey that in the competitive newspaper market, visually compelling and well-presented photographs are crucial for attracting readers and distinguishing the publication from its competitors. These images are not just decorative; they are fundamental to the newspaper's identity and success, underlining the critical role of visual elements in modern journalism and the strategic considerations in selecting and featuring photographs in daily publications.

This ethical conflict is particularly evident in images that vividly capture victim distress, contributing to a trend towards traumatic reporting. Prominent disasters like the 2004 Aceh tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake and 2010 Mt Merapi eruption have seen such reporting styles, which, while aiming to reflect the emotional and physical toll of these events, also risk impacting the audience's perception and compromising the dignity of those depicted.

The media's role in fundraising efforts through disaster photography adds another layer to the discussion. In an interview, a chief-editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) suggests that by

showing the real situation, a photo can actually become a means to extend a hand to gather support and aid for disaster victims. However, he emphasizes the importance of handling such photographs with sensitivity. *KR* frequently dedicates entire pages to showcasing photographs related to donations. Although this approach has practical benefits, it has been subject to scholarly criticism. Concerns primarily revolve around the potential compromise of journalistic integrity and the risk of exploiting victim suffering for the purpose of aid (Masduki 2007). These criticisms highlight the necessity for a thorough evaluation of both the ethical ramifications and the practical effectiveness of using disaster photography in media-led charitable endeavours.

The media's portrayal of the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption offers more evidence of the distressing imagery depicting the disasters in Indonesia. A front-page photo in the Indonesian national daily, *Kompas*, from October 6, 2010, as shown in figure 1, presents a powerful visual narrative: a grieving woman, her face etched with ash and tears, embodies the profound sadness and helplessness prevalent among the residents of Yogyakarta during the eruption. Accompanying this image was the impactful headline 'Merapi Peras Air Mata,' which can be directly translated as 'Merapi Squeezes Tears.' This headline not only reflects the essence of the image, but also effectively communicates the deep psychological distress caused by the event.

Figure 1. Photo of a woman's victims in tears. *Kompas* on 6 October 2010

In Indonesia, the portrayal of an individual's profound sadness or suffering, often captured in close-up shots, does not require consent. This reflects an alarming gap in ethical standards, potentially infringing on the privacy and dignity of those affected. Regarding

privacy and consent, a representative of the Indonesian Ministry of Communication notes that there is a lack of specific regulations in Indonesia protecting the privacy of disaster victims in media reports. He mentioned in the interview:

> 'Socially speaking, protection is a right everyone deserves, as happiness and comfort in life come from being respected by others. We desire privacy; not everything should be exposed. However, the issue lies in the regulation—or lack thereof—regarding the protection of personal data. As of now, there is no specific regulation in place.

This lack of specific regulations creates a significant challenge, as images of dead bodies, suffering individuals, and other sensitive content can circulate widely without the consent of the individuals or their families. He stresses the importance of respecting the privacy and dignity of disaster victims, pointing out that ethical considerations should guide the publication of such images.

While some may view the photograph of the woman in tears as a graphic portrayal of personal tragedy, the photo editor at *Kompas* offers a different perspective. The photo was chosen for its powerful portrayal of the emotional impact of the disaster, emphasizing the human aspect rather than any sensationalism. The *Kompas* photo editor, explains this decision, stating, "We had other photos, like people being rushed to ambulances with severely burnt legs. However, we couldn't publish those due to ethical constraints." This approach underscores the ethical considerations that guide their editorial decisions. A local journalist also commended the photo's beauty, highlighting its ability to capture a profound human response to the catastrophe. Further emphasizing its impact, this photograph was selected as the winner of a prestigious Merapi photo competition, judged by a professional photographer. Its selection reflects more than just technical skill; the photograph's ability to evoke strong emotions testifies to its power. It transcends mere moment capturing, delving into the depths of human experience. This range of interpretations highlights the subjective nature of photojournalism and the fine line between evoking empathy and crossing into sensationalism.

Another disaster photograph published in the local daily *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on 28 October 2010 (figure 2) depicted rescue professionals transporting a deceased body, with just one hand visible, symbolising a life that has been tragically ended.

Figure 2. *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 28 October 2010

Another image, resembling the previous one, was published in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010. It portrayed a deceased individual enclosed in a body bag containing ashes, with just their hands showing.

Figure 3. in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010.

The media coverage of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in Indonesia features several distressing photos of the victims, showcased in both printed and visual media formats.   The three photos above (figure 1 – 3) effectively communicate a strong emotional message.

The chief editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) contributes to the discussion of publishing photographs of dead bodies in disaster reporting. He acknowledges the need for such images in the early stages of a disaster to accurately depict the severity and invoke the needed response. Yet, as the situation evolves, he emphasizes shifting the narrative towards recovery and community rebuilding, highlighting resilience. A journalist colleague at *KR* explains their internal policy further, stating in an interview: "Indeed, the most respectful photo is the one that employs symbolism. Through the lens of semiotics in photography, we represent the deceased with a single part – perhaps a hand or a leg. This approach stems from our deep empathy for the victims." This method, employing symbolic imagery such as the depiction of just a hand, becomes a common practice to convey the tragedy's gravity while respecting the deceased and their families.

In responds to the depiction of dead bodies and suffering in disaster reporting, a representative from AJI address these concerns in their interviews. Manan highlights that while there isn't a specific prohibition against publishing such images in the Journalistic Code of Ethics, many media outlets, especially those in national newspaper with a deeper understanding of ethical journalism, choose not to display exploitative content, compared to the local newspapers. He emphasizes the ethical dilemma and the lack of specific privacy protections in the AJI code. Manan also critiques the tendency towards sensationalism and the generalization in disaster victim portrayal, advocating for factual, balanced, and dignified reporting. In addition, a representative from Dewan Pers concurs on the need for sensitivity and ethical integrity, pointing out during the interview, "When media are regulated to publish photos of disaster victims, the most important thing to maintain is to not display sadism/graphic, not to show traumatic effects on the victims or the community." This statement underscores the less defined guidelines for disaster photojournalism and the necessity for journalists to navigate these ethical complexities with empathy and professionalism. Both stress that upholding ethical standards, respecting victim dignity, and accurately depicting events are paramount in maintaining credibility and integrity in Indonesian disaster journalism.

Adding to the discourse, a reporter from *Kompas* shared his perspective on the responsible depiction of disaster victims. He emphasizes personal and editorial discretion in the selection of images, striving to balance the truthful depiction of events with respect for the victims' dignity and the potential impact on readers. He contrasts the Indonesian approach with the more restrained Japanese media, highlighting the need for a shift towards responsible journalism that educates and informs without sensationalizing suffering. Together, these insights underscore the ethical complexities and responsibilities inherent in disaster

photojournalism, advocating for standards that respect human dignity while informing the public.

A photo editor of *Kompas* describes *Kompas*'s approach to photojournalism in disaster scenarios, emphasizing their internal guidelines and ethical considerations. He notes that while there are no absolute prohibitions against showing dead bodies, *Kompas* strives to avoid such images unless they are crucial for understanding the story, such as in the case of mass burials during the Aceh tsunami. The policy generally discourages the display of dead bodies, blood, violence, and anything that might be considered sensationalist or disrespectful. He explains that even when such images are available, the decision to publish them is made with caution and sensitivity towards the impact on readers and the dignity of the victims. He stresses that photographs should contribute to public education and awareness, not just serve as a means to attract readership. The goal is to prompt a compassionate and constructive response from the public, rather than simply to shock or entertain.

The interview with a local photojournalist from *Riau Pos* reveals a cautious approach towards the portrayal of dead bodies, typically avoiding such images unless they are crucial for conveying the magnitude of the disaster. He clarifies, "As long as a photo does not display a body that is dismembered or bloody, I think it's okay." His main idea revolves around balancing ethical journalism with the compelling need to inform the public about disasters, underlining that "black and white can cover up the gruesomeness of a situation, creating a sorrowful rather than a sadistic effect." He advocates for sensitivity in portraying victims, emphasizing the importance of depicting the disaster's impact in a way that is both truthful and respectful. Echoing this sentiment, he states, "When those bodies have been buried in a mass grave, only then is it appropriate to publish the photo," reflecting the ongoing ethical considerations and challenges that journalists face in selecting and publishing photographs of disaster victims. This underscores the need for discretion, empathy, and a commitment to ethical reporting.

Enhancing this narrative, a representative from the Ministry of Communication highlights the crucial role of media literacy and education among journalists and the public in navigating these ethical complexities. Understanding the ethical implications and responsibilities in disaster reporting is vital for media professionals and consumers alike, fostering a discourse that is not only informative but also respectful and constructive. This call for increased media literacy underscores the need for a conscientious approach to disaster journalism, one that balances the public's right to information with the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It reflects a growing awareness of the impact of media

representation on public perception and the ethical responsibility of journalists in shaping this narrative.

The Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs

The 'Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs' section delves into the intricate challenges faced by photojournalists like Regina Safri (*Antara*), Surya Lesmana (*KR*), and Ahmad Arif (*Kompas*) in disaster reporting. This section explores their complex decision-making process in documenting disasters, where they must balance the responsibility of providing accurate information against their ethical obligation to respect individual dignity and privacy in crisis situations. These journalists' narratives illuminate the profound impact of their decisions on both the public narrative and their personal emotional well-being. Their experiences echo the sentiments expressed in the previous subsection, where the ethical challenges in capturing and displaying graphic images from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption were analyzed. Such photographs, while having significant news value and profound effects on human lives, present a moral quandary, often leading to a 'double disaster' as articulated by a representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication. This representative highlighted the delicate balance needed between capturing public attention and avoiding sensationalism that exploits victims' suffering. Additionally, insights from other media professionals underscore the crucial role of ethical considerations in photojournalism, particularly in the context of disaster reporting.

Dispatched to the epicentre of the devastating 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, *Antara* News Agency's female photojournalist, Regina Safri, witnessed the pain and grief of the victims, blurring the distinction between her professional role as a journalist and the first responders. The chaotic image of a father reuniting with his child, among the shouts of *'Allahu Akbar,'* presented an opportunity to capture an impactful shot. However, it was precisely this intense emotional impact that made Regina hesitate; her feelings prevented her from mechanically capturing the moment with her camera. The moment that remained untaken—the opportunity to comfort by providing mineral water—shows both a human aspect of journalism and the photojournalist's own ethical choice.

During the interview, she explained that she photographed a mother laying on the ground with her two boys surrounding her and comforting her. She captured numerous images of the earthquake devastation as well. She then quickly placed her camera in her bag. She wanted to show her empathy for the victims. Her actions demonstrate a shared humanity between the journalist and those affected by the earthquake. Empathy allows journalists to tell

stories with compassion, ensuring that the narrative is dignified rather than invasive or sensationalist.

However, in the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, Indonesian media, might driven by commercial interests, published images of blackened corpses and destruction. Ahmad Arif, of *Kompas*, reflected on the struggle to portray disaster without causing viewer distress (Arif, 2010). Similarly, Finnish media, covering the South Asian earthquake and tsunami, faced ethical decisions about displaying death, particularly when it involved local victims (Maenpaa 2022, p.2241). These cases illustrate how personal ethics of journalists can clash with institutional priorities.

He narrated in his book that the task of visual and print journalists to portray a horrific disaster without causing psychological distress to the readers/viewers is a hard one (Arif, 2010). According to Arif, photographing and publishing images of the victims' suffering has the potential to grab the attention and sympathy of readers, making it newsworthy. This aligns with Pantti's (2012) assertion that rather of providing explanations or statistics, showing graphic images of human suffering has been the most effective approach to get people to pay attention to the issue at hand. However, Arif's personal ethical values prevent him from sending the photographs of the Tsunami victims' grief and the dead body to the *Kompas* photo editor. Arif expressed fear pertaining the physiological effects on both the audience and the subjects of such coverage upon viewing the photographs depicting the victims' mourning and corpses.

The importance of personal connections in journalistic decision-making is highlighted by a *KR* photojournalist who, even after capturing a photograph of a deceased individual during a Yogyakarta flood, chose not to submit the image out of consideration for the victim's family and the strong ties within the local community. However, his efforts were in vain as *KR* published a similar image from a photo agency. This led to a discussion with the editor about avoiding such images in future coverage, highlighting potential differences in ethical perspectives between editors and photojournalists.

In navigating these ethical dilemmas, journalists like Safri, Lesmana and Arif confront a fundamental question: How can they effectively portray the victims in a way that is both informative and empathetic, while also maintaining the respect and dignity, avoiding sensationalism? Their experiences and decisions shed light on the intricate balance between the obligation to provide information and the duty to show empathy, a balance that reminds to be central to the ethical dilemma faced by journalists.

This complex ethical dilemma highlights the conflicting demands of photojournalism: the need to provide compelling, newsworthy content while respecting the emotional and ethical

boundaries of those affected by tragedy. These case studies demonstrate that the decision-making process in such circumstances goes beyond journalistic regulations. It requires a thoughtful examination of personal ethics and consideration of the societal impact of their work. The actions of Safri, Lesmana, and Arif, amidst these challenging circumstances, underscore the ongoing struggle within the field of journalism to find the right balance between professional responsibility and human sensitivity.

The ethical challenges encountered by photojournalists in disaster zones are intricate and diverse, demanding an in-depth knowledge of journalistic principles and human empathy. The decisions made by Safri, Lesmana, and Arif in the face of these dilemmas not only shape their narratives but also reflect broader questions about the role of media in society and the responsibility of journalists to their subjects and audience. As the media landscape continues to evolve, the experiences of these journalists provide valuable lessons and insights into the ethical considerations that are essential for responsible and sensitive reporting in a rapidly changing industry.

Ethics of Disaster Imagery in Indonesian Journalism

Indonesian journalists generally adhere to the Kode Etik Jurnalistik (KEJ or Journalist Code of Ethics) established by Dewan Pers for their reporting activities. Formed in 1999 ratified by the Press Council in 2006, the KEJ provides a fundamental ethical framework, consisting of eleven articles, each with its own interpretation. For more comprehensive and in-depth guidance, the Aliansi Jurnalis Indonesia (AJI) provides a Code of Conduct, comprising 57 articles. Abdul Manan from AJI highlighted that the Journalistic Code of Ethics, along with the AJI Code of Conduct, serves as the primary reference for journalists, each with varied interpretations and implementations in the field. Adding to this, Ratna Komala from Dewan Pers underscores the significance of these differences in interpretation, which can vary significantly across different media platforms, affecting the consistency and application of the ethical guidelines. This variability points to the nuanced and contextual nature of ethical journalism, especially in the sensitive area of disaster reporting.

In addition, different media outlets have their own set of regulations that govern how they approach journalism. These regulations may not always be written; some are communicated verbally during meetings. Journalists tend to be familiar with the regulations set by their media institution, which they regularly incorporate into their daily practices. For instance, in an interview, a journalist from *Kompas* newspaper expressed awareness of the types of disaster event photographs likely to be rejected or preferred by their editor.

Related to photojournalism, in 1992, Pewarta Foto Indonesia (PFI, Indonesian Photojournalists) was established. Photojournalism defined as "reporting visual information via various media" (Newton 2001, p.26). PFI formed its Code of Ethics in 2007, consisting of 14 articles. PFI Code of Ethics states that Indonesian photojournalists are dedicated to delivering truthful and accountable visual information, placing public interest at the forefront and upholding professional autonomy while adhering to ethical guidelines. This includes respecting copyright and privacy, refraining from manipulations, and refusing any kind of bribery. They are committed to upholding ethical reporting standards, preserving the dignity of victims, and seeking guidance from advisory bodies on ethical considerations.

In the context of Indonesian disaster reporting, as previously outlined, a critical concern emerges from the tendency towards sensationalism, where both local and national newspapers frequently emphasize the suffering of victims. This practice not only raises significant ethical questions regarding the protection of victims' privacy but also calls into question the professionalism of journalists handling such sensitive content. Moreover, this addresses the issue of whether these concerns are adequately addressed within the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Furthermore, scholars argue that such sensationalist reporting can contribute to 'compassion fatigue' among the public (Arif 2010). Continual exposure to graphic and distressing images may desensitize viewers, diminishing their capacity for empathy and their willingness to engage with the issues at hand. This phenomenon not only impacts the audience's emotional response but also raises questions about the long-term effectiveness of such reporting strategies in fostering a constructive and compassionate public discourse around disasters.

In light of these considerations, one important improvement that could be made to the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics or Conduct is the incorporation of explicit criteria for disaster reporting. This would include specific guidelines pertaining to the selection and use of photographs in newspapers. For instance, the code should address questions such as: What type of images are considered ethical? How should consent be obtained and documented? And how can the impact on victims, families, and the wider public be mitigated?

By revising the Code of Ethics to include these considerations, Indonesian journalism can better respect the dignity of individuals while still informing the public. This not only enhances the ethical standing of the journalism profession in Indonesia but also ensures that the victims and their families are treated with the respect and sensitivity they deserve.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the ethical challenges Indonesian photojournalists encounter in disaster reporting, especially in depicting pain and suffering in print media. It uncovers a conflict between striving for accurate journalism and the temptation of sensationalism, a practice that could compromise the privacy and dignity of those affected by disasters. The research included interviews with media professionals, revealing diverse viewpoints. A photo editor noted that their choice of photographs, although deemed the most respectful among available options, nevertheless prompts concerns regarding their influence on public perception and respect for the victims' dignity.

The findings also show that the existing Journalists' Code of Ethics in Indonesia offers only general guidelines, lacking specificity for disaster coverage. This lack of detailed guidance necessitates clearer and more comprehensive ethical standards tailored to the unique challenges of disaster photojournalism. The study suggests a need for enhanced journalist training and a re-evaluation of journalistic codes of ethics, aiming for a more empathetic and responsible approach in disaster photojournalism.

The implications of this research are significant for the field of journalism, particularly in Indonesia. It highlights the need for media organizations and regulatory bodies to re-examine and update their ethical codes to address the specific challenges of disaster reporting. This includes providing clear guidelines on the portrayal of suffering and ensuring that journalists are equipped with the necessary skills and ethical understanding to navigate these complex scenarios. The study also underscores the importance of fostering media literacy among the public, enhancing their understanding of journalistic practices and encouraging a critical consumption of news.

This paper highlights a range of areas for future research. These include observational studies and direct involvement in editorial decision-making processes to gain richer insights into how photographs are chosen for publication. Additionally, given the rapid developments in AI, exploring its ethical ramifications in disaster photojournalism becomes increasingly pertinent.

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Formulir Review Jurnal Kawistara

(DIISI OLEH REVIEWER)

Mohon dijawab beberapa pertanyaan dan berikan komentar sesuai dengan kriteria penilaian artikel. (Tanda *, Wajib diisi)

Untuk beberapa pertanyaan di bawah, silahkan diberikan isian sudah/belum di kotak yang telah disediakan jika sudah memenuhi.

Kriteria	Sudah/ Belum
Apakah judul artikel ini sudah tepat?	Sudah
Apakah abstrak sudah tepat merefleksikan konten?	Sudah
Apakah tujuan penelitian sudah dicantumkan dengan jelas?	Sudah
Apakah manfaat penelitian sudah dicantumkan dengan jelas?	Sudah
Apakah tesis utama sudah diutarakan dengan tepat?	Sudah
Apakah penulisan artikel sudah ringkas dan menarik?	Sudah
Apakah kesimpulan artikel sudah akurat dan mendukung konten?	Sudah
Apakah penulisan daftar pustaka sudah dicantumkan semua yang dikutip?	Sudah

Mohon untuk diberikan penilaian sesuai dengan poin-poin penilaian berikut:

1. Originality: Keaslian dan kebaruan dari artikel apakah sudah memenuhi?*

Sudah ditunjukkan

2. Implikasi: Apakah artikel telah mengeksplorasi analisis secara kritis dan konstruktif dari materi ?*

Jelas implikasi dalam diskusi terkait etika jurnalisme

3. Tinjauan pustaka: Apakah artikel sudah memadai untuk penggunaan literatur yang relevan dan sudah menjelaskan tinjauan literatur secara jelas? (Mohon untuk menunjukkan jika ada sumber referensi tertentu dari literatur relevan yang harus dimasukkan)*

Sudah cukup kaya

4. Metode: Apakah di dalam metode telah diuraikan dan dijelaskan secara jelas dan tepat ?*

Jelas

5. Komentar dan Saran: *

Beberapa contoh foto yang dianlisasi dalma paper ini, termasuk hasil wawancara dari para jurnalisasnya, menunjukkan bahwa mereka berusaha menahan diri untuk tidak menerbitkan foto yang grafis eskplisit gambar korban. Sebaliknya para jurnalis memolih untuk menampilkan foto-foto yang bersifat simbolis. Sepertinya contoh-contoh tidak menunjukkan bahwa sebenarnya para jurnalis sdh mempunyai kesadaran tentang etika jurnalisme yang dimaksud. Apakah ini tidak bertentangan dengan klaim penulis bahwa ada masalah tentang sensasionalisasi media dalam foto jurnalisme? Ataua ada evident lain bahwa ini adalah masalah yang akut di kalangan jurnalis? Silakan jelaskan beberap concern ini di tulisan!

6. Hasil Review (Cukup berikan tanda X di kolom sebelah kanan)*:

Rekomendasi	Hasil Review
a. Accept Submission	
b. Revisions Required	V
c. Resubmit for Review	
d. Decline Submission	

7. Skor penilaian (Berikan tanda X di salah satu kolom)

Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Very Good

*NB: Mohon file artikel yang direview juga diberikan komentar di file Ms. Word untuk disampaikan kepada penulis langsung.

Navigating Ethics and Empathy in Disaster Photojournalism in Indonesia

Abstract

This study is based on the scholars' critique of the Indonesian media reporting on disaster for focusing on vulnerable groups' suffering, sadness, and grief. The absence of comprehensive journalistic ethical guidelines for disaster published photographs in Indonesia, might contribute to the recurring choice and publication of such images in Indonesian print newspapers. Examining major disasters, including the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires, this research provides critical evidence for re-evaluating the Indonesian journalist's codes of ethics, especially concerning the published photographs of disaster victims. Methodologically, this study draws on interviews with six Indonesian journalists and two media practitioners, exploring the ethical practices and dilemmas in photojournalism with a specific emphasis on disaster reporting in Indonesian print newspapers. The transcripts were analysed thematically, emphasising the repeating ideas or patterns present in the text. It also includes an analysis of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption coverage in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The study highlights the complex balance between ensuring truthful reporting and honouring the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It advocates for a nuanced method in disaster coverage that harmonizes journalistic integrity with a compassionate portrayal of victims. This research contributes to the discourse on ethical disaster photojournalism and has significant implications for policy development, journalist training programs, and the revision of journalistic codes of ethics, promoting a more empathetic and responsible approach in the field.

Keywords: Indonesian media, visual ethics, photojournalism, disaster journalism, journalism practice

INTRODUCTION

The media, including print newspapers, extensively covers disasters due to their significant news value, which impacts both human lives and the environment. These media play a crucial role in providing information to readers about the events occurring in a disaster-stricken area and the necessary actions that affected individuals should take. However, unlike in Japan and Australia, Indonesian media present a distinct representation of disaster by vividly depicting the visible suffering of victims. This portrayal, focusing on moments of despair, pain, and vulnerability, is found to prioritize sensationalism over sensitivity, leading to ethical dilemmas concerning the victims' right to privacy and the exploitation of their trauma for commercial gain (Irawanto, 2018; Lampito, 2015; Arif, 2010; Noviani, 2009; Silva and Eldridge 2020).

The commercial nature of media organizations is evident in disaster reporting. The intense competition among news outlets to be the first on the scene during crises highlights this commercial drive in the industry (Anis, 2022). Such a competitive drive can influence the nature of disaster reporting, potentially exacerbating the focus on sensationalism and the commercialization of human suffering. Griffin (2010) and Ali (2014) have noted that photographs, particularly those depicting shocking events or mass destruction, possess a unique capacity to engage a global audience. This remarkable ability to grab attention also renders these graphic images highly marketable, attracting more readers and viewers, which in turn boosts their commercial value for media outlets. Building on this, Hoijer (2004, p. 516) contends that media reporting on distant suffering is not just about informing the public. It can also be driven by more cynical commercial interests, where media entities commodify human tragedies for sale in a global marketplace. This problem, coupled with the country's frequent encounters with disasters, means that it's crucial to evaluate the ethical implications of disaster photography in Indonesia.

Sensationalism in disaster reporting is often closely linked to the level of professionalism in journalism. In Indonesia, the Journalists' Code of Ethics provides broad guidelines for news photographs publication, as seen in Article No. 4, which advises against creating false, slanderous, cruel, and filthy news reports, and describes 'sadistic' behavior as characterized by cruelty and a lack of sympathy (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 38). Additionally, Article 9 emphasizes the need to uphold the privacy of news sources, barring conflicts with public interest, and defines "private life" as aspects of an individual's life not directly connected to public matters (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 40-41). Despite these guidelines, there is a

lack of specificity and enforceability, particularly in the context of published photograph of the disaster's victims, leading to potential violations of rights and dignity.

Photojournalists and editors are at the forefront of these ethical considerations, embodying the principles of both framing theory and gatekeeping theory. They are responsible for determining what to capture, how to frame it, and ultimately, what to publish, carrying a significant weight in shaping public perception and discourse. Framing theory suggests that the way information is presented (or 'framed') by the media can influence how it is understood and interpreted by audiences. Framing, as explained by Entman (1993, p. 55), describes a selecting process that "call[s] attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions." Photojournalists and editors play a crucial role in this process, making deliberate choices about which aspects of a story to emphasize or omit, thus framing the audience's understanding of the event.

Seelig (2001) characterizes the photo editor as 'the visual elite,' underscoring their important role in determining the visual narrative of news. This perspective aligns with the gatekeeping theory, as expounded by Shoemaker and Vos (2009). They describe how editors function as gatekeepers, crucially determining what information is published and what is omitted. These gatekeepers in charge in evaluating a wide range of stories and images, selecting those that reach the public based on criteria such as newsworthiness, ethical considerations, and organizational policy. Together with framing theory, gatekeeping theory, as elaborated by Shoemaker and Vos, underscores the significant influence of photojournalists and editors in crafting the media landscape and, consequently, influencing the public's perception and response to news events.

Studies shows that the selection images for publication is close related to the concept of newsworthiness, which is defined by several factors that determine whether a story is worthy of being reported (Bednarek and Caple 2017). Galtung and Ruge (1965) propose a set of criteria that journalists often use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a story, which includes criteria such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, human interest, impact, prominence, and novelty. Bednarek and Caple (2016, pp. 447–448) detail how news values in visual journalism are constructed through elements like such as eliteness, impact, novelty, personalization, consonance, and aesthetic appeal, among others. Each news value is linked with key devices in image-making: content elements like the presence of high-status individuals or scenes of destruction, and camera techniques such as angles and framing that convey significance or emotional resonance. For instance, eliteness is conveyed through images of recognizable figures or symbols of authority, while impact is highlighted by

capturing the significant effects of events, such as destruction or emotional aftermath. This complex interplay of content and technique in visual storytelling shapes the news value and the audience's perception of a story.

While the broad ethical challenges in photojournalism, including staging, accuracy, editing, and the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI), are increasingly scrutinized, this study narrows its focus to the ethics of portraying victims in disaster imagery within Indonesian print newspaper. With Scopus data indicating limited scholarly attention to disaster photojournalism ethics in Indonesian newspapers, this research aims to fill this gap and make a significant scholarly contribution to the field. It investigates photojournalism ethics as applied to disaster reportage in Indonesian print newspapers. Specifically, the study identifies the norms and regulations followed by news photographers, highlight the most significant professional ethical issues they encounter in capturing and selecting images of disaster victims. In addition, the study sought to stimulate discourse regarding the necessity of regulating the ethical standards of photojournalism.

To address these aims, the study poses the following research questions. First, what ethical dilemmas do Indonesian photojournalists and editors face in portraying disaster victims in print newspapers, particularly with regard to respecting victims' rights and dignity? Second, how do Indonesia's Journalists' Code of Ethics influence photojournalists during disaster coverage, and how effective are these codes in guiding ethical practices in the depiction of victims in print newspapers?

In the following section, the paper provides an overview of the research methodology used. It then delves into three main themes that were identified from the interview transcripts: the sensationalism often associated with disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and the ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism. The paper concludes up by summarising the main findings, offering suggestions to tackle the identified challenges, and suggesting areas for further research.

METHODS

This study employs in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed information from six Indonesian journalists (reporter, photojournalist, and editors) from both national and local newspapers in three cities: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Riau. Additionally, two Indonesian media practitioners from Dewan Pers and the Indonesian Ministry of Communication are included in this research. Conducted in July – August 2018, these interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into journalistic experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, particularly in the

context of disaster reporting. The focus was on how print newspapers in Indonesia report disasters and adhere to journalistic ethics and professionalism. This included a specific examination of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The selection of journalist participants was based on their experience in covering at least one major Indonesian disaster event, ensuring a knowledgeable and relevant group of respondents. Major disasters discussed included the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires. These discussions provided a platform to explore the ethical considerations and practices influencing journalists' decision-making processes in disaster reporting.

For the analytical approach, this research employs thematic analysis to examine the transcripts of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and highlighting recurrent ideas or patterns within the text. The theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The study systematically organizes these patterns into emerging themes and further analyse and interpret them through the lens of the gatekeeping process, newsworthiness, and ethical considerations in journalism. By doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in disaster reporting in Indonesia. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive and detailed insight into the intricate complexities and challenges specific to disaster reporting in Indonesia.

Thematic analysis is selected for its notable advantage of effectively summarising key features of a substantial amount of data. In addition, it facilitates the identification of similarities and differences across the data set and can bring out recurrent themes and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. To enhance the primary data collected from interviews, this research also incorporates relevant secondary sources, including books and articles, to enrich the analysis.

DISCUSSION

This section discussed three main themes derived from the interview. These themes include the issue of sensationalism in disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by

photojournalists, and ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism.

The Sensationalism of Disaster Reporting in Indonesia

This section discusses three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption as featured in the national and local newspapers, *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, analyzing the responses of research participants to these images. These photographs exemplify the ethical challenges inherent in disaster coverage, which holds significant news value due to its profound effects on human lives. A representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication has highlighted the dilemma that, while dramatic images might capture public attention and boost newspaper sales, they also risk crossing into sensationalism and exploiting the suffering of victims. He emphasized the potential for a 'double disaster,' with his statement: "The first disaster is the real, physical one. The second disaster is born from the way it is reported, leading to double the trauma and sorrow. This is what we must avoid; this is the essence of journalistic ethics."

Echoing her sentiment, a chief editor from a local Yogyakarta newspaper sheds light on the motivations behind sensationalist disaster reporting in Indonesian media. He points out that the frequent use of dramatic, emotionally charged images might be motivated by commercial interests aimed at sustaining newspaper sales. Meanwhile, the depiction of suffering in photographs remains a controversial topic within journalism globally (Santos Silva & Eldridge 2020, Arif 2010). Some journalists defend such imagery as a truthful representation of the harsh consequences and a means to humanize the event. However, critics argue these images can sensationalize tragedy, harm those depicted, and unnecessarily disturb readers.

In an interview, a local journalist from Riau conveys the importance of photographs in local newspapers. He states, "Photos are an important part of the newspaper. At *Riau Pos*, there's always a question and discussion about 'what's the photo of the day?". This highlights how photographs are essential elements that define the quality and appeal of the publication. Further elaborating on the competitive aspect of the newspaper market, he notes:

> "We sell newspapers if our product is good, otherwise it won't sell. Meanwhile, we have competitors like *Tribun Haluan Riau* and others in this region. If we are selling and our goods aren't good, how will people want to buy? This means competition with other newspapers."

These insights convey that in the competitive newspaper market, visually compelling and well-presented photographs are crucial for attracting readers and distinguishing the publication from its competitors. These images are not just decorative; they are fundamental to the newspaper's identity and success, underlining the critical role of visual elements in modern journalism and the strategic considerations in selecting and featuring photographs in daily publications.

This ethical conflict is particularly evident in images that vividly capture victim distress, contributing to a trend towards traumatic reporting. Prominent disasters like the 2004 Aceh tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake and 2010 Mt Merapi eruption have seen such reporting styles, which, while aiming to reflect the emotional and physical toll of these events, also risk impacting the audience's perception and compromising the dignity of those depicted.

The media's role in fundraising efforts through disaster photography adds another layer to the discussion. In an interview, a chief-editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) suggests that by showing the real situation, a photo can actually become a means to extend a hand to gather support and aid for disaster victims. However, he emphasizes the importance of handling such photographs with sensitivity. *KR* frequently dedicates entire pages to showcasing photographs related to donations. Although this approach has practical benefits, it has been subject to scholarly criticism. Concerns primarily revolve around the potential compromise of journalistic integrity and the risk of exploiting victim suffering for the purpose of aid (Masduki 2007). These criticisms highlight the necessity for a thorough evaluation of both the ethical ramifications and the practical effectiveness of using disaster photography in media-led charitable endeavours.

The media's portrayal of the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption offers more evidence of the distressing imagery depicting the disasters in Indonesia. A front-page photo in the Indonesian national daily, *Kompas*, from October 6, 2010, as shown in figure 1, presents a powerful visual narrative: a grieving woman, her face etched with ash and tears, embodies the profound sadness and helplessness prevalent among the residents of Yogyakarta during the eruption. Accompanying this image was the impactful headline 'Merapi Peras Air Mata,' which can be directly translated as 'Merapi Squeezes Tears.' This headline not only reflects the essence of the image, but also effectively communicates the deep psychological distress caused by the event.

Figure 1. Photo of a woman's victims in tears. *Kompas* on 6 October 2010

In Indonesia, the portrayal of an individual's profound sadness or suffering, often captured in close-up shots, does not require consent. This reflects an alarming gap in ethical standards, potentially infringing on the privacy and dignity of those affected. Regarding privacy and consent, a representative of the Indonesian Ministry of Communication notes that there is a lack of specific regulations in Indonesia protecting the privacy of disaster victims in media reports. He mentioned in the interview:

> 'Socially speaking, protection is a right everyone deserves, as happiness and comfort in life come from being respected by others. We desire privacy; not everything should be exposed. However, the issue lies in the regulation—or lack thereof—regarding the protection of personal data. As of now, there is no specific regulation in place.

This lack of specific regulations creates a significant challenge, as images of dead bodies, suffering individuals, and other sensitive content can circulate widely without the consent of the individuals or their families. He stresses the importance of respecting the privacy and dignity of disaster victims, pointing out that ethical considerations should guide the publication of such images.

While some may view the photograph of the woman in tears as a graphic portrayal of personal tragedy, the photo editor at *Kompas* offers a different perspective. The photo was chosen for its powerful portrayal of the emotional impact of the disaster, emphasizing the human aspect rather than any sensationalism. The *Kompas* photo editor, explains this decision, stating, "We had other photos, like people being rushed to ambulances with severely burnt legs. However, we couldn't publish those due to ethical constraints." This

approach underscores the ethical considerations that guide their editorial decisions. A local journalist also commended the photo's beauty, highlighting its ability to capture a profound human response to the catastrophe. Further emphasizing its impact, this photograph was selected as the winner of a prestigious Merapi photo competition, judged by a professional photographer. Its selection reflects more than just technical skill; the photograph's ability to evoke strong emotions testifies to its power. It transcends mere moment capturing, delving into the depths of human experience. This range of interpretations highlights the subjective nature of photojournalism and the fine line between evoking empathy and crossing into sensationalism.

Another disaster photograph published in the local daily *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on 28 October 2010 (figure 2) depicted rescue professionals transporting a deceased body, with just one hand visible, symbolising a life that has been tragically ended.

Figure 2. *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 28 October 2010

Another image, resembling the previous one, was published in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010. It portrayed a deceased individual enclosed in a body bag containing ashes, with just their hands showing.

KORBAN TEWAS : Puluhan korban tewas akibat awan panas Gunung Merapi yang akan diidentifikasi di
Forensik Rumah Sakit Sardjito. Jumat (5/11).   KR - Franz Boedi...

Figure 3. in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010.

The media coverage of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in Indonesia features several distressing photos of the victims, showcased in both printed and visual media formats. The three photos above (figure 1 – 3) effectively communicate a strong emotional message.

The chief editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) contributes to the discussion of publishing photographs of dead bodies in disaster reporting. He acknowledges the need for such images in the early stages of a disaster to accurately depict the severity and invoke the needed response. Yet, as the situation evolves, he emphasizes shifting the narrative towards recovery and community rebuilding, highlighting resilience. A journalist colleague at *KR* explains their internal policy further, stating in an interview: "Indeed, the most respectful photo is the one that employs symbolism. Through the lens of semiotics in photography, we represent the deceased with a single part – perhaps a hand or a leg. This approach stems from our deep empathy for the victims." This method, employing symbolic imagery such as the depiction of just a hand, becomes a common practice to convey the tragedy's gravity while respecting the deceased and their families.

In responds to the depiction of dead bodies and suffering in disaster reporting, a representative from AJI address these concerns in their interviews. Manan highlights that while there isn't a specific prohibition against publishing such images in the Journalistic Code of Ethics, many media outlets, especially those in national newspaper with a deeper understanding of ethical journalism, choose not to display exploitative content, compared to the local newspapers. He emphasizes the ethical dilemma and the lack of specific privacy

protections in the AJI code. Manan also critiques the tendency towards sensationalism and the generalization in disaster victim portrayal, advocating for factual, balanced, and dignified reporting. In addition, a representative from Dewan Pers concurs on the need for sensitivity and ethical integrity, pointing out during the interview, "When media are regulated to publish photos of disaster victims, the most important thing to maintain is to not display sadism/graphic, not to show traumatic effects on the victims or the community." This statement underscores the less defined guidelines for disaster photojournalism and the necessity for journalists to navigate these ethical complexities with empathy and professionalism. Both stress that upholding ethical standards, respecting victim dignity, and accurately depicting events are paramount in maintaining credibility and integrity in Indonesian disaster journalism.

Adding to the discourse, a reporter from *Kompas* shared his perspective on the responsible depiction of disaster victims. He emphasizes personal and editorial discretion in the selection of images, striving to balance the truthful depiction of events with respect for the victims' dignity and the potential impact on readers. He contrasts the Indonesian approach with the more restrained Japanese media, highlighting the need for a shift towards responsible journalism that educates and informs without sensationalizing suffering. Together, these insights underscore the ethical complexities and responsibilities inherent in disaster photojournalism, advocating for standards that respect human dignity while informing the public.

A photo editor of *Kompas* describes *Kompas*'s approach to photojournalism in disaster scenarios, emphasizing their internal guidelines and ethical considerations. He notes that while there are no absolute prohibitions against showing dead bodies, *Kompas* strives to avoid such images unless they are crucial for understanding the story, such as in the case of mass burials during the Aceh tsunami. The policy generally discourages the display of dead bodies, blood, violence, and anything that might be considered sensationalist or disrespectful. He explains that even when such images are available, the decision to publish them is made with caution and sensitivity towards the impact on readers and the dignity of the victims. He stresses that photographs should contribute to public education and awareness, not just serve as a means to attract readership. The goal is to prompt a compassionate and constructive response from the public, rather than simply to shock or entertain.

The interview with a local photojournalist from *Riau Pos* reveals a cautious approach towards the portrayal of dead bodies, typically avoiding such images unless they are crucial for conveying the magnitude of the disaster. He clarifies, "As long as a photo does not display

a body that is dismembered or bloody, I think it's okay." His main idea revolves around balancing ethical journalism with the compelling need to inform the public about disasters, underlining that "black and white can cover up the gruesomeness of a situation, creating a sorrowful rather than a sadistic effect." He advocates for sensitivity in portraying victims, emphasizing the importance of depicting the disaster's impact in a way that is both truthful and respectful. Echoing this sentiment, he states, "When those bodies have been buried in a mass grave, only then is it appropriate to publish the photo," reflecting the ongoing ethical considerations and challenges that journalists face in selecting and publishing photographs of disaster victims. This underscores the need for discretion, empathy, and a commitment to ethical reporting.

Enhancing this narrative, a representative from the Ministry of Communication highlights the crucial role of media literacy and education among journalists and the public in navigating these ethical complexities. Understanding the ethical implications and responsibilities in disaster reporting is vital for media professionals and consumers alike, fostering a discourse that is not only informative but also respectful and constructive. This call for increased media literacy underscores the need for a conscientious approach to disaster journalism, one that balances the public's right to information with the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It reflects a growing awareness of the impact of media representation on public perception and the ethical responsibility of journalists in shaping this narrative.

The Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs

The 'Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs' section delves into the intricate challenges faced by photojournalists like Regina Safri (*Antara*), Surya Lesmana (*KR*), and Ahmad Arif (*Kompas*) in disaster reporting. This section explores their complex decision-making process in documenting disasters, where they must balance the responsibility of providing accurate information against their ethical obligation to respect individual dignity and privacy in crisis situations. These journalists' narratives illuminate the profound impact of their decisions on both the public narrative and their personal emotional well-being. Their experiences echo the sentiments expressed in the previous subsection, where the ethical challenges in capturing and displaying graphic images from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption were analyzed. Such photographs, while having significant news value and profound effects on human lives, present a moral quandary, often leading to a 'double disaster' as articulated by a representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication. This

representative highlighted the delicate balance needed between capturing public attention and avoiding sensationalism that exploits victims' suffering. Additionally, insights from other media professionals underscore the crucial role of ethical considerations in photojournalism, particularly in the context of disaster reporting.

Dispatched to the epicentre of the devastating 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, *Antara* News Agency's female photojournalist, Regina Safri, witnessed the pain and grief of the victims, blurring the distinction between her professional role as a journalist and the first responders. The chaotic image of a father reuniting with his child, among the shouts of *'Allahu Akbar,'* presented an opportunity to capture an impactful shot. However, it was precisely this intense emotional impact that made Regina hesitate; her feelings prevented her from mechanically capturing the moment with her camera. The moment that remained untaken—the opportunity to comfort by providing mineral water—shows both a human aspect of journalism and the photojournalist's own ethical choice.

During the interview, she explained that she photographed a mother laying on the ground with her two boys surrounding her and comforting her. She captured numerous images of the earthquake devastation as well. She then quickly placed her camera in her bag. She wanted to show her empathy for the victims. Her actions demonstrate a shared humanity between the journalist and those affected by the earthquake. Empathy allows journalists to tell stories with compassion, ensuring that the narrative is dignified rather than invasive or sensationalist.

However, in the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, Indonesian media, might driven by commercial interests, published images of blackened corpses and destruction. Ahmad Arif, of *Kompas*, reflected on the struggle to portray disaster without causing viewer distress (Arif, 2010). Similarly, Finnish media, covering the South Asian earthquake and tsunami, faced ethical decisions about displaying death, particularly when it involved local victims (Maenpaa 2022, p.2241). These cases illustrate how personal ethics of journalists can clash with institutional priorities.

He narrated in his book that the task of visual and print journalists to portray a horrific disaster without causing psychological distress to the readers/viewers is a hard one (Arif, 2010). According to Arif, photographing and publishing images of the victims' suffering has the potential to grab the attention and sympathy of readers, making it newsworthy. This aligns with Pantti's (2012) assertion that rather of providing explanations or statistics, showing graphic images of human suffering has been the most effective approach to get people to pay attention to the issue at hand. However, Arif's personal ethical values prevent him from

sending the photographs of the Tsunami victims' grief and the dead body to the *Kompas* photo editor. Arif expressed fear pertaining the physiological effects on both the audience and the subjects of such coverage upon viewing the photographs depicting the victims' mourning and corpses.

The importance of personal connections in journalistic decision-making is highlighted by a *KR* photojournalist who, even after capturing a photograph of a deceased individual during a Yogyakarta flood, chose not to submit the image out of consideration for the victim's family and the strong ties within the local community. However, his efforts were in vain as *KR* published a similar image from a photo agency. This led to a discussion with the editor about avoiding such images in future coverage, highlighting potential differences in ethical perspectives between editors and photojournalists.

In navigating these ethical dilemmas, journalists like Safri, Lesmana and Arif confront a fundamental question: How can they effectively portray the victims in a way that is both informative and empathetic, while also maintaining the respect and dignity, avoiding sensationalism? Their experiences and decisions shed light on the intricate balance between the obligation to provide information and the duty to show empathy, a balance that reminds to be central to the ethical dilemma faced by journalists.

This complex ethical dilemma highlights the conflicting demands of photojournalism: the need to provide compelling, newsworthy content while respecting the emotional and ethical boundaries of those affected by tragedy. These case studies demonstrate that the decision-making process in such circumstances goes beyond journalistic regulations. It requires a thoughtful examination of personal ethics and consideration of the societal impact of their work. The actions of Safri, Lesmana, and Arif, amidst these challenging circumstances, underscore the ongoing struggle within the field of journalism to find the right balance between professional responsibility and human sensitivity.

The ethical challenges encountered by photojournalists in disaster zones are intricate and diverse, demanding an in-depth knowledge of journalistic principles and human empathy. The decisions made by Safri, Lesmana, and Arif in the face of these dilemmas not only shape their narratives but also reflect broader questions about the role of media in society and the responsibility of journalists to their subjects and audience. As the media landscape continues to evolve, the experiences of these journalists provide valuable lessons and insights into the ethical considerations that are essential for responsible and sensitive reporting in a rapidly changing industry.

Ethics of Disaster Imagery in Indonesian Journalism

Indonesian journalists generally adhere to the Kode Etik Jurnalistik (KEJ or Journalist Code of Ethics) established by Dewan Pers for their reporting activities. Formed in 1999 ratified by the Press Council in 2006, the KEJ provides a fundamental ethical framework, consisting of eleven articles, each with its own interpretation. For more comprehensive and in-depth guidance, the Aliansi Jurnalis Indonesia (AJI) provides a Code of Conduct, comprising 57 articles. Abdul Manan from AJI highlighted that the Journalistic Code of Ethics, along with the AJI Code of Conduct, serves as the primary reference for journalists, each with varied interpretations and implementations in the field. Adding to this, Ratna Komala from Dewan Pers underscores the significance of these differences in interpretation, which can vary significantly across different media platforms, affecting the consistency and application of the ethical guidelines. This variability points to the nuanced and contextual nature of ethical journalism, especially in the sensitive area of disaster reporting.

In addition, different media outlets have their own set of regulations that govern how they approach journalism. These regulations may not always be written; some are communicated verbally during meetings. Journalists tend to be familiar with the regulations set by their media institution, which they regularly incorporate into their daily practices. For instance, in an interview, a journalist from *Kompas* newspaper expressed awareness of the types of disaster event photographs likely to be rejected or preferred by their editor.

Related to photojournalism, in 1992, Pewarta Foto Indonesia (PFI, Indonesian Photojournalists) was established. Photojournalism defined as "reporting visual information via various media" (Newton 2001, p.26). PFI formed its Code of Ethics in 2007, consisting of 14 articles. PFI Code of Ethics states that Indonesian photojournalists are dedicated to delivering truthful and accountable visual information, placing public interest at the forefront and upholding professional autonomy while adhering to ethical guidelines. This includes respecting copyright and privacy, refraining from manipulations, and refusing any kind of bribery. They are committed to upholding ethical reporting standards, preserving the dignity of victims, and seeking guidance from advisory bodies on ethical considerations.

In the context of Indonesian disaster reporting, as previously outlined, a critical concern emerges from the tendency towards sensationalism, where both local and national newspapers frequently emphasize the suffering of victims. This practice not only raises significant ethical questions regarding the protection of victims' privacy but also calls into question the professionalism of journalists handling such sensitive content. Moreover, this

addresses the issue of whether these concerns are adequately addressed within the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Furthermore, scholars argue that such sensationalist reporting can contribute to 'compassion fatigue' among the public (Arif 2010). Continual exposure to graphic and distressing images may desensitize viewers, diminishing their capacity for empathy and their willingness to engage with the issues at hand. This phenomenon not only impacts the audience's emotional response but also raises questions about the long-term effectiveness of such reporting strategies in fostering a constructive and compassionate public discourse around disasters.

In light of these considerations, one important improvement that could be made to the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics or Conduct is the incorporation of explicit criteria for disaster reporting. This would include specific guidelines pertaining to the selection and use of photographs in newspapers. For instance, the code should address questions such as: What type of images are considered ethical? How should consent be obtained and documented? And how can the impact on victims, families, and the wider public be mitigated?

By revising the Code of Ethics to include these considerations, Indonesian journalism can better respect the dignity of individuals while still informing the public. This not only enhances the ethical standing of the journalism profession in Indonesia but also ensures that the victims and their families are treated with the respect and sensitivity they deserve.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the ethical challenges Indonesian photojournalists encounter in disaster reporting, especially in depicting pain and suffering in print media. It uncovers a conflict between striving for accurate journalism and the temptation of sensationalism, a practice that could compromise the privacy and dignity of those affected by disasters. The research included interviews with media professionals, revealing diverse viewpoints. A photo editor noted that their choice of photographs, although deemed the most respectful among available options, nevertheless prompts concerns regarding their influence on public perception and respect for the victims' dignity.

The findings also show that the existing Journalists' Code of Ethics in Indonesia offers only general guidelines, lacking specificity for disaster coverage. This lack of detailed guidance necessitates clearer and more comprehensive ethical standards tailored to the unique challenges of disaster photojournalism. The study suggests a need for enhanced journalist

training and a re-evaluation of journalistic codes of ethics, aiming for a more empathetic and responsible approach in disaster photojournalism.

The implications of this research are significant for the field of journalism, particularly in Indonesia. It highlights the need for media organizations and regulatory bodies to re-examine and update their ethical codes to address the specific challenges of disaster reporting. This includes providing clear guidelines on the portrayal of suffering and ensuring that journalists are equipped with the necessary skills and ethical understanding to navigate these complex scenarios. The study also underscores the importance of fostering media literacy among the public, enhancing their understanding of journalistic practices and encouraging a critical consumption of news.

This paper highlights a range of areas for future research. These include observational studies and direct involvement in editorial decision-making processes to gain richer insights into how photographs are chosen for publication. Additionally, given the rapid developments in AI, exploring its ethical ramifications in disaster photojournalism becomes increasingly pertinent.

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Navigating Ethics and Empathy in Disaster Photojournalism in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study is based on the scholars' critique of the Indonesian media reporting on disaster for focusing on vulnerable groups' suffering, sadness, and grief. The absence of comprehensive journalistic ethical guidelines for disaster published photographs in Indonesia, might contribute to the recurring choice and publication of such images in Indonesian print newspapers. Examining major disasters, including the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires, this research provides critical evidence for re-evaluating the Indonesian journalist's codes of ethics, especially concerning the published photographs of disaster victims. Methodologically, this study draws on interviews with six Indonesian journalists and two media practitioners, exploring the ethical practices and dilemmas in photojournalism with a specific emphasis on disaster reporting in Indonesian print newspapers. The transcripts were analysed thematically, emphasising the repeating ideas or patterns present in the text. It also includes an analysis of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption coverage in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The study highlights the complex balance between ensuring truthful reporting and honouring the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It advocates for a nuanced method in disaster coverage that harmonizes journalistic integrity with a compassionate portrayal of victims. This research contributes to the discourse on ethical disaster photojournalism and has significant implications for policy development, journalist training programs, and the revision of journalistic codes of ethics, promoting a more empathetic and responsible approach in the field.

Keywords: Indonesian media, visual ethics, photojournalism, disaster journalism, journalism practice

INTRODUCTION

The media, including print newspapers, extensively covers disasters due to their significant news value, which impacts both human lives and the environment. These media play a crucial role in providing information to readers about the events occurring in a disaster-stricken area and the necessary actions that affected individuals should take. However, unlike in Japan and Australia, Indonesian media present a distinct representation of disaster by vividly depicting the visible suffering of victims. This portrayal, focusing on moments of despair, pain, and vulnerability, is found to prioritize sensationalism over sensitivity, leading to ethical dilemmas concerning the victims' right to privacy and the exploitation of their trauma for commercial gain (Irawanto, 2018; Lampito, 2015; Arif, 2010; Noviani, 2009; Silva and Eldridge 2020).

The commercial nature of media organizations is evident in disaster reporting. The intense competition among news outlets to be the first on the scene during crises highlights this commercial drive in the industry (Anis, 2022). Such a competitive drive can influence the nature of disaster reporting, potentially exacerbating the focus on sensationalism and the commercialization of human suffering. Griffin (2010) and Ali (2014) have noted that photographs, particularly those depicting shocking events or mass destruction, possess a unique capacity to engage a global audience. This remarkable ability to grab attention also renders these graphic images highly marketable, attracting more readers and viewers, which in turn boosts their commercial value for media outlets. Building on this, Hoijer (2004, p. 516) contends that media reporting on distant suffering is not just about informing the public. It can also be driven by more cynical commercial interests, where media entities commodify human tragedies for sale in a global marketplace. This problem, coupled with the country's frequent encounters with disasters, means that it's crucial to evaluate the ethical implications of disaster photography in Indonesia.

Sensationalism in disaster reporting is often closely linked to the level of professionalism in journalism. In Indonesia, the Journalists' Code of Ethics provides broad guidelines for news photographs publication, as seen in Article No. 4, which advises against creating false, slanderous, cruel, and filthy news reports, and describes 'sadistic' behavior as characterized by cruelty and a lack of sympathy (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 38). Additionally, Article 9 emphasizes the need to uphold the privacy of news sources, barring conflicts with public interest, and defines "private life" as aspects of an individual's life not directly connected to public matters (Dewan Pers, 2017, p. 40-41). Despite these guidelines, there is a lack of

specificity and enforceability, particularly in the context of published photograph of the disaster's victims, leading to potential violations of rights and dignity.

Photojournalists and editors are at the forefront of these ethical considerations, embodying the principles of both framing theory and gatekeeping theory. They are responsible for determining what to capture, how to frame it, and ultimately, what to publish, carrying a significant weight in shaping public perception and discourse. Framing theory suggests that the way information is presented (or 'framed') by the media can influence how it is understood and interpreted by audiences. Framing, as explained by Entman (1993, p. 55), describes a selecting process that "call[s] attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions." Photojournalists and editors play a crucial role in this process, making deliberate choices about which aspects of a story to emphasize or omit, thus framing the audience's understanding of the event.

Seelig (2001) characterizes the photo editor as 'the visual elite,' underscoring their important role in determining the visual narrative of news. This perspective aligns with the gatekeeping theory, as expounded by Shoemaker and Vos (2009). They describe how editors function as gatekeepers, crucially determining what information is published and what is omitted. These gatekeepers in charge in evaluating a wide range of stories and images, selecting those that reach the public based on criteria such as newsworthiness, ethical considerations, and organizational policy. Together with framing theory, gatekeeping theory, as elaborated by Shoemaker and Vos, underscores the significant influence of photojournalists and editors in crafting the media landscape and, consequently, influencing the public's perception and response to news events.

Studies shows that the selection images for publication is close related to the concept of newsworthiness, which is defined by several factors that determine whether a story is worthy of being reported (Bednarek and Caple 2017). Galtung and Ruge (1965) propose a set of criteria that journalists often use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a story, which includes criteria such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, human interest, impact, prominence, and novelty. Bednarek and Caple (2016, pp. 447–448) detail how news values in visual journalism are constructed through elements like such as eliteness, impact, novelty, personalization, consonance, and aesthetic appeal, among others. Each news value is linked with key devices in image-making: content elements like the presence of high-status individuals or scenes of destruction, and camera techniques such as angles and framing that convey significance or emotional resonance. For instance, eliteness is conveyed through images of recognizable figures or symbols of authority, while impact is highlighted by capturing the significant effects of events, such as

destruction or emotional aftermath. This complex interplay of content and technique in visual storytelling shapes the news value and the audience's perception of a story.

While the broad ethical challenges in photojournalism, including staging, accuracy, editing, and the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI), are increasingly scrutinized, this study narrows its focus to the ethics of portraying victims in disaster imagery within Indonesian print newspaper. With Scopus data indicating limited scholarly attention to disaster photojournalism ethics in Indonesian newspapers, this research aims to fill this gap and make a significant scholarly contribution to the field. It investigates photojournalism ethics as applied to disaster reportage in Indonesian print newspapers. Specifically, the study identifies the norms and regulations followed by news photographers, highlight the most significant professional ethical issues they encounter in capturing and selecting images of disaster victims. In addition, the study sought to stimulate discourse regarding the necessity of regulating the ethical standards of photojournalism.

To address these aims, the study poses the following research questions. First, what ethical dilemmas do Indonesian photojournalists and editors face in portraying disaster victims in print newspapers, particularly with regard to respecting victims' rights and dignity? Second, how do Indonesia's Journalists' Code of Ethics influence photojournalists during disaster coverage, and how effective are these codes in guiding ethical practices in the depiction of victims in print newspapers?

In the following section, the paper provides an overview of the research methodology used. It then delves into three main themes that were identified from the interview transcripts: the sensationalism often associated with disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and the ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism. The paper concludes up by summarising the main findings, offering suggestions to tackle the identified challenges, and suggesting areas for further research.

METHODS

This study employs in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed information from six Indonesian journalists (reporter, photojournalist, and editors) from both national and local newspapers in three cities: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Riau. Additionally, two Indonesian media practitioners from Dewan Pers and the Indonesian Ministry of Communication are included in this research. Conducted in July – August 2018, these interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into journalistic experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, particularly in the context of disaster reporting. The focus was on how print newspapers in Indonesia report disasters and

adhere to journalistic ethics and professionalism. This included a specific examination of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The selection of journalist participants was based on their experience in covering at least one major Indonesian disaster event, ensuring a knowledgeable and relevant group of respondents. Major disasters discussed included the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires. These discussions provided a platform to explore the ethical considerations and practices influencing journalists' decision-making processes in disaster reporting.

For the analytical approach, this research employs thematic analysis to examine the transcripts of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and highlighting recurrent ideas or patterns within the text. The theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The study systematically organizes these patterns into emerging themes and further analyse and interpret them through the lens of the gatekeeping process, newsworthiness, and ethical considerations in journalism. By doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in disaster reporting in Indonesia. Through this approach, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive and detailed insight into the intricate complexities and challenges specific to disaster reporting in Indonesia.

Thematic analysis is selected for its notable advantage of effectively summarising key features of a substantial amount of data. In addition, it facilitates the identification of similarities and differences across the data set and can bring out recurrent themes and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. To enhance the primary data collected from interviews, this research also incorporates relevant secondary sources, including books and articles, to enrich the analysis.

DISCUSSION

This section discussed three main themes derived from the interview. These themes include the the issue of sensationalism in disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and ethical considerations surrounding disaster imagery in Indonesian journalism.

The Sensationalism of Disaster Reporting in Indonesia

This section discusses three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption as featured in the national and local newspapers, *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, analyzing the responses of research participants to these images. These photographs exemplify the ethical challenges inherent in disaster coverage, which holds significant news value due to its profound effects on human lives. A representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication has highlighted the dilemma that, while dramatic images might capture public attention and boost newspaper sales, they also risk crossing into sensationalism and exploiting the suffering of victims. He emphasized the potential for a 'double disaster,' with his statement: "The first disaster is the real, physical one. The second disaster is born from the way it is reported, leading to double the trauma and sorrow. This is what we must avoid; this is the essence of journalistic ethics."

Echoing her sentiment, a chief editor from a local Yogyakarta newspaper sheds light on the motivations behind sensationalist disaster reporting in Indonesian media. He points out that the frequent use of dramatic, emotionally charged images might be motivated by commercial interests aimed at sustaining newspaper sales. Meanwhile, the depiction of suffering in photographs remains a controversial topic within journalism globally (Santos Silva & Eldridge 2020, Arif 2010). Some journalists defend such imagery as a truthful representation of the harsh consequences and a means to humanize the event. However, critics argue these images can sensationalize tragedy, harm those depicted, and unnecessarily disturb readers.

In an interview, a local journalist from Riau conveys the importance of photographs in local newspapers. He states, "Photos are an important part of the newspaper. At *Riau Pos*, there's always a question and discussion about 'what's the photo of the day?". This highlights how photographs are essential elements that define the quality and appeal of the publication. Further elaborating on the competitive aspect of the newspaper market, he notes:

> "We sell newspapers if our product is good, otherwise it won't sell. Meanwhile, we have competitors like *Tribun Haluan Riau* and others in this region. If we are selling and our goods aren't good, how will people want to buy? This means competition with other newspapers."

These insights convey that in the competitive newspaper market, visually compelling and well-presented photographs are crucial for attracting readers and distinguishing the publication from its competitors. These images are not just decorative; they are fundamental to the newspaper's identity and success, underlining the critical role of visual elements in modern journalism and the strategic considerations in selecting and featuring photographs in daily publications.

This ethical conflict is particularly evident in images that vividly capture victim distress, contributing to a trend towards traumatic reporting. Prominent disasters like the 2004 Aceh tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake and 2010 Mt Merapi eruption have seen such reporting styles, which, while aiming to reflect the emotional and physical toll of these events, also risk impacting the audience's perception and compromising the dignity of those depicted.

The media's role in fundraising efforts through disaster photography adds another layer to the discussion. In an interview, a chief-editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) suggests that by showing the real situation, a photo can actually become a means to extend a hand to gather support and aid for disaster victims. However, he emphasizes the importance of handling such photographs with sensitivity. *KR* frequently dedicates entire pages to showcasing photographs related to donations. Although this approach has practical benefits, it has been subject to scholarly criticism. Concerns primarily revolve around the potential compromise of journalistic integrity and the risk of exploiting victim suffering for the purpose of aid (Masduki 2007). These criticisms highlight the necessity for a thorough evaluation of both the ethical ramifications and the practical effectiveness of using disaster photography in media-led charitable endeavours.

The media's portrayal of the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption offers more evidence of the distressing imagery depicting the disasters in Indonesia. A front-page photo in the Indonesian national daily, *Kompas*, from October 6, 2010, as shown in figure 1, presents a powerful visual narrative: a grieving woman, her face etched with ash and tears, embodies the profound sadness and helplessness prevalent among the residents of Yogyakarta during the eruption. Accompanying this image was the impactful headline 'Merapi Peras Air Mata,' which can be directly translated as 'Merapi Squeezes Tears.' This headline not only reflects the essence of the image, but also effectively communicates the deep psychological distress caused by the event.

Figure 1. Photo of a woman's victims in tears. *Kompas* on 6 October 2010

In Indonesia, the portrayal of an individual's profound sadness or suffering, often captured in close-up shots, does not require consent. This reflects an alarming gap in ethical standards, potentially infringing on the privacy and dignity of those affected. Regarding privacy and consent, a representative of the Indonesian Ministry of Communication notes that there is a lack of specific regulations in Indonesia protecting the privacy of disaster victims in media reports. He mentioned in the interview:

> 'Socially speaking, protection is a right everyone deserves, as happiness and comfort in life come from being respected by others. We desire privacy; not everything should be exposed. However, the issue lies in the regulation—or lack thereof—regarding the protection of personal data. As of now, there is no specific regulation in place.

This lack of specific regulations creates a significant challenge, as images of dead bodies, suffering individuals, and other sensitive content can circulate widely without the consent of the individuals or their families. He stresses the importance of respecting the privacy and dignity of disaster victims, pointing out that ethical considerations should guide the publication of such images.

While some may view the photograph of the woman in tears as a graphic portrayal of personal tragedy, the photo editor at *Kompas* offers a different perspective. The photo was chosen for its powerful portrayal of the emotional impact of the disaster, emphasizing the human aspect rather than any sensationalism. The *Kompas* photo editor, explains this decision, stating, "We had other photos, like people being rushed to ambulances with severely burnt legs. However, we couldn't publish those due to ethical constraints." This approach underscores the

ethical considerations that guide their editorial decisions. A local journalist also commended the photo's beauty, highlighting its ability to capture a profound human response to the catastrophe. Further emphasizing its impact, this photograph was selected as the winner of a prestigious Merapi photo competition, judged by a professional photographer. Its selection reflects more than just technical skill; the photograph's ability to evoke strong emotions testifies to its power. It transcends mere moment capturing, delving into the depths of human experience. This range of interpretations highlights the subjective nature of photojournalism and the fine line between evoking empathy and crossing into sensationalism.

Another disaster photograph published in the local daily *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on 28 October 2010 (figure 2) depicted rescue professionals transporting a deceased body, with just one hand visible, symbolising a life that has been tragically ended.

Figure 2. *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 28 October 2010

Another image, resembling the previous one, was published in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010. It portrayed a deceased individual enclosed in a body bag containing ashes, with just their hands showing.

KORBAN TEWAS : Puluhan korban tewas akibat awan panas Gunung Merapi yang akan diidentifikasi di KR - Franz Boedi
Forensik Rumah Sakit Sardjito, Jumat (5/11).

Figure 3. in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on November 6, 2010.

The media coverage of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in Indonesia features several distressing photos of the victims, showcased in both printed and visual media formats.   The three photos above (figure 1 – 3) effectively communicate a strong emotional message.

The chief editor of a local newspaper (*KR*) contributes to the discussion of publishing photographs of dead bodies in disaster reporting. He acknowledges the need for such images in the early stages of a disaster to accurately depict the severity and invoke the needed response. Yet, as the situation evolves, he emphasizes shifting the narrative towards recovery and community rebuilding, highlighting resilience. A journalist colleague at *KR* explains their internal policy further, stating in an interview: "Indeed, the most respectful photo is the one that employs symbolism. Through the lens of semiotics in photography, we represent the deceased with a single part – perhaps a hand or a leg. This approach stems from our deep empathy for the victims." This method, employing symbolic imagery such as the depiction of just a hand, becomes a common practice to convey the tragedy's gravity while respecting the deceased and their families.

In responds to the depiction of dead bodies and suffering in disaster reporting, a representative from AJI address these concerns in their interviews. Manan highlights that while there isn't a specific prohibition against publishing such images in the Journalistic Code of Ethics, many media outlets, especially those in national newspaper with a deeper understanding of ethical journalism, choose not to display exploitative content, compared to the local newspapers. He emphasizes the ethical dilemma and the lack of specific privacy protections in

the AJI code. Manan also critiques the tendency towards sensationalism and the generalization in disaster victim portrayal, advocating for factual, balanced, and dignified reporting. In addition, a representative from Dewan Pers concurs on the need for sensitivity and ethical integrity, pointing out during the interview, "When media are regulated to publish photos of disaster victims, the most important thing to maintain is to not display sadism/graphic, not to show traumatic effects on the victims or the community." This statement underscores the less defined guidelines for disaster photojournalism and the necessity for journalists to navigate these ethical complexities with empathy and professionalism. Both stress that upholding ethical standards, respecting victim dignity, and accurately depicting events are paramount in maintaining credibility and integrity in Indonesian disaster journalism.

Adding to the discourse, a reporter from *Kompas* shared his perspective on the responsible depiction of disaster victims. He emphasizes personal and editorial discretion in the selection of images, striving to balance the truthful depiction of events with respect for the victims' dignity and the potential impact on readers. He contrasts the Indonesian approach with the more restrained Japanese media, highlighting the need for a shift towards responsible journalism that educates and informs without sensationalizing suffering. Together, these insights underscore the ethical complexities and responsibilities inherent in disaster photojournalism, advocating for standards that respect human dignity while informing the public.

A photo editor of *Kompas* describes *Kompas*'s approach to photojournalism in disaster scenarios, emphasizing their internal guidelines and ethical considerations. He notes that while there are no absolute prohibitions against showing dead bodies, *Kompas* strives to avoid such images unless they are crucial for understanding the story, such as in the case of mass burials during the Aceh tsunami. The policy generally discourages the display of dead bodies, blood, violence, and anything that might be considered sensationalist or disrespectful. He explains that even when such images are available, the decision to publish them is made with caution and sensitivity towards the impact on readers and the dignity of the victims. He stresses that photographs should contribute to public education and awareness, not just serve as a means to attract readership. The goal is to prompt a compassionate and constructive response from the public, rather than simply to shock or entertain.

The interview with a local photojournalist from *Riau Pos* reveals a cautious approach towards the portrayal of dead bodies, typically avoiding such images unless they are crucial for conveying the magnitude of the disaster. He clarifies, "As long as a photo does not display a body that is dismembered or bloody, I think it's okay." His main idea revolves around balancing

ethical journalism with the compelling need to inform the public about disasters, underlining that "black and white can cover up the gruesomeness of a situation, creating a sorrowful rather than a sadistic effect." He advocates for sensitivity in portraying victims, emphasizing the importance of depicting the disaster's impact in a way that is both truthful and respectful. Echoing this sentiment, he states, "When those bodies have been buried in a mass grave, only then is it appropriate to publish the photo," reflecting the ongoing ethical considerations and challenges that journalists face in selecting and publishing photographs of disaster victims. This underscores the need for discretion, empathy, and a commitment to ethical reporting.

Enhancing this narrative, a representative from the Ministry of Communication highlights the crucial role of media literacy and education among journalists and the public in navigating these ethical complexities. Understanding the ethical implications and responsibilities in disaster reporting is vital for media professionals and consumers alike, fostering a discourse that is not only informative but also respectful and constructive. This call for increased media literacy underscores the need for a conscientious approach to disaster journalism, one that balances the public's right to information with the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It reflects a growing awareness of the impact of media representation on public perception and the ethical responsibility of journalists in shaping this narrative.

The Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs

The 'Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs' section delves into the intricate challenges faced by photojournalists like Regina Safri (*Antara*), Surya Lesmana (*KR*), and Ahmad Arif (*Kompas*) in disaster reporting. This section explores their complex decision-making process in documenting disasters, where they must balance the responsibility of providing accurate information against their ethical obligation to respect individual dignity and privacy in crisis situations. These journalists' narratives illuminate the profound impact of their decisions on both the public narrative and their personal emotional well-being. Their experiences echo the sentiments expressed in the previous subsection, where the ethical challenges in capturing and displaying graphic images from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption were analyzed. Such photographs, while having significant news value and profound effects on human lives, present a moral quandary, often leading to a 'double disaster' as articulated by a representative from the Indonesian Ministry of Communication. This representative highlighted the delicate balance needed between capturing public attention and avoiding sensationalism that exploits victims' suffering. Additionally, insights from other media

professionals underscore the crucial role of ethical considerations in photojournalism, particularly in the context of disaster reporting.

Dispatched to the epicentre of the devastating 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, *Antara* News Agency's female photojournalist, Regina Safri, witnessed the pain and grief of the victims, blurring the distinction between her professional role as a journalist and the first responders. The chaotic image of a father reuniting with his child, among the shouts of *'Allahu Akbar,'* presented an opportunity to capture an impactful shot. However, it was precisely this intense emotional impact that made Regina hesitate; her feelings prevented her from mechanically capturing the moment with her camera. The moment that remained untaken—the opportunity to comfort by providing mineral water—shows both a human aspect of journalism and the photojournalist's own ethical choice.

During the interview, she explained that she photographed a mother laying on the ground with her two boys surrounding her and comforting her. She captured numerous images of the earthquake devastation as well. She then quickly placed her camera in her bag. She wanted to show her empathy for the victims. Her actions demonstrate a shared humanity between the journalist and those affected by the earthquake. Empathy allows journalists to tell stories with compassion, ensuring that the narrative is dignified rather than invasive or sensationalist.

However, in the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, Indonesian media, might driven by commercial interests, published images of blackened corpses and destruction. Ahmad Arif, of *Kompas*, reflected on the struggle to portray disaster without causing viewer distress (Arif, 2010). Similarly, Finnish media, covering the South Asian earthquake and tsunami, faced ethical decisions about displaying death, particularly when it involved local victims (Maenpaa 2022, p.2241). These cases illustrate how personal ethics of journalists can clash with institutional priorities.

He narrated in his book that the task of visual and print journalists to portray a horrific disaster without causing psychological distress to the readers/viewers is a hard one (Arif, 2010). According to Arif, photographing and publishing images of the victims' suffering has the potential to grab the attention and sympathy of readers, making it newsworthy. This aligns with Pantti's (2012) assertion that rather of providing explanations or statistics, showing graphic images of human suffering has been the most effective approach to get people to pay attention to the issue at hand. However, Arif's personal ethical values prevent him from sending the photographs of the Tsunami victims' grief and the dead body to the *Kompas* photo editor. Arif

expressed fear pertaining the physiological effects on both the audience and the subjects of such coverage upon viewing the photographs depicting the victims' mourning and corpses.

The importance of personal connections in journalistic decision-making is highlighted by a *KR* photojournalist who, even after capturing a photograph of a deceased individual during a Yogyakarta flood, chose not to submit the image out of consideration for the victim's family and the strong ties within the local community. However, his efforts were in vain as *KR* published a similar image from a photo agency. This led to a discussion with the editor about avoiding such images in future coverage, highlighting potential differences in ethical perspectives between editors and photojournalists.

In navigating these ethical dilemmas, journalists like Safri, Lesmana and Arif confront a fundamental question: How can they effectively portray the victims in a way that is both informative and empathetic, while also maintaining the respect and dignity, avoiding sensationalism? Their experiences and decisions shed light on the intricate balance between the obligation to provide information and the duty to show empathy, a balance that reminds to be central to the ethical dilemma faced by journalists.

This complex ethical dilemma highlights the conflicting demands of photojournalism: the need to provide compelling, newsworthy content while respecting the emotional and ethical boundaries of those affected by tragedy. These case studies demonstrate that the decision-making process in such circumstances goes beyond journalistic regulations. It requires a thoughtful examination of personal ethics and consideration of the societal impact of their work. The actions of Safri, Lesmana, and Arif, amidst these challenging circumstances, underscore the ongoing struggle within the field of journalism to find the right balance between professional responsibility and human sensitivity.

The ethical challenges encountered by photojournalists in disaster zones are intricate and diverse, demanding an in-depth knowledge of journalistic principles and human empathy. The decisions made by Safri, Lesmana, and Arif in the face of these dilemmas not only shape their narratives but also reflect broader questions about the role of media in society and the responsibility of journalists to their subjects and audience. As the media landscape continues to evolve, the experiences of these journalists provide valuable lessons and insights into the ethical considerations that are essential for responsible and sensitive reporting in a rapidly changing industry.

Ethics of Disaster Imagery in Indonesian Journalism

Indonesian journalists generally adhere to the Kode Etik Jurnalistik (KEJ or Journalist Code of Ethics) established by Dewan Pers for their reporting activities. Formed in 1999 ratified by the Press Council in 2006, the KEJ provides a fundamental ethical framework, consisting of eleven articles, each with its own interpretation. For more comprehensive and in-depth guidance, the Aliansi Jurnalis Indonesia (AJI) provides a Code of Conduct, comprising 57 articles. Abdul Manan from AJI highlighted that the Journalistic Code of Ethics, along with the AJI Code of Conduct, serves as the primary reference for journalists, each with varied interpretations and implementations in the field. Adding to this, Ratna Komala from Dewan Pers underscores the significance of these differences in interpretation, which can vary significantly across different media platforms, affecting the consistency and application of the ethical guidelines. This variability points to the nuanced and contextual nature of ethical journalism, especially in the sensitive area of disaster reporting.

In addition, different media outlets have their own set of regulations that govern how they approach journalism. These regulations may not always be written; some are communicated verbally during meetings. Journalists tend to be familiar with the regulations set by their media institution, which they regularly incorporate into their daily practices. For instance, in an interview, a journalist from *Kompas* newspaper expressed awareness of the types of disaster event photographs likely to be rejected or preferred by their editor.

Related to photojournalism, in 1992, Pewarta Foto Indonesia (PFI, Indonesian Photojournalists) was established. Photojournalism defined as "reporting visual information via various media" (Newton 2001, p.26). PFI formed its Code of Ethics in 2007, consisting of 14 articles. PFI Code of Ethics states that Indonesian photojournalists are dedicated to delivering truthful and accountable visual information, placing public interest at the forefront and upholding professional autonomy while adhering to ethical guidelines. This includes respecting copyright and privacy, refraining from manipulations, and refusing any kind of bribery. They are committed to upholding ethical reporting standards, preserving the dignity of victims, and seeking guidance from advisory bodies on ethical considerations.

In the context of Indonesian disaster reporting, as previously outlined, a critical concern emerges from the tendency towards sensationalism, where both local and national newspapers frequently emphasize the suffering of victims. This practice not only raises significant ethical questions regarding the protection of victims' privacy but also calls into question the professionalism of journalists handling such sensitive content. Moreover, this addresses the issue of whether these concerns are adequately addressed within the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Furthermore, scholars argue that such sensationalist reporting can contribute to 'compassion fatigue' among the public (Arif 2010). Continual exposure to graphic and distressing images may desensitize viewers, diminishing their capacity for empathy and their willingness to engage with the issues at hand. This phenomenon not only impacts the audience's emotional response but also raises questions about the long-term effectiveness of such reporting strategies in fostering a constructive and compassionate public discourse around disasters.

In light of these considerations, one important improvement that could be made to the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics or Conduct is the incorporation of explicit criteria for disaster reporting. This would include specific guidelines pertaining to the selection and use of photographs in newspapers. For instance, the code should address questions such as: What type of images are considered ethical? How should consent be obtained and documented? And how can the impact on victims, families, and the wider public be mitigated?

By revising the Code of Ethics to include these considerations, Indonesian journalism can better respect the dignity of individuals while still informing the public. This not only enhances the ethical standing of the journalism profession in Indonesia but also ensures that the victims and their families are treated with the respect and sensitivity they deserve.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the ethical challenges Indonesian photojournalists encounter in disaster reporting, especially in depicting pain and suffering in print media. It uncovers a conflict between striving for accurate journalism and the temptation of sensationalism, a practice that could compromise the privacy and dignity of those affected by disasters. The research included interviews with media professionals, revealing diverse viewpoints. A photo editor noted that their choice of photographs, although deemed the most respectful among available options, nevertheless prompts concerns regarding their influence on public perception and respect for the victims' dignity.

The findings also show that the existing Journalists' Code of Ethics in Indonesia offers only general guidelines, lacking specificity for disaster coverage. This lack of detailed guidance necessitates clearer and more comprehensive ethical standards tailored to the unique challenges of disaster photojournalism. The study suggests a need for enhanced journalist training and a re-evaluation of journalistic codes of ethics, aiming for a more empathetic and responsible approach in disaster photojournalism.

The implications of this research are significant for the field of journalism, particularly in Indonesia. It highlights the need for media organizations and regulatory bodies to re-examine and update their ethical codes to address the specific challenges of disaster reporting. This includes providing clear guidelines on the portrayal of suffering and ensuring that journalists are equipped with the necessary skills and ethical understanding to navigate these complex scenarios. The study also underscores the importance of fostering media literacy among the public, enhancing their understanding of journalistic practices and encouraging a critical consumption of news.

This paper highlights a range of areas for future research. These include observational studies and direct involvement in editorial decision-making processes to gain richer insights into how photographs are chosen for publication. Additionally, given the rapid developments in AI, exploring its ethical ramifications in disaster photojournalism becomes increasingly pertinent.

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Navigating Ethics and Empathy in Disaster Photojournalism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT This study examines the ethical challenges within Indonesian media's disaster reporting, particularly focusing on the depiction of disaster victims. It focused on several major disasters, including the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires. Through thematic analysis of interviews with six journalists and two media practitioners, and a critical examination of three graphic photographs of the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption, this research delves into the ethical challenges encountered by Indonesian photojournalists. The article highlights a pressing gap in the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics regarding the disaster coverage. This gap often leads to the recurrent publication of distressing images, emphasizing the need for clearer, more comprehensive ethical standards. Moreover, the study contrasts individual journalists' ethical awareness with broader industry trends towards sensationalism. This research contributes to the discourse on disaster photojournalism ethics, suggesting the significant need for policy development, journalist training programs, and the revision of journalistic codes of ethics. This emphasises the significance of balancing journalistic ethics with empathetic representation of victims and promotes fostering media literacy among the public.

KEYWORDS Indonesian media; Visual ethics; Photojournalism; Disaster journalism; and Journalism practice

INTRODUCTION

The media, including print newspapers, extensively covers disasters due to their significant news value, which impacts both human lives and the environment. These media play a crucial role in providing information to readers about the events occurring in a disaster-stricken area and the necessary actions that affected individuals should take. However, unlike in Japan and Australia, Indonesian media present a distinct representation of disaster by vividly depicting the visible suffering of victims. This portrayal, focusing on moments of despair, pain, and vulnerability, is found to prioritize sensationalism over sensitivity, leading to ethical dilemmas concerning the victims' right to privacy and the exploitation of their trauma for commercial gain (Irawanto, 2018; Lampito, 2015; Arif, 2010; Noviani, 2009; Silva and Eldridge, 2020).

The commercial nature of media organizations is evident in disaster reporting. The intense competition among news outlets to be the first on the scene during crises highlights this commercial drive in the industry (Anis, 2022). Such a competitive drive can influence the nature of disaster reporting, potentially exacerbating the focus

on sensationalism and the commercialization of human suffering. Griffin (2010) and Ali (2014) have noted that photographs, particularly those depicting shocking events or mass destruction, possess a unique capacity to engage a global audience. This remarkable ability to grab attention also renders these graphic images highly marketable, attracting more readers and viewers, which in turn boosts their commercial value for media outlets. Building on this, Hoijer (2004) contends that media reporting on distant suffering is not just about informing the public. It can also be driven by more cynical commercial interests, where media entities commodify human tragedies for sale in a global marketplace. This problem, coupled with the country's frequent encounters with disasters, means that it is crucial to evaluate the ethical implications of disaster photography in Indonesia.

Sensationalism in disaster reporting is often closely linked to the level of professionalism in journalism. In Indonesia, the Journalists' Code of Ethics provides broad guidelines for news photographs publication, as seen in Article No. 4, which advises against creating false, slanderous, cruel, and filthy news reports, and describes 'sadistic' behavior as characterized by cruelty and a lack of sympathy (Dewan Pers, 2017). Additionally, Article No. 9, emphasizes the need to uphold the privacy of news sources, barring conflicts with public interest, and defines "private life" as aspects of an individual's life not directly connected to public matters (Dewan Pers, 2017). Despite these guidelines, there is a lack of specificity and enforceability, particularly in the context of published photograph of the disaster's

victims, leading to potential violations of rights and dignity.

Photojournalists and editors are at the forefront of these ethical considerations, embodying the principles of both framing theory and gatekeeping theory. They are responsible for determining what to capture, how to frame it, and ultimately, what to publish, carrying a significant weight in shaping public perception and discourse. Framing theory suggests that the way information is presented (or 'framed') by the media can influence how it is understood and interpreted by audiences. Framing, as explained by Entman (1993), describes a selecting process that "call[s] attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions." Photojournalists and editors play a crucial role in this process, making deliberate choices about which aspects of a story to emphasize or omit, thus framing the audience's understanding of the event.

Seelig (2005) characterizes the photo editor as 'the visual elite,' underscoring their important role in determining the visual narrative of news. This perspective aligns with the gatekeeping theory, as explained by Shoemaker and Vos (2009). They describe how editors function as gatekeepers, crucially determining what information is published and what is omitted. These gatekeepers in charge in evaluating a wide range of stories and images, selecting those that reach the public based on criteria such as newsworthiness, ethical considerations, and organizational policy. Together with framing theory, gatekeeping theory, as elaborated by Shoemaker and Vos, underscores the

significant influence of photojournalists and editors in crafting the media landscape and, consequently, influencing the public's perception and response to news events.

Studies shows that the selection images for publication is close related to the concept of newsworthiness, which is defined by several factors that determine whether a story is worthy of being reported (Bednarek and Caple, 2017). Galtung and Ruge (1965) propose a set of criteria that journalists often use to evaluate the newsworthiness of a story, which includes criteria such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, human interest, impact, prominence, and novelty. Bednarek and Caple (2016) detail how news values in visual journalism are constructed through elements such as eliteness, impact, novelty, personalization, consonance, and aesthetic appeal, among others. Each news value is linked with key devices in image-making: content elements like the presence of high-status individuals or scenes of destruction, and camera techniques such as angles and framing that convey significance or emotional resonance. For instance, eliteness is conveyed through images of recognizable figures or symbols of authority, while impact is highlighted by capturing the significant effects of events, such as destruction or emotional aftermath. This complex interplay of content and technique in visual storytelling shapes the news value and the audience's perception of a story.

While the broad ethical challenges in photojournalism, including staging, accuracy, editing, and the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI), are increasingly scrutinized, this study narrows its focus to the ethics of portraying victims in disaster

imagery within Indonesian print newspaper. With Scopus data indicating limited scholarly attention to disaster photojournalism ethics in Indonesian newspapers, this research aims to address this gap by making a significant scholarly contribution to the understanding of photojournalism ethics as it pertains to disaster reportage in Indonesian print newspapers. It seeks to identify the norms and regulations guiding news photographers, highlight the primary professional ethical issues encountered in capturing and selecting images of disaster victims, and stimulate discourse on the necessity for ethical standard regulations in Indonesian photojournalism.

In order to achieve these aims, the study addresses the following research questions. First, how do Indonesian photojournalists and editors ethically navigate the portrayal of disaster victims, considering the impact on victims' dignity? Second, what are the limitations of Indonesia's Journalists' Code of Ethics in guiding ethical disaster coverage, and what improvements are necessary?

In the following section, the paper provides an overview of the research methodology employed. It then delves into three main themes that were identified from the interview transcripts: the sensationalism often associated with disaster reporting, the ethical dilemmas faced by photojournalists, and the ethical frameworks guiding the depiction of disaster imagery within the context of Indonesian journalism. The paper concludes up by summarising the main findings, offering suggestions to tackle the identified challenges, and suggesting areas for further research.

Research Methods

This study employs in-depth interviews to gather rich, detailed information from six Indonesian journalists (reporter, photojournalist, and editors) from both national and local newspapers in three cities: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Riau. Additionally, two Indonesian media practitioners from Dewan Pers and the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika, Kominfo) are included in this research. Conducted in July-August 2018, these interviews aimed to gather detailed insights into journalistic experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, particularly in the context of disaster reporting. The focus was on how print newspapers in Indonesia report disasters and adhere to journalistic ethics and professionalism. This included a specific examination of three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in *Kompas* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspapers. The selection of journalist participants was based on their experience in covering at least one major Indonesian disaster event, ensuring a knowledgeable and relevant group of respondents. Major disasters discussed included the 2004 Aceh Tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquake, the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption, and the 2015 Sumatra Forest fires. These discussions provided a platform to explore the ethical considerations and practices influencing journalists' decision-making processes in disaster reporting.

For the analytical approach, this research employs thematic analysis to examine the transcripts of the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis focuses on identifying and highlighting recurrent ideas or patterns within the text. The theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". The study systematically organizes these patterns into emerging themes and further analyse and interpret them through the lens of the gatekeeping process, newsworthiness, and ethical considerations in journalism. By doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in disaster reporting in Indonesia.

Thematic analysis is selected for its notable advantage of effectively summarising key features of a substantial amount of data. In addition, it facilitates the identification of similarities and differences across the data set and can bring out recurrent themes and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. To enhance the primary data collected from interviews, this research also incorporates relevant secondary sources, including books and articles, to enrich the analysis.

DISCUSSION

This section examines three key topics derived from interviews with Indonesian journalists: the prevalence of sensationalism in disaster reporting, the ethical challenges faced by photojournalists, and the ethical frameworks guiding the depiction of disaster imagery in the Indonesian journalism.

The Sensationalism of Disaster Reporting in Indonesian Print Newspapers

This section discusses three graphic/disturbing photographs from the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption as featured in the national and local newspapers, *Kompas* and *KR*, analyzing the responses of research participants to these images. These photographs, while holding significant news value due to their profound effects on human lives, also bring to light the ethical challenges intrinsic to disaster coverage.

Kompas and *KR*'s coverage of this event provides a clear illustration of the ethical dilemmas that emerge in disaster journalism. It highlights the challenge of balancing an impactful narrative with the temptation to sensationalise. The difficulty lies in balancing the need to draw public attention to the gravity of the situation against the risk of exploiting the victims' suffering for increased readership. The concerns raised by a Kominfo representative about the potential for a 'double disaster' resonate deeply in this context. He warns against creating a 'double disaster,' where the second unfolds through the sensationalist reporting of the event, potentially intensifying trauma and sorrow for the audience and victims alike.

Echoing his sentiment, a chief editor from a local Yogyakarta newspaper (*KR*) sheds light on the motivations behind sensationalist disaster reporting in Indonesian media. He highlights that commercial interests may drive the frequent use of dramatic, emotionally charged images to maintain newspaper sales. Meanwhile, the depiction of suffering in photographs remains a controversial topic within journalism globally (Silva and Eldridge, 2020; Arif, 2010; Bersak,

2006). Some journalists defend such imagery as a truthful representation of the harsh consequences and a means to humanize the event. However, critics argue these images can sensationalize tragedy, harm those depicted, and unnecessarily disturb readers.

In an interview, a local journalist from Riau conveys the importance of photographs in local newspapers. He states, "Photos are an important part of the newspaper. At *Riau Pos*, there's always a question and discussion about 'what's the photo of the day?'" This highlights how photographs are essential elements that define the quality and appeal of the publication. Further elaborating on the competitive aspect of the newspaper market, he notes:

> "We sell newspapers only if our product is of high quality; otherwise, it won't sell. Meanwhile, we face competition from others in the region. If we're not offering a product that stands out, why would people choose to buy from us? This underscores the importance of competition with other newspapers." (Author's translation).

These insights convey that in the competitive newspaper market, visually compelling and well-presented photographs are crucial for attracting readers and distinguishing the publication from its competitors. These images are not just decorative; they are fundamental to the newspaper's identity and success, underscoring the critical role of visual elements in modern journalism and the strategic considerations in selecting and featuring photographs in daily publications.

This ethical conflict is particularly evident in images that vividly capture victim distress, contributing to a trend towards traumatic reporting. Prominent disasters like the 2004

Aceh tsunami, the 2006 Yogyakarta and Central Java earthquakes, and the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption have seen such reporting styles, which, while aiming to reflect the emotional and physical toll of these events, also risk impacting the audience's perception and compromising the dignity of those depicted.

The media's role in fundraising efforts through disaster photography adds another layer to the discussion. In an interview, a chief-editor of a local newspaper (KR) suggests that by showing the real situation, a photo can actually become a means to extend a hand to gather support and aid for disaster victims. However, he emphasizes the importance of handling such photographs with sensitivity. KR frequently dedicates entire pages to showcasing photographs related to donations. Although this approach has practical benefits, it has been subject to scholarly criticism. Concerns primarily revolve around the potential compromise of journalistic integrity and the risk of exploiting victim suffering for the purpose of aid (Masduki, 2007). These criticisms highlight the necessity for a thorough evaluation of both the ethical ramifications and the practical effectiveness of using disaster photography in media-led charitable endeavours.

The media's portrayal of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption offers more evidence of the distressing imagery depicting the disasters in Indonesia. A front-page photo in the Indonesian national daily, *Kompas*, on 6 October 2010, as shown in figure 1, presents a powerful visual narrative: a grieving woman, her face etched with ash and tears, embodies the profound sadness and helplessness prevalent among the residents of Yogyakarta during the eruption. The accompanying headline, 'Merapi Peras Air Mata' ('Merapi Squeezes Tears), 'while capturing the essence of the disaster's emotional toll, also prompts a reflection on the potential for such narratives to turn towards sensationalism, and in doing so, risk commodifying personal tragedy.

Figure 1 A woman's tearful aftermath in the wake of Merapi's eruption.

(Kompas, 6 October 2010)

In Indonesia, the portrayal of an individual's profound sadness or suffering, often captured in close-up shots, does not require consent. This reflects an alarming gap in ethical standards, potentially infringing on the privacy and dignity of those affected. Regarding privacy and consent, a representative of Kominfo notes that there is a lack of specific regulations in Indonesia protecting the privacy of disaster victims in media reports. He mentions in the interview:

"Socially speaking, protection is a right everyone deserves, as happiness and comfort in life come from being respected by others. We want privacy; we shouldn't expose everything. However, the problem lies in the regulation—or lack thereof—regarding the protection of personal data. As of now, there is no specific regulation in place." (Author's translation).

This lack of specific regulations creates a significant challenge, as images of dead bodies, suffering individuals, and other sensitive content can circulate widely without the consent of the individuals or their families. He stresses the importance of respecting the privacy and dignity of disaster victims, pointing out that ethical considerations should guide the publication of such images.

Kompas's editorial choice to feature a less graphic yet emotionally charged image of a woman in tears highlights the nuanced challenges within disaster photojournalism. While the decision was made with ethical considerations, it does not prevent the image from contributing to sensationalist narratives. The photograph's recognition in a Merapi photo contest for its emotive and aesthetic impact underscores the delicate balance between empathy and sensationalism. Such images, while avoiding explicit graphic content, may still engage in sensationalism through their evocative power. The complex interplay of empathy, ethics, and sensationalism highlights the significance of visual journalism. It suggests a crucial discussion on the need for clearer ethical standards and a greater moral compass in the field of disaster reporting.

Another disaster photograph published in the local daily *KR* on 28 October 2010 (figure 2) depicted rescue professionals transporting a deceased body, with just one hand visible, symbolising a life that has been tragically ended.

Figure 2 Rescue workers transport a victim of the Mt. Merapi eruption.

(KR, 28 October 2010)

Another image, resembling the previous one, was published in *KR* on 6 November 2010. It portrays a deceased individual shrouded in a body bag, the hand emerging from the ashes, both humanizing the tragedy and preserving the dignity of the deceased.

Figure 3 A Mt Merapi victim's hand emerges from a body bag.

(KR, 6 November 2010)

The media coverage of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption in Indonesia presented numerous distressing images of the victims across both print and digital platforms. In addition to the three photographs analyzed in this paper (figures 1 – 3), a multitude of images captured the profound suffering endured by the affected individuals. These selected photos underscore the strong

emotional resonance of the broader visual documentation of the event

The chief editor of *KR* contributes to the discussion of publishing photographs of dead bodies in disaster reporting. He acknowledges the need for such images in the early stages of a disaster to accurately depict the severity and invoke the needed response. Yet, as the situation evolves, he emphasizes shifting the narrative towards recovery and community rebuilding, highlighting resilience. A journalist colleague at *KR* explains their internal policy further, stating in an interview:

> "Indeed, the most respectful photo is the one that employs symbolism. Through the lens of semiotics in photography, we represent the deceased with a single part – perhaps a hand or a leg. This approach stems from our deep empathy for the victims." (Author's translation).

This method, employing symbolic imagery such as the depiction of just a hand, becomes a common practice to convey the tragedy's gravity while respecting the deceased and their families.

In responds to the depiction of dead bodies and suffering in disaster reporting, a representative from AJI address these concerns in their interviews. He highlights that while there isn't a specific prohibition against publishing such images in the Journalistic Code of Ethics, many media outlets, especially those in national newspaper with a deeper understanding of ethical journalism, choose not to display exploitative content, compared to the local newspapers. He emphasizes the ethical dilemma and the lack of specific privacy protections in the AJI code. He also critiques

the tendency towards sensationalism and the generalization in disaster victim portrayal, advocating for factual, balanced, and dignified reporting. In addition, a representative from Dewan Pers concurs on the need for sensitivity and ethical integrity, pointing out during the interview:

> "When media are regulated to publish photos of disaster victims, the most important thing to maintain is to not display sadism/graphic, not to show traumatic effects on the victims or the community." (Author's translation).

This statement underscores the less defined guidelines for disaster photojournalism and the necessity for journalists to navigate these ethical complexities with empathy and professionalism. Both stress that upholding ethical standards, respecting victim dignity, and accurately depicting events are paramount in maintaining credibility and integrity in Indonesian disaster journalism.

Adding to the discourse, a journalist from *Kompas* shared his perspective on the responsible depiction of disaster victims. He emphasizes personal and editorial discretion in the selection of images, striving to balance the truthful depiction of events with respect for the victims' dignity and the potential impact on readers. He contrasts the Indonesian approach with the more restrained Japanese media, highlighting the need for a shift towards responsible journalism that educates and informs without sensationalizing suffering. Together, these insights underscore the ethical complexities and responsibilities inherent in disaster photojournalism, advocating for standards that respect human dignity while informing the public.

A photo editor of *Kompas* describes *Kompas*'s approach to photojournalism in disaster scenarios, emphasizing their internal guidelines and ethical considerations. He notes that while there are no absolute prohibitions against showing dead bodies, *Kompas* strives to avoid such images unless they are crucial for understanding the story, such as in the case of mass burials during the Aceh tsunami. The policy generally discourages the display of dead bodies, blood, violence, and anything that might be considered sensationalist or disrespectful. He explains that even when such images are available, the decision to publish them is made with caution and sensitivity towards the impact on readers and the dignity of the victims. He stresses that photographs should contribute to public education and awareness, not just serve as a means to attract readership. The goal is to prompt a compassionate and constructive response from the public, rather than simply to shock or entertain.

The interview with a local photojournalist from *Riau Pos* reveals a cautious approach towards the portrayal of dead bodies, typically avoiding such images unless they are crucial for conveying the magnitude of the disaster. He explains, "As long as a photo does not display a body that is dismembered or bloody, I think it is okay." His main idea revolves around balancing ethical journalism with the compelling need to inform the public about disasters, underlining that "black and white can cover up the gruesomeness of a situation, creating a sorrowful rather than a sadistic effect." He advocates for sensitivity in portraying victims, emphasizing the importance of depicting the disaster's impact in a way that is both truthful and respectful. Echoing this sentiment, he states, "When those bodies have been buried in a mass grave, only then is it appropriate to publish the photo," reflecting the ongoing ethical considerations and challenges that journalists face in selecting and publishing photographs of disaster victims. This underscores the need for discretion, empathy, and a commitment to ethical reporting.

Enhancing this narrative, a representative from Kominfo highlights the crucial role of media literacy and education among journalists and the public in navigating these ethical complexities. Understanding the ethical implications and responsibilities in disaster reporting is vital for media professionals and consumers alike, fostering a discourse that is not only informative but also respectful and constructive. This call for increased media literacy underscores the need for a conscientious approach to disaster journalism, one that balances the public's right to information with the dignity and privacy of those affected by disasters. It reflects a growing awareness of the impact of media representation on public perception and the ethical responsibility of journalists in shaping this narrative.

The Journalists' Ethical Dilemma in Selecting Disaster Photographs

This section examines the perceived contradiction between the ethical restraint demonstrated by Indonesian photojournalists and the broader critique of sensationalism in disaster journalism. The ethical dilemmas encountered by photojournalists in documenting disasters present a complex interplay between the responsibility to

report accurately and the ethical imperative to respect the subjects' dignity and privacy. Journalists such as Regina Safri (*Antara*), Surya Lesmana (*KR*), and Ahmad Arif (*Kompas*) embody the conscientious approach to disaster reporting, highlighting the significant impact their decisions have on both public perception and their own emotional well-being.

During the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake, Safri's hesitation to capture a potentially sensational image in favour shows a conscious decision to prioritize empathy over the capture of sensational content, indicating a deep commitment to ethical awareness within individual journalists. Similarly, Ahmad Arif's choice to refrain from disseminating graphic images of the Aceh Tsunami illustrates a deliberate effort to avoid contributing to the audience's distress. These cases reveal a tension between the journalistic objectives to inform and the potential for sensationalism to exploit victims' suffering, a concern echoed by a representative from Kominfo who warns against the 'double disaster' of sensationalized reporting.

While such individual ethical diligence, as seen in Safri's and Arif's reporting, the broader industry's practices occasionally veer towards sensationalism, influenced by competitive pressures and audience demand for compelling visuals. Yet, it's crucial to acknowledge the diversity within the journalistic community. Despite the commendable ethical restraint shown by journalists such as Regina Safri, Ahmad Arif, and Surya Lesmana, it is important to recognize that not all journalists adhere to the same high standards. The diversity

in journalistic practice across the industry can lead to varied approaches in covering disasters, some of which may prioritize sensationalism over ethical considerations. As demonstrated by the analysis of the three photographs in the previous section, the selection and presentation of images can indeed sensationalize the disaster, emphasizing dramatic or emotionally charged content to attract viewership or readership.

Arif (2010) offers a critique of the journalistic practice of disseminating images depicting victims' suffering, employed frequently to engage readers due to its perceived newsworthiness. While such methods are effective in capturing public attention, as Pantti (2010) explains, they raise profound ethical concerns. Arif (2010) stresses the moral responsibility journalists hold to balance public information needs against the psychological impacts of graphic content on audiences and depicted subjects. His critique calls attention to the need for reporting that is both informative and empathetic, avoiding sensationalism.

This reflection is complemented by the experience of a *KR* photojournalist who chose not to submit an image of a deceased individual out of respect for the victim's family and community. However, *KR* published a similar image from a photo agency, sparking a discussion on editorial choices and the potential for ethical discrepancies between editors and photojournalists.

This variation in ethical standards and editorial choices highlights a critical tension within disaster journalism. While Safri, Arif, and Lesmana exemplify a commitment to

dignity, privacy, and empathy, the broader examination of media coverage, including the photographs selected for publication, suggests a persistent inclination towards sensationalism in some quarters of the media. This discrepancy underscores the need for a more uniform adherence to ethical guidelines across the field of journalism, ensuring that the portrayal of disasters serves the public interest without exploiting the suffering of those involved.

In acknowledging the exceptional ethical awareness of certain journalists, we must also confront the reality that sensationalism remains a significant challenge within disaster reporting. The selection of photos that tend towards sensationalizing the disaster reflects a broader industry issue that extends beyond individual journalists. It is a reminder of the ongoing struggle within the media to balance the demands of storytelling, audience engagement, and ethical responsibility.

The ethical dilemmas explored here underscore a critical distinction: while journalists exhibit a nuanced understanding of and commitment to ethical reporting, the mechanics of media consumption and institutional priorities can still propel the industry towards sensationalism. Therefore, acknowledging the ethical sensitivity demonstrated by journalists like Safri, Lesmana, and Arif invites a deeper examination of sensationalism, not as a failure of individual ethics, but as a complex challenge that the media industry must collectively address.

Ethical Framework of Disaster Imagery in Indonesian Journalism

This section examines the ethical standards guiding the portrayal of disaster victims in Indonesian print media, with a particular focus on the Kode Etik Jurnalistik (KEJ or Journalist Code of Ethics), formed in 1999 ratified by the Press Council in 2006. It is essential to explore how the existing ethical frameworks are interpreted and applied in practice, revealing gaps that may allow sensationalism to persist. This includes discussing the need for more explicit guidelines on disaster reporting within these ethical codes, addressing directly how journalists and media outlets can better balance the public's right to information with the dignity and privacy of victims.

The KEJ provides a fundamental ethical framework, consisting of eleven articles, each with its own interpretation. For more comprehensive and in-depth guidance, the Aliansi Jurnalis Indonesia (AJI) provides a Code of Conduct, comprising 57 articles. A representative from AJI highlighted that the Journalistic Code of Ethics, along with the AJI Code of Conduct, serves as the primary reference for journalists, each with varied interpretations and implementations in the field. Adding to this, a representative from Dewan Pers underscores the significance of these differences in interpretation, which can vary significantly across different media platforms, affecting the consistency and application of the ethical guidelines. This variability points to the nuanced and contextual nature of ethical journalism, particularly in the sensitive domain of disaster reporting.

In addition, different media institutions have their own set of regulations that govern how they approach journalism, including in disaster reporting. These regulations may not always be written; some are communicated verbally during meetings. Journalists tend to be familiar with the regulations set by their media institution, which they regularly incorporate into their daily practices. For instance, in an interview, a journalist from *Kompas* newspaper expressed awareness of the types of disaster event photographs likely to be rejected or preferred by their editor.

Related to photojournalism, in 1992, Pewarta Foto Indonesia (PFI, Indonesian Photojournalists) was established. Photojournalism defined as "reporting visual information via various media" (Newton, 2012). PFI formed its Code of Ethics in 2007, consisting of 14 articles. PFI Code of Ethics states that Indonesian photojournalists are dedicated to delivering truthful and accountable visual information, placing public interest at the forefront and upholding professional autonomy while adhering to ethical guidelines. This includes respecting copyright and privacy, refraining from manipulations, and refusing any kind of bribery. They are committed to upholding ethical reporting standards, preserving the dignity of victims, and seeking guidance from advisory bodies on ethical considerations.

In the context of Indonesian disaster reporting, as previously outlined, a critical concern emerges from the tendency towards sensationalism, where both local and national newspapers frequently emphasize the suffering of victims. This practice not only raises significant ethical questions regarding the protection of victims' privacy but also calls into question the professionalism of journalists handling such sensitive content. Moreover, this addresses the issue of whether these concerns are adequately addressed within the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics.

The analysis of media coverage of significant disasters, such as the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption, by national and local newspapers (e.g., *Kompas* and *KR*), reveals a nuanced approach to disaster reporting. Recent research by Anis (2022) underscores *Kompas*'s efforts as a national newspaper to employ multiple layers of editing, showcasing restraint in sensationalizing disaster events compared to the local newspaper, *KR*. This nuanced editorial judgment is exemplified in *Kompas*'s choice to publish an emotionally charged yet less graphic image of a woman in tears. Such a decision reflects a conscious negotiation of ethical boundaries, aiming to evoke empathy without resorting to graphic depictions of the disaster. However, as previously noted, even this careful selection does not entirely escape the potential for sensationalism. The photograph's capacity to convey deep emotional impact, coupled with its recognition in a Merapi photo contest, illustrates the fine line between empathy and sensationalism in disaster photojournalism. In contrast, the approach taken by *KR*, involving the publication of a more direct yet still restrained depiction of tragedy (e.g., showing a deceased victim's hand), suggests different editorial priorities that might lean more overtly towards sensationalism.

Furthermore, scholars argue that such sensationalist reporting can contribute to 'compassion fatigue' among the public (Arif, 2010). Continual exposure to graphic and

distressing images may desensitize viewers, diminishing their capacity for empathy and their willingness to engage with the issues at hand. This phenomenon not only impacts the audience's emotional response but also raises questions about the long-term effectiveness of such reporting strategies in fostering a constructive and compassionate public discourse around disasters.

In light of these considerations, a critical enhancement to the Indonesian Journalists' Code of Ethics or Conduct would involve integrating explicit criteria tailored specifically to disaster reporting. Such an amendment should elaborate on guidelines for the ethical selection and presentation of photographs within the media. This enhancement necessitates defining what types of images are deemed ethically acceptable for publication, especially in contexts that involve human suffering or tragedy. It also requires establishing clear protocols for obtaining consent from individuals featured in disaster-related imagery, addressing how such consent should be documented, and outlining the approach when direct consent cannot be practically obtained. Moreover, the code should provide directions on mitigating the potential adverse impacts of published images on victims, their families, and the general public.

By revising the Code of Ethics to include these considerations, Indonesian journalism can better respect the dignity of individuals while still informing the public. This not only enhances the ethical standing of the journalism profession in Indonesia but also ensures that the victims and their families

are treated with the respect and sensitivity they deserve.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the ethical challenges Indonesian photojournalists encounter in disaster reporting, especially in depicting pain and suffering in print media. It uncovers a conflict between striving for accurate journalism and the temptation of sensationalism, a practice that could compromise the privacy and dignity of those affected by disasters. The research included interviews with media professionals, revealing diverse viewpoints on the pressures of the news industry, audience expectations, and the potential for photographs to significantly influence public response to disasters.

The findings underscore that the existing Journalists' Code of Ethics in Indonesia provides only general guidelines, which notably lack specificity in addressing the ethical considerations involved in selecting and publishing images of victims in disaster scenarios. This gap highlights an urgent need for the development of clearer, more comprehensive ethical standards in depicting the suffering of victims within disaster photojournalism. Such standards should guide journalists on how to balance the public's right to be informed with the imperative to respect the dignity and privacy of individuals affected by disasters. Consequently, the study suggests a pressing need for enhanced journalist training focused on ethical decision-making in image selection and a thorough re-evaluation of journalistic codes of ethics. The goal is to cultivate a more empathetic and responsible approach to disaster reporting, ensuring that

the portrayal of victims is both sensitive and ethically sound.

Moreover, an investigation on the journalists' ethical dilemma in selecting disaster photographs, reveals a clear contrast between the ethical awareness and commitment demonstrated by individual journalists like Regina Safri, Ahmad Arif, and Surya Lesmana, and the broader industry's tendency towards sensationalism, driven by competitive pressures and the quest for compelling visuals. This nuanced understanding of ethical reporting by individual journalists stands in contrast to industry practices that occasionally prioritize sensationalism. Such divergence emphasizes the necessity for a collective effort within the media industry to address sensationalism, viewing it as a systemic challenge requiring a unified response, rather than as a reflection of individual ethical failures.

The implications of this research are significant for disaster journalism, particularly in Indonesia, calling for news outlets and regulatory bodies to revise and update ethical codes to better address disaster reporting's specific challenges. This includes formulating clear guidelines on portraying suffering and equipping journalists with the skills and ethical insights needed to navigate these scenarios sensitively. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of enhancing media literacy among the public, to foster an understanding of journalistic practices and promote critical engagement with news content.

This paper also identifies areas for future research, such as conducting observational studies and engaging directly in editorial decision-making processes for deeper insights into photograph selection. Additionally, given the rapid developments in AI, exploring its ethical ramifications in disaster photojournalism becomes increasingly pertinent.

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