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Assessing Independent Media Viability in Indonesia

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December 2025

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First published by:

Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia
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Assessing Independent Media Viability in Indonesia
67 p. : 21 cm x 29,7 cm
Cet. I, December 2025

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Foreword

The dynamics of the global crisis in media and journalism have triggered movements to mitigate further crises and to evaluate empirical conditions for policy recommendations involving the state/government, media actors, and activists. The concept of media resilience or media viability has become one of the strategies promoted by international media-sector donor institutions, supported by supranational organizations such as UNESCO. This report represents an effort to introduce and adapt the global idea of media viability to Indonesia's post-digital disruption context and to examine how the government is involved. The collaboration between AJI Indonesia, BBC Media Action, and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has made this initiative possible.

In designing the concept, framework, and measurement tools to assess media viability in Indonesia, taking lessons from countries with similar circumstances, the working group appointed by AJI Indonesia has studied various ideas and models of viability indices, as well as conducted literature reviews from relevant institutions such as Deutsche Welle Akademie, the Global Forum for Media Development, and BBC Media Action.

This report presents three main areas of discussion derived from the literature study. First, it outlines the normative and political-economic background behind the emergence of the media viability concept and the rationale for developing a media viability index in Indonesia. It also reviews definitions of media viability, compares formulas and indicators of media viability indices from various international organizations, and explains how measurement will be carried out with attention to Indonesia's specific context. The second part discusses the empirical conditions of alternative news media businesses and journalists as pillars of press freedom in Indonesia. The third part explains the proposed measurement scenarios and selected dimensions of media viability for Indonesia, including key indicators, data sources, and methods.

In addition to document studies (desk reviews), the working group is also conducting, and will continue to conduct, a series of data collection activities through focus group discussions (FGDs) involving two strategic groups: alternative media managers and relevant stakeholders. The working group will also carry out field visits to several alternative media outlets to gain a deeper empirical understanding of newsroom conditions. The observations and FGDs will be complemented by surveys targeting specific populations to gather further input on media viability. All of these activities fully refer to the indicators and measurement methods for media viability formulated by several international institutions, including BBC Media Action.

SECTION I

Understanding Media Viability

I. Why Media Viability?

The global media sector is facing an unprecedented sustainability crisis. The fundamental role of independent media, widely recognized as the "fourth pillar" of democracy, is now under threat from systemic crises (DW Akademie, 2020). Traditional business models that have long sustained the news industry, based on advertising, subscriptions, and print distribution, are no longer viable amid the dominance of global digital platforms such as Google and Meta. These companies control the majority of digital advertising (Ogundipe, 2025) and hold power over the ecosystems of news distribution and monetization, transforming journalism from a public service into an algorithmic commodity (Hermida & Young, 2024).

This digital transformation has created a new imbalance of power between media and platforms. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024 (Newman et al., 2024) shows that 56% of global news consumers now access information through social media, while only 22% visit news websites directly. Scheffauer, Urban, and Maier (2023) further demonstrate how algorithmic gatekeeping has replaced the curatorial role of professional journalists, often displacing journalistic values such as accuracy, relevance, and context with the logic of virality and engagement metrics.

Beyond platform pressure, the media industry also faces challenges from automation and artificial intelligence (AI). Dodds (2024) describes this phenomenon as "the AI turn in journalism"—a phase in which automated news production accelerates content creation but simultaneously deepens inequalities between well-resourced major media and smaller outlets without access to advanced technology. This disruption is not only economic but also epistemic: the public now faces a flood of information that is increasingly difficult to verify.

DW Akademie (2024) refers to this crisis as a direct threat to the viability of democracy. When the media lose their economic and social capacity to perform their watchdog function, it is not merely the industry at risk, but the very foundation of democracy. In this context, media viability is not just about profitability, as it concerns the media's ability to remain an independent, accountable, and trustworthy public sphere. In Latin America, Colussi, Paes, and Gomes-Franco e Silva (2025) show that initiatives like Google News Showcase, initially intended to support the media, have in fact reinforced structural dependency on digital platforms. Similar patterns are observed in Europe and Asia, where platform-based initiatives often create asymmetric economic relationships between global tech companies and local media.

However, this crisis is not purely economic. It is also a systemic social crisis. In the post-truth era, where emotions and personal beliefs often outweigh objective facts (Uluşan & Özejder, 2024), the spread of disinformation has intensified while journalistic authority has weakened. In this context, public preference for news curated by professional journalists over algorithmic curation has become a driver of trust, while algorithm-driven clickbait practices erode the media's most valuable asset. (Scheffauer et al., 2023).

Mass media in general, and journalism in particular, play crucial roles in fostering democratic culture, social order, and equitable economic life. To fulfill these strategic roles, media require both protection and sustainability to perform their holistic public functions effectively. The media sector, especially journalism, needs not only economic guarantees to innovate but also a democratic political climate grounded in respect for press freedom. Drawing on the experience of Western European countries, particularly Scandinavia, media policy originates from the state's obligation to protect its citizens and uphold human rights law, which ensures the right to freedom of expression. Article 10, paragraph 1, of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) states that "everyone has the right to freedom of expression." In Indonesia, similar principles are enshrined in the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 40/1999 on the Press.

Normatively, the existence of mass media derives from the right to freedom of opinion and the right to receive and impart information and ideas without interference from political authorities. Media policy in every democratic country is closely tied to human rights and must be based on reaffirming freedom of expression and information, recognizing that such freedoms are essential for citizens' social, economic, cultural, and political development. From this perspective, two fundamental aspects are connected to the concept and implementation of media viability measurement: first, technology (the need to regulate the use of frequency spectrum); and second, the role of media in democracy. Both aspects influence not only the formulation of regulations and the work of regulators but also the practices of media actors involved. Within this framework, it becomes understandable that in most democratic countries in Europe, the news media sector was initially placed within a public monopoly context, justified by the understanding that high-quality news is a public good that significantly shapes public opinion.

Recent developments, particularly digital technological disruption and the hegemony of global digital platforms, have been accompanied by other challenges facing journalism: a crisis of public trust caused by editorial interference from owners or political actors, especially in post-authoritarian countries. The dependence of commercial news corporations on advertising or government funding has eroded media autonomy and their alignment with the public interest. The media landscape has been completely transformed

by the proliferation of online platforms and services, which have reshaped the cultural and media industries through large-scale platformization. The crisis of quality journalism has become the culmination of the media's economic crisis, distancing it from public participation. Consequently, the sustainability of news media is no longer guaranteed.

In response to these conditions and the normative arguments above, the concept of media viability and sustainability has attracted increasing attention over the past decade. The notion of media viability remains open to various interpretations and lacks a single, unified definition among stakeholders. However, there is broad agreement that it relates to the idea of state responsibility, which may take the form of national or international policy frameworks. The nature of this responsibility may vary depending on local political-economic conditions, provided that such interventions do not compromise editorial independence.

The concept of media viability and/or sustainability encompasses multiple dimensions, including financing and ensuring fair market competition, integrating vertical and horizontal digital media business models, consolidating new market segments such as digital media service providers and distributors, including video-on-demand, and content production driven by private production groups, their subsidiaries, and public broadcasters.

Why is knowledge of media viability important? A comprehensive understanding of media viability in a given country is essential for two main reasons. First, from the perspective of media practitioners: when newsrooms understand the detailed conditions and deficiencies of their operating environment, they can take appropriate actions and find ways to strengthen the sustainability of journalism, especially in responding to the complexities of digital disruption. Second, from the perspective of media activists and policymakers, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the media viability situation in a country or region to design appropriate macro policy strategies and targeted assistance interventions.

Collecting data on the economic sustainability of media can help monitor the media landscape, track its development, and raise awareness of existing challenges. Insights gained from assessing indicators focused on media viability can help identify potential sustainable business models for news media in specific national contexts. The data generated are not only relevant for media owners and managers worldwide but also for donors and international organizations involved in media development. Only when business viability is ensured can media, currently still dependent on advertising and international donors, remain economically sustainable and editorially independent in the long term.

II. Definition of Media Viability

In much of the academic literature and in definitions developed by professional media consultancy institutions, such as Deutsche Welle Akademie and Free Press Unlimited, the concept of media viability generally refers to two main aspects. First, the economic aspect of news media operations, which responds to the crisis situation that emerged following digital disruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the work culture aspect, which combines economic dimensions with professional standards, legal protection, and journalists' occupational safety, among others. While the first aspect pertains to media institutions or corporations, the second encompasses individual actors. The term viable itself is not yet widely used in Indonesian; for the purposes of this study, it can be translated as resilience or robustness. Referring to the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and the Global Media Investment Fund, media resilience is defined as a condition of full operational resourcefulness that enables editorial independence and the media's critical role in serving the public.

The independent organization BBC Media Action initially defined media viability as the sustainability of financial resources that allows media to maintain integrity in the public sphere, for instance, through the production of high-quality content that meets public needs. However, the initially finance-focused criteria were later expanded to include three dimensions, political, economic, and social, which are considered key factors driving transformations in the post-digital disruption media ecosystem, particularly in fragile states.

Referring to the media viability consultation document in Tunisia, the consultancy firm Alkhatt and the Global Forum for Media Development integrate two popular and closely related terms: media viability and media sustainability. According to this report, a news media outlet can initially be considered viable if it is funded by either the government or private entrepreneurs through companies or foundations they establish. The issue, however, lies in the political nature of both funding sources, particularly the potential for strong editorial interference through financial dependence. Consequently, media viability also encompasses the implementation of sound journalistic professional standards, the guarantee of editorial independence, diversity of content, and newsroom structure. In this sense, diversified funding sources (rather than a single dominant source) are key to building broader media networks and fostering public trust.

From the state or government perspective, the GFMD identifies three critical components in assessing media resilience: Firstly, guarantees of editorial and journalistic freedom. Secondly, the diversity of funding sources. Thirdly, the existence of independent regulators, such as the Press Council and Broadcasting Commission in Indonesia. From the economic and business perspective, regulation should promote fair competition, prevent monopolies, and avoid corrupt practices, including bribery. Regulatory frameworks must foster a competitive media market structure while ensuring specific support for strengthening public service and non-profit media.

Broadly defined, media viability refers to an operational condition in which media organizations and the entire media ecosystem can consistently produce high-quality, editorially independent journalistic content in a sustainable manner (DW Akademie, 2020). This assessment is inherently multidimensional, relying on an analysis of five interrelated domains: Politics, Economy, Content and Expertise, Technology, and Community (DW Akademie, 2020).

1. The political dimension involves press freedom and the legal framework that protects the media from state interference and market pressures.
2. The economic dimension includes revenue diversification and efficient business management.
3. The content and expertise dimension specifically highlights editorial professionalism, digital literacy, and innovation capacity.
4. The technological dimension emphasizes adaptation to digital infrastructure and data security.
5. The community dimension highlights the significance of social connectedness and public trust in the media, particularly in the digital era.

The Media Viability Manifesto (2024), released by various media development organizations, including DW Akademie, UNESCO, IMS, and BBC Media Action, emphasizes that media sustainability cannot be achieved individually. It requires an ecosystemic approach, in which actors such as governments, academia, donor institutions, and civil society collaborate to build an enabling environment for independent journalism. The manifesto asserts: “Viability is not a matter of market survival, but of collective responsibility.”

Free Press Unlimited (FPU) offers a more operational perspective. According to FPU (2021): “Media viability is the whole of conditions that need to be fulfilled for media to be able to exist and flourish completely independently (on their own). These include factors that media outlets can, to some extent, influence themselves (e.g. job positions created

in the organisation, a culture that stimulates innovation) but also factors an individual outlet cannot influence (e.g. the legal framework, economic conditions in the country, the advertisement market)."

This definition underscores that media viability is a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include organizational capacity, governance, and an innovation-driven newsroom culture. External factors encompass regulation, economic stability, advertising market conditions, and political freedom. This means that media sustainability depends not only on a newsroom's ability to adapt, but also on the extent to which the socio-political environment allows the media to grow independently.

This approach aligns with Cagé's (2016) perspective, which views media as a public good that should not be entirely subject to market mechanisms. According to Cagé, maintaining independent journalism requires democratic economic models, such as foundation-based ownership, cooperatives, or membership models that enable citizens to directly support the media. Media sustainability can only be achieved if ownership structures, funding mechanisms, and governance models are designed to protect the public interest. In the Indonesian context, this understanding is particularly relevant. As the media industry faces ownership concentration and algorithmic pressures, maintaining media viability means preserving democratic space itself. As DW Akademie (2024) reminds us, "Media viability is democracy viability."

Finally, a comparative review of various studies on the concept of media viability identifies four key sectors that serve as preconditions for the sustainability of quality journalism:

- First, diversification of business models. Comparing the effectiveness of different revenue streams (e.g., paywalls, subscriptions, advertising, and non-media ventures).
- Second, digital adaptability. How different types of media (print vs. digital-first) navigate digital transformation and audience shifts.
- Third, political and regulatory environment. Comparing the impact of government policies, the rule of law, and press freedom on media sustainability across regions.
- Fourth, technology and infrastructure. Assessing the role of internet penetration, mobile access, and production resources in viability.

III. Indicators of Media Viability

In its 2021/2022 global report, the United Nations agency UNESCO noted that media resilience requires an overall economic and business environment that is conducive to

independent media, alongside a political and social environment that enables journalism to perform its role as a public sphere. Debates within the media industry have further identified various factors influencing media sustainability beyond financial issues, including political stability, regulatory frameworks, digital and technological transformation, as well as the strength of public engagement and community trust.

Referring to various studies, there is no single approach to measuring media viability across countries. For example, Deutsche Welle (DW) designed its Media Viability Indicators to assess sustainability on three levels: the macro level, which considers the broader economic environment; the meso level, which focuses on market structures and revenue potential; and the micro level, which examines the internal resources and organizational structures of media outlets operating within that market.

Most institutions measuring media viability identify long-term financial well-being as the primary economic factor. Their metrics often consist of seven specific indicators, built using data from business records. The media advocacy organization PRIMED, for instance, evaluates media viability at both the ecosystem level (macro) and the organizational level. Its assessments measure how resilient media outlets are to business environment shocks and pressures, whether through management adaptation or by adopting digital-based business practices. The resilience index also includes the ability to produce content relevant to public interest.

According to PRIMED's Global Media Viability Learning Brief, there are several aspects to consider in developing measurement frameworks and policy recommendations for media viability. First, the definition and contextual urgency of creating such an index. Since no universal definition exists, media viability measurement can adopt either qualitative or quantitative methods. Referring to DW Akademie's model, the measurement operates on three levels: national macroeconomic context; ecosystem and market structure, including potential revenue sources; and organizational level, which evaluates media ownership, business models, and internal structures. Long-term economic resilience indicators are often based on data from national statistics agencies or development planning institutions.

At its core, the discourse on media viability seeks to answer two major questions: What aspects should be considered when a media organization aims not only to survive financially but also to produce quality journalism and generate sufficient income to sustain its operations? And what kind of political framework is needed to foster a healthy and growing media landscape?

Indicators of resilience from organizations such as DW Akademie provide practical tools for media managers, development experts, donors, and academics to assess both the individual viability of media outlets and the broader information ecosystem within a country. Such tools help design long-term, solution-oriented interventions. The purpose of developing a media viability measurement document for Indonesia and similar economies is to produce systematic data on the sustainability of news media, contribute comparable data to the global knowledge base, and facilitate evidence-based discussions for shaping the future of journalism.

Overall, media viability indicators view sustainability as extending beyond economic and managerial concerns. Initiators of media viability adopt a holistic perspective, considering the political, legal, and economic contexts that influence the functioning and quality of journalism. Media viability, sustainability, and resilience are defined as "the ability of media and the media landscape to continuously produce high-quality journalism". From this perspective, media viability focuses on four interrelated areas: financial sustainability of the news industry, editorial independence and the organizational capacity to produce independent journalism, quality of journalistic content, as well as public trust and audience engagement, reflecting how well media serve citizens' needs.

Ultimately, a media viability index serves as a diagnostic and developmental tool. For media managers, donors, and development activists, it helps identify capacity-building pathways and acts as a database for strengthening media performance. For academics, it contributes to advancing media sustainability scholarship. Moreover, human rights organizations monitoring freedom of expression in post-authoritarian societies can use these indicators to produce periodic reports, enhancing their analysis of existing challenges and future risks. Media companies exploring new digital distribution strategies can apply these indicators to evaluate how digitalization and audience habits affect their market growth potential.

In detail, the Media Viability Indicators (MVI) formulated by DW Akademie examine five dimensions that influence the function and quality of media as follows:

First, politics: examining the political environment at the national and local levels—and how this affects the diversity of views represented in news content, as well as the extent to which news media are influenced and controlled by the government. Some of the questions raised by the MVI are: Does the state have an independent judiciary that enforces laws and rulings impartially toward businesses and individuals? Are the relations between the government and professional news media characterized by mutual respect? To what extent do citizens and journalists have access to public information?

Second, economy: related to the financial aspects and the economic market of the media, news media organizations, and audiences. Some of the questions raised by the MVI are: Do media outlets have editorial independence from their sources of income? To what extent does competition encourage—or hinder—the quality of journalism? How strong is audience demand for quality news content, and are they willing to pay for it?

Third, community: includes the capacities and values of the audience and their relationship with the media, namely the level of trust, emotional attachment, and participation. Some of the questions raised by the MVI are: Are readers or citizens generally able to distinguish fact from fiction? Can they produce and contribute content responsibly? Do media organizations have access to reliable audience (citizen) data, their needs, and their consumption habits?

Fourth, technology: assesses the access of news media to resources and technology for production and distribution within digital architecture, as well as their ability to optimize the use of such resources. Some of the questions raised by the MVI are: Do citizens across the country have the ability to access content and pay for it through a reliable digital payment system? To what extent do the state/government and news organizations protect citizens' digital rights, especially their privacy?

Fifth, content and competence: this criterion includes ownership structures, the independence of media actors, and the quality of journalism available to the public. Some of the questions raised by the MVI are: Do journalists have the necessary skills to produce non-partisan reports based on multiple sources? Is media ownership transparent, or does it hinder diversity of voices and instead serve the business or political interests of the media owner?

Referring to the description above, the process of measuring media viability follows the tradition of qualitative research. Each of the dimensions above is quantified based on five main indicators, resulting in a total of 25 media viability indicators. In total, there are 119 sub-indicators. Each MVI sub-indicator is assessed on a 4-point scale, with a score of 4 indicating that the condition fully supports the viability of news media and a score of 1 indicating that the condition poses a serious obstacle to media viability. If a sub-indicator is not relevant in a particular country, it is given a score of 0 and excluded when averaging the sub-indicators to form the final score for each indicator. The key indicator scores are calculated by averaging the scores of all their sub-indicators.

Considering the significant differences between developed and underdeveloped countries in terms of democracy, the dimensions of media viability vary depending on the category

of media, political system, and community/non-commercial nature. As an illustration, under the government support indicator, the state uses taxation and business regulations to promote media development in a non-discriminatory manner, including the elimination of import duties and tariff regimes. The state does not impose general taxes or levies, and tax practices do not discriminate against media or favor certain private media over others. Furthermore, the state does not discriminate through advertising policies and places advertisements fairly and without discrimination, for example, through a code of ethics. The allocation of government advertising is closely monitored to ensure fair access for all media corporations. Public service media are subject to fair competition rules regarding the advertisements they broadcast.

Under the code of ethics indicator, effective regulation is required to govern advertising in the media. Journalistic media must comply with nationally agreed limits on advertising content and adhere to general national guidelines for the separation of advertisements and programs. Another indicator is the existence of an advertising code of ethics, established by an independent professional body, to prevent misleading advertisements in dominant and minority languages, for both large- and small-scale media operations, as well as established and emerging media. In principle, the indicators in media viability aim to provide policy scenario options and ideal standards, which partly explains the highly detailed nature of their measurement.

In the dimension of the economic environment, media viability emphasizes the need for the economic sustainability of media organizations supported by a healthy macroeconomic condition, overall reflecting an environment that strengthens a competitive media market structure. For example, media consumers' purchasing power remains high enough to enable the media to be economically sustainable (the public's purchasing power and interest in buying media products). Regulation also allows the media to operate under fair competition rules. To understand this aspect, data required for verification should come from credible institutions or consulting firms on economic health, such as income levels, national unemployment rates, gross domestic product per capita, and data on media news production distribution.

In the dimension of market structure supporting the economic sustainability of media organizations, field data required include cooperation agreements and joint ventures between media organizations that are fair to media at all levels. Verification data may come from credible institutions or consulting firms' reports on the level of market concentration in the media sector. Data on multilingualism and population, literacy and income levels, audience measurement, or audience distribution across media are also included.

At the micro level, media viability relates to the resources and organizational structure of media outlets. In addition to supportive conditions related to the overall economic environment and media market, it is important for media viability that media have access to sufficient resources for efficient and sustainable business operations. That media resources are sufficient to provide high-quality reporting and news production to the audience, to pay staff salaries high enough to attract and retain qualified employees, and to prevent unethical journalistic behavior. Another prerequisite for viable media is that they can find and employ staff with adequate knowledge in management, marketing, and sales.

Furthermore, media must also have adequate and affordable access to essential tangible resources such as electricity, paper (for print media), production equipment, and distribution systems. Media organizations require fundamental organizational structures and routines to ensure their survival. This includes having an organizational entity—a department or at least one person in charge—who dedicates most of their working time to generating revenue. For the sake of editorial independence, the marketing and sales departments of the media must work separately from journalists, allowing them to focus on journalistic content and quality.

Various media viability indexes, such as those of DW Akademie, acknowledge that the indicators and measurement of media viability are complex activities with various limitations that refer to local objective conditions. For example, an initial study of a country's media viability using the MVI found that the final score does not always reflect the differing significance of various sub-indicators for media viability. Moreover, there is no reliable data providing performance targets for the MVI, which, individually or in combination, yield the viability of news media. The same applies to the MVI in other institutions; therefore, continuous review is required.

SECTION II

Portrait of Media in Indonesia

I. Crisis of Journalism Media

The global crisis of journalism media has a clear reflection in Indonesia. As the largest democracy in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has experienced rapid development in media digitalization, but it has been accompanied by a decline in newsroom economic stability, increasing dependence on platforms, and worsening working conditions for journalists. The AJI report on the Press Freedom Situation in 2024 assessed it as "the hardest year" for Indonesian journalists, with waves of mass layoffs, union-busting practices, and inequality between permanent workers and freelance contributors. This phenomenon creates what Zion, Marjoribanks, and O'Donnell (2022) call atypical journalism work, a new form of journalistic labor that is unstable, without social security, and highly risky.

From the perspective of political economy structure, Syarief in ISEAS Perspective (2022) describes that media ownership in Indonesia is highly concentrated: 12 major conglomerates control most of the national media market. These owners have direct affiliations with major political and business powers. Syarief notes that the phenomenon of conglomerate media transformation in Indonesia toward digitalization actually strengthens old domination rather than expanding media pluralism. This condition is exacerbated by weak public policy to protect the sustainability of independent journalism. As noted by Masduki and Wendratama (2025), Indonesia does not yet have a public funding mechanism for non-commercial or community-based media. As a result, alternative media focusing on public interest are forced to rely on international donors or voluntary work.

Amid these political and economic pressures, new forms of alternative media have emerged, such as Project Multatuli, Konde.co, Floresa.co, Bincang Perempuan, etc. They seek to fill the gap left by mainstream media, raise underreported issues, and strengthen citizen participation (Masduki et al., 2025). However, as reminded by Usher and Kim-Leffingwell (2023), such nonprofit media models often operate under high financial, managerial, and political control threats, with limited human resources and security guarantees.

There is a sustainability crisis. The media viability crisis in Indonesia, therefore, cannot be understood merely as an economic issue. It reflects a structural tension between digital capitalism, political power, and the social responsibility of journalism. As concluded by DW Akademie (2024): "Viability is not only about survival, but about purpose." Media sustainability is about purpose, how journalism can continue to function as a public institution amid market, technological, and political pressures.

Globally, journalism is a sector that continuously experiences crises, ecological, health, economic, and political (Scott, Bunce, Wright, 2019). In Indonesia, journalism that upholds

public interest, including investigative news media as the fourth pillar of democracy and control over power, is experiencing a crisis and marginalization. On one hand, journalists' activities face risks of physical and digital intimidation and pressure. On the other hand, conventional journalism organizations are suffering from prolonged financial crises. Yet, their presence in society remains crucial as providers of public goods amid digital disruption. Tempo magazine, for example, as a pioneer of investigative journalism, has faced major shocks in dealing with COVID-19 and the onslaught of digital platforms. The magazine has begun making breakthroughs by building a digital platform after its print version faced a readership crisis, though progress appears slow. The future of this magazine, which is consistent in serving the public and presenting investigative reports, remains uncertain, under siege by the business models of digital news platforms that are free, fast, and interactive.

The general condition of the journalism media crisis encompasses two things. First, the financial crisis faced by investigative news media after the onslaught of digital media. Second, the emergence of community-based, nonprofit investigative news platforms in Indonesia, such as Jaring.id, Watchdoc, and Project Multatuli. This phenomenon aligns with digital activism, where the founders are veteran journalists and media activists. In addition to receiving support from digital communities, they also receive assistance from various international institutions, marking another model of public journalism in post-digital Indonesia. However, management and funding problems are major issues for their sustainability. Investigative journalism, as a high-cost product, cannot be routinely produced. Based on these two conditions, the media viability index will provide data, business model recommendations, and predictions for the sustainability of investigative journalism media in Indonesia in the digital media era.

Various studies in Indonesia have found three crises of journalism as the fourth pillar. The first crisis occurred when, from 2004 until now, the journalism media have been politicized. The reputation of being an independent media has eroded because the media are driven by owners who are involved in politics. The second blow is to global digital technology corporations. The wave of reader and viewer migration to online media has forced traditional media to migrate to digital platforms to survive. The COVID-19 pandemic is the third crisis blow for quality media and journalism in Indonesia. This third blow left the media almost paralyzed because the public preferred to work from home and access media online rather than in print—one of the reasons Koran Tempo and many other media outlets stopped printing. If COVID-19 and media digitalization are external factors, politicization is an internal behavior of the media, particularly by owners who act as politicians.

The migration of the media business from analog to digital is inevitable. However, digital migration, combined with post-COVID-19 economic impacts, has eroded the production of quality journalism. There has been confusion in journalism models and a decline in the quality standards of journalistic products and content. The tradition of news that was once strong in in-depth reporting, investigation, and careful and accurate editorial management has been forced to follow the powerful current of online media, which is instead fast, shallow, and places accuracy last. Journalism has lost its relevance as a provider of public goods. The tradition of delivering information with depth, through the work of gatekeepers verifying data and ensuring manuscript quality with strong public orientation, has been abandoned.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a financial income crisis in the media sector and impacted news production. The crisis occurred at its core: the cost of producing and disseminating news. Due to efficiency efforts, high-cost quality journalistic products have been reduced or even eliminated. The media consumption climate in Indonesia, which has long favored free content, also complicates mitigation efforts through subscription models on digital platforms. Meanwhile, government policy to provide subsidies to critical news media during 2020–2025 has not existed. At the same time, initiatives to establish digital platforms by several communities remain an initial phenomenon, centered on idealism and support from international donor institutions. Their contribution and sustainability still need to be proven in the coming years. Considering this condition, the fate of public journalism as the fourth pillar in Indonesia is bleak.

Kompas Daily in 2023, page 8, featured a statement from AMSI Central Chairman Wenseslaus Manggut, who encouraged transparency in the draft Presidential Regulation on media sustainability, which is currently being prepared by the Ministry of Communication and Informatics. In his statement, the AMSI chairman emphasized the importance of public testing of the Presidential Regulation by the press community, civil society, and global platforms. This regulation is urgent and has become common in several developed countries, such as Germany and Australia. However, researchers note that a regulation with a business-to-business mindset between media companies and digital platforms does not automatically guarantee a healthy media ecosystem.

The media viability index will contribute to helping policymakers in Indonesia's media sector and international institutions mitigate the crisis of public journalism as the pillar of media democracy in Indonesia. This research provides initial data based on global indicators related to the sustainability of journalism media in the post-COVID-19 period. More broadly, the study is conducted because similar research has never been carried

out in Indonesia. Previous studies focused on the impact of COVID-19 on field journalism activities or mass media in general as business entities (Suprayitno, 2020; Parahita et al., 2020; Indah, 2020). Academic studies focusing on the future of journalism as a tool of social control have not received much attention. Likewise, research mapping various investigative journalism initiatives outside mainstream media remains limited.

II. Crisis of Media Labor

Indonesia's media industry is facing a serious labor crisis, marked by increasingly precarious working conditions and weak protection for media workers. The 2024 Press Freedom Situation Report by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) recorded waves of mass layoffs throughout 2024 at more than 13 major media companies, including Kompas Gramedia, Tribun Network, Jawa Pos, CNN Indonesia, and MNC Group. Most employees lost their jobs without adequate severance pay, while freelance journalists and contributors continued to work without contracts or social security. Another AJI study titled Portrait of Indonesian Journalists (Masduki, Arif, et al., 2025) found that 34% of journalists are still paid below the provincial minimum wage despite heavier workloads, unclear contracts, and increasing pressure to produce more content per day or to secure advertisements on their own. Freelancers face even harsher realities, with extremely weak bargaining positions against media companies (AJI, 2023). Their wages are often calculated per piece, and the rates are unilaterally determined by the company based on output rather than working hours.

This situation creates what Zion, Marjoribanks, and O'Donnell (2022) describe as atypical journalism work: a form of journalism characterized by unstable, flexible, and exploitative labor conditions. In Indonesia, this type of work has become the norm in the digital media industry, where most contributors are paid according to clicks or views. Beyond economic vulnerability, Indonesian media workers also face persistent threats of violence. AJI's annual monitoring shows that the number and variety of attacks on journalists continue to rise. In 2024, 73 documented cases included physical assaults, digital harassment, and legal intimidation. In such conditions, journalists struggle not only with the pressures of production and distribution but also with physical, psychological, and legal risks that foster self-censorship and avoidance of critical reporting.

This structural fragility underscores that media viability cannot be achieved without addressing labor rights and journalist safety. As stated in the Media Viability Manifesto, sustainable media require "healthy, fair, and innovative organizations within". When

journalists work without economic security or collective rights, it becomes difficult to imagine journalism fulfilling its democratic role as a watchdog.

III. Concentration of Media Ownership

The structure of media ownership in Indonesia remains highly concentrated among a small group of elites centered in Jakarta, forming an oligarchic pattern. The ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute report (Syarief, 2022) notes that 12 major conglomerates dominate the national media market, including television, radio, print, and online platforms. Leading media owners such as Surya Paloh (Media Group), Chairul Tanjung (Trans Corp), Hary Tanoesoedibjo (MNC), Aburizal Bakrie (TVone, ANTV, Viva), and Erick Thohir (Mahaka Group) maintain direct affiliations with political parties and government positions. The shift of these media to digital platforms has not expanded ownership pluralism; rather, it has reinforced the dominance of long-standing conglomerates through deeper political and economic integration.

Research by Firman and Rahmawati (2023) confirms that the relationship between media conglomerates and political power is mutually beneficial. Many media owners have direct ties to political parties or hold strategic government roles, turning media companies into both economic enterprises and instruments of political influence. In such a context, editorial independence becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, as the boundary between public-interest journalism and the owner's political or commercial interests grows blurred. The AJI Annual Report (2025) also highlights several cases where major outlets published unlabelled political or commercial advertorials, violating the principle of transparency to the public. This not only erodes the line between news and advertising but also undermines public trust in the media as a neutral institution.

The concentration of ownership has profound effects on news diversity and information pluralism. Small and independent outlets struggle to compete economically and in terms of content distribution. Digital platforms—through their algorithms and advertising policies—tend to favor large media organizations with a wide audience reach. As a result, alternative and investigative media focused on public interest or local issues are often marginalized within the mainstream news landscape.

As outlined in the Media Viability Manifesto (2024), media sustainability is inextricably linked to fair and transparent ownership structures. In Indonesia, inequality in media ownership and content control not only threatens press freedom but also undermines the development of a sustainable media ecosystem. Research by Pemantau Regulasi dan

Regulator Media (PR2Media) in 2024 confirms that media ownership in Indonesia is affiliated with or aligned to the practical political interests of their owners. The risks of this condition extend beyond a decline in journalistic quality to a broader crisis of public trust in the media.

IV. Emergence of Alternative Media

Within a media landscape dominated by large conglomerates and strong economic pressures, several alternative and nonprofit outlets have emerged in Indonesia to uphold the values of public-interest journalism. These outlets function not only as new information channels but also as social responses to the crisis of representation and the decline of public trust in mainstream media—an expression of media activism. Platforms such as Project Multatuli, Konde.co, Floresa.co, Jaring.id, Bincang Perempuan, and Suara Papua focus on marginalized issues, human rights, gender, and the environment (Masduki et al., 2025).

Ratnaningtyas and Adiyanto (2025) note that the rise of such alternative media is often driven by two main motivations: (1) dissatisfaction with the political bias of mainstream outlets, and (2) the need to build a more participatory and community-based news space. However, most of these outlets operate with limited resources, relying heavily on donor grants, voluntary labor, and networks of journalistic solidarity.

This dependence creates a sustainability dilemma. Donor-based funding models are rarely stable in the long term, while advertising-driven models are unfeasible due to the inability of small media to compete with mainstream or platform-based giants. Consequently, many independent media organizations must balance editorial independence with financial survival, experimenting with models such as crowdfunding, membership programs, grants, or public partnerships (Masduki, Wendratama, et al., 2025). In the global context, Usher, Kim, and Leffingwell (2023) describe this phenomenon as "the rise of nonprofit news ecosystems," in which small news organizations play a critical role in filling news deserts—gaps left by commercial decline. Their success, they argue, should be measured not by economic scale but by their social capacity to sustain informational justice and local accountability.

The Media Viability Manifesto (2024) emphasizes that a healthy media ecosystem requires diversity in both form and model. Alternative media are integral to the information ecology, serving as innovators, testers of new sustainability frameworks, and counterbalances to

commercial media. The manifesto declares: "The diversity of media types and models is not a luxury—it is a necessity for democracy."

Yet, as AJI (2025) and Masduki & Wendratama (2025) observe, such initiatives remain unsupported by adequate policy frameworks. There are no state mechanisms to provide public funding or fiscal incentives for independent and nonprofit media. As a result, the resilience of alternative media largely depends on journalistic activism and international donor support, both inherently temporary sources of strength.

Research by Masduki et al. (2024) documents several cases of violence against alternative media outlets between 2020 and 2024. Konde.co, a news site focusing on gender-based violence, was hacked on 25 October 2022 after publishing reports on a rape case involving an official from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. The outlet suffered a Denial of Service (DoS) attack that rendered its website inaccessible to the public—its second such incident since its founding in 2016. Two weeks earlier, Narasi, an alternative media outlet managed by Najwa Shihab and her team, experienced a similar attack, along with hacking and surveillance of its journalists' personal accounts.

These incidents confirm that journalism operating fully on digital platforms is highly vulnerable to hacking and cyber harassment. Since the early 2000s, Indonesia's digital journalism landscape has evolved without sufficient regulatory safeguards. In this unregulated environment, any actor can establish a content platform for any purpose. Outlets such as Konde.co, Project Multatuli, and Narasi represent "children of digital freedom", initiatives born out of the open internet that allow civic actors to perform the role of the "good citizen." They fill the void left by conventional media, unable to provide timely and critical reporting, becoming an oasis amid the prevalence of clickbait journalism and the broader crisis of quality journalism in post-digital Indonesia. Scholars such as Tofel (2012) and Friedland & Konieczna (2009) classify this form of work as nonprofit journalism, media operations conducted without commercial motives, typically rooted in critical or advocacy-oriented reporting.

The problem is that digital journalism in general—and non-profit journalism in particular—has emerged within a socio-political media climate that is hostile to independent outlets. There is still no specific regulatory framework that protects the existence of, or guarantees the sustainability of, alternative forms of digital journalism that challenge power. Law No. 40/1999 on the Press remains overly general in its regulation of the press and tends to favor mainstream journalistic institutions.

Violence constitutes a central challenge for digital journalism, manifesting both in vulnerabilities to digital attacks and in financial insecurity related to operational costs.

Because of their role in criticizing social inequality and oppressive power structures, alternative media outlets and their journalists are frequently targeted. Perpetrators of such attacks vary and are not always linked to the government; ironically, the majority of these actors cannot be identified. At the same time, most alternative media outlets are not registered or verified by the Press Council, making advocacy efforts difficult. The technologies used by news site operators also remain insufficiently robust to withstand digital attacks. In essence, both mitigation and advocacy efforts remain far from optimal.

V. Urgency of Media Viability

Over the past decade, the issues of media viability and sustainability have become key topics of discussion among journalists and media observers in Indonesia. In Washington, for instance, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) annually publishes a global media sustainability index, using broad indicators that span corporate economics, technology, and editorial freedom. Frère (2013) defines media sustainability as the capacity of news organizations and journalism within a country to function effectively in ensuring the continued availability of quality journalism amid political and economic pressures.

In Indonesia, this issue revolves around three main areas of discussion. First, the sustainability of conventional media (print, radio, and television) as commercial corporate entities following the decline in popularity brought about by the digital technology revolution. The rise of the internet has disrupted the news production and distribution process, making it faster and more efficient. News no longer requires lengthy bureaucratic processes to reach the public. The business model has shifted from capital-intensive corporations to "homegrown media." Meanwhile, global digital platforms that aggregate news, such as Google, now dominate advertising revenues. The power imbalance between news media and digital platforms stems from the fact that algorithmic control rests entirely with tech corporations.

Second, there has been a sharp decline in journalistic quality with the proliferation of online news sites driven by clickbait logic and the spread of disinformation and hoaxes. As a result, news as an information product has suffered a crisis of quality and, consequently, a decline in its public value. Moreover, since their inception, digital platforms and online news portals have operated on the principle of freely accessible news, unlike the paid or subscription-based model of print media. This climate has made it difficult for news outlets to generate production funding directly from their audiences.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic, which kept audiences largely at home, caused major disruption to journalistic work patterns due to restrictions on physical mobility. On one hand, these restrictions limited journalists' access to reporting activities; on the other, they accelerated the digital migration of media businesses. Two contrasting phenomena emerged. The first was a media business crisis, UNESCO (2021) reported that 40% of news outlets experienced multidimensional crises leading to layoffs, budget cuts, and even the suspension of news production. In contrast to the first trend, digital disruption has also driven a transformation in the business models of conventional journalism. Several national news outlets have migrated their news services to digital platforms, covering every stage from production and distribution to marketing.

Beyond mainstream news outlets, new media start-ups and alternative journalism initiatives emerged, focusing on data-driven and investigative journalism. Projects such as Project Multatuli, Konde.co, and Magdalene.co were founded by experienced journalists who had previously worked in mainstream media. These initiatives reflect optimism for the continued vitality of journalism, even as traditional print, broadcast, and online platforms become increasingly marginalized. Journalism in Indonesia is not dying, it is evolving, even undergoing a revolution in format and dissemination strategies from old to new platforms.

Unfortunately, among the three contexts above, the first has received far greater attention than the second and third. The discourse among media actors has shifted away from the public interest, disrupted by digital transformation, toward the narrower concern of sustaining corporate media businesses. Yet, discussions about media sustainability must be holistic, encompassing business, editorial politics, and legality.

The issuance of Indonesia's Presidential Regulation (Perpres) on Publisher Rights reflects a state initiative to protect national interests in the context of digital sovereignty. This effort concerns not only the survival of media corporations but also the public's right to quality journalism. In this framework, the spirit of the regulation must address all the contexts above, not merely operate on a business-to-business logic between global platforms and major media corporations. The regulation should serve as a gateway for nurturing good journalism, which in the digital era is produced not only by mainstream media but also by alternative media.

However, Presidential Regulation No. 32/2024 still presents several problems. It appears to focus primarily on revenue-sharing between digital platforms and large media corporations, without addressing the broader media and digital journalism ecosystem. Moreover, state efforts to rescue struggling media businesses remain sectoral and

institutional, offering little benefit to digital citizens' need for quality journalism as a public good.

Given the limitations of a regulation at the presidential level, within the framework of media viability, this Perpres should be seen as a stepping stone toward a Media Sustainability Law. Indonesia can take lessons from Germany, which enacted the Network Enforcement Act in 2018 to combat disinformation, or from Ireland, which in 2022 passed an Online Safety Act to protect citizens from harmful digital content. Both laws clearly prohibit digital platforms from becoming breeding grounds for hate speech and disinformation, issues that have severely undermined journalism's credibility in the digital age.

SECTION III

Scenario for Indonesia

I. Priority for Alternative Media

Following an extensive review of media literature and an assessment of the macro-structure of journalism in Indonesia after the 1998 Reform era and the subsequent wave of digital disruption, the working group has determined that the measurement of media viability should focus on alternative media. Alternative media were chosen because they represent the most vulnerable institutions within the current media ecosystem, while at the same time holding the greatest potential to sustain and advance the values of quality journalism. Broader measurements encompassing mainstream journalism will be carried out in subsequent phases of the research. Based on the results of a focus group discussion (FGD) held in Jakarta in August 2025 involving multiple stakeholders, the following criteria were agreed upon to define what constitutes alternative media:

1. Media that operate consistently and are oriented toward the public interest, provide accurate information about minority and marginalized groups, and involve the public in the process from content production to dissemination.
2. Operate on a non-profit basis for the financing of content production and editorial management, with diversified funding sources.
3. Consistently produce journalistic work with a gender perspective, in-depth reporting, and approaches that draw on investigative and advocacy journalism.
4. Have sufficient human resources with expertise in content/editorial work, public engagement, and financial management.
5. Possess organizational governance and editorial policies that accommodate universal principles of human rights protection.
6. Ownership of alternative media is not affiliated with political parties, government institutions, parliament, and/or commercial corporations.

The initial ideas behind alternative media outlets generally begin with producing content as a distinct and critical counter-narrative. Only after content production do they turn their attention to legal incorporation and financial sustainability. It is therefore unsurprising that many alternative media organizations are established using pooled contributions, often derived from short-term fellowships or limited funding support. From this stage, they move toward formal legal status, followed by staff recruitment, securing office space, seeking longer-term funding, and only then developing management systems.

Several alternative media outlets have subsequently formed legal entities such as limited liability companies (PT) and/or foundations, financing their legal incorporation through member contributions, as seen in Floresa.co and Konde.co. Meanwhile, Progresip, which was established by the Media and Creative Industry Workers Union for Democracy

(Serikat Sindikasi), initially operated as a podcast under the auspices of the union. It later became an independent entity with PT legal status while remaining affiliated with Serikat Sindikasi. Funding for Progresip's legal incorporation was secured after it carried out several programs on behalf of the union.

"Progresip exists to carry out journalistic work, produce audiovisual content, and serve the working middle class. We have networks with labor unions that often lack effective campaigning tools, so we use Progresip for that purpose," said Nur Aini, founder of Progresip and former chair of Serikat Sindikasi. "We chose labor issues because we are members of Sindikasi. For example, when there was a case involving workers at CNN that few media outlets were willing to cover, we reported on it," she added. In subsequent phases after its establishment, the outlet began recruiting staff. Typically, staffing levels remain limited, with small editorial teams operating as small newsrooms.

Across several alternative media organizations, some staff members continue to work for other media outlets or are employed part-time, while maintaining a commitment to producing content and adhering to agreed management systems, including divisions of labor and editorial independence. The decision to hold multiple jobs is often driven by the inability of alternative media to provide adequate salaries. "We currently have eight full-time staff members. All of them handle multiple tasks, such as managing the website," said Ryan Dagur, founder and editor-in-chief of Floresa.co. "We now provide honoraria above the regional minimum wage, calculated per article, with rates depending on production conditions. We also have a dedicated staff member handling financial matters, but on a part-time basis rather than full-time."

The editorial team at Bollo.id applies a similar staffing system, with some staff receiving monthly salaries and others being paid per article. "There are seven of us, plus additional recruitment for social media staff. In total, Bollo.id has eight members: one editor-in-chief, two editors, two journalists, and two social media staff." Progresip, meanwhile, employs four full-time staff and five part-time staff members. The organization has faced challenges in recruitment, as many young people who join require greater flexibility in working arrangements. To accommodate these needs, Progresip subsequently introduced flexible work policies.

When alternative media outlets lack sufficient funding, some permanent staff members continue to receive salaries while also making small personal donations, for example when they obtain fellowships. The percentage of such donations is determined internally by each outlet; there is no formal documentation, only mutual agreement. "The donations are not always consistent, but there are many contributors. When we were on campus,

lecturers would give us money, which made us realize there are still many ways to secure support. At present, around 70 percent of our income may come from partnerships, while the rest comes from our own initiatives, such as selling merchandise," said Ryan Dagur.

How, then, is media independence measured under such conditions? The key lies in avoiding conflicts of interest and maintaining oversight by the management team. Floresa.co and Konde.co, for example, do not work with or receive funding from the government when they are engaged in criticizing government policies. This practice is considered a means of safeguarding editorial independence.

Another example is Ekuatorial, which was initially established under a parent organization, the Earth Journalism Network (EJN), dedicated to environmental advocacy. Over time, Ekuatorial developed independently with its own team. According to Asep Saefullah, Editor-in-Chief and Director of Ekuatorial.com, the organization employs nine people managing editorial, business, and community affairs. To ensure sustainability, Asep decided to seek funding from various sources, including government institutions, and does not rule out collaboration with commercial companies. For him, ensuring the outlet's survival while continuing to cover environmental issues is paramount; therefore, the newsroom remains open to cooperation with any party through advertising or program-based activities.

Regarding staff welfare, several outlets have begun providing social security coverage through BPJS Ketenagakerjaan and BPJS Kesehatan. This requires financial investment, staff registration, and robust human resources data management. However, not all alternative media organizations yet have well-developed management systems, such as written standard operating procedures (SOPs). In response, Konde.co invited experts to facilitate the development of flexible and inclusive internal policies. In 2025, Konde.co received an AMSI Award as a small media outlet recognized for inclusive and diverse editorial policies. Nabila Wahyu, Executive Manager of Konde.co, noted that such policies were formulated through collective agreement.

"We worked hard to develop these rules and involved many stakeholders so that we could establish a management system that is both effective and collectively endorsed," she said. For outlets that have yet to formalize written policies, the main constraint is the need to prioritize content production before developing management systems. This process is often described as learning by doing, where management systems evolve alongside daily operations. Ryan Dagur added that his team has sought assistance in developing IT applications through collaboration with fellow alternative media organizations, such as Project Multatuli and Konde.co.

Alternative media outlets in Indonesia have formed a network known as the Koalisi Media Alternatif (KOMA), which was established in January 2025 and officially declared in Makassar on 13 September 2025 during the Media Festival organized by the Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI). The declaration emerged from a shared awareness of the importance of advancing critical narratives and ensuring the sustainability of quality journalism managed by alternative media outlets. In its declaration, the Coalition articulated four main demands. First, it calls for recognition, protection, and guarantees of sustainability for alternative media. Second, it urges the Dewan Pers to promptly conduct verification as a form of legitimacy and legal protection. Third, it opposes all forms of discrimination, violence, and intimidation against journalists. Fourth, it commits to upholding professionalism, advancing alternative narratives, and amplifying critical social movements as pillars of democracy. The Makassar Declaration was signed by representatives of alternative media outlets, including Bandung Bergerak, Bollo.id, Ekuatorial.com, Floresa.co, Idenera.com, Independen.id, Jaring.id, KatongNTT.com, Konde.co, Koreksi.org, Prohealth.id, ProgreSIP, and Project Multatuli.

Discussions accompanying the declaration highlighted the key challenges facing alternative media. Didit Haryadi, Editor-in-Chief of Bollo.id, pointed to the limited number of alternative media outlets in Makassar, which constrains opportunities for collaboration. Unlike mainstream media bound by business interests, alternative media enjoy greater freedom to cover sensitive issues. However, this freedom comes with consequences: alternative media are more vulnerable to intimidation due to the lack of clear legal protection. Beyond legal vulnerability, financial sustainability remains a major burden. Many alternative media outlets are driven by writers and activists with limited experience in financial management, placing organizational sustainability at risk. In response, the Coalition has advanced three key priorities: strengthening the position of alternative media within the Press Council framework, ensuring legal protection and security for journalists, and maintaining a commitment to producing high-quality, public-interest journalism. Alternative media play a crucial role in keeping the public sphere critical and people-centered.

KOMA runs regular monthly agendas, including peer-learning discussions among alternative media members and collaborative activities ranging from organizational management to fundraising strategies, campaigning, and advocacy. Other programs include advocacy directed at the Press Council to secure formal recognition and more flexible verification requirements, as well as policy advocacy to support media sustainability. These initiatives respond to the need for solidarity among alternative media outlets in pursuit of shared goals. Through KOMA, members also learn collectively how to address challenges such

as implementing work systems and organizational culture, and how to provide mutual support when an outlet comes under attack.

In an initial study and a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) held in Jakarta on 27–28 November 2025—aimed at reaffirming media categorization and gathering input on the formulation of indicators for measuring media resilience in the Indonesian context—the following general conditions of alternative media in Indonesia were identified.

Overall, FGD participants—comprising alternative media managers and strategic stakeholders supporting quality journalism—viewed Recognition and Legal Protection as a fundamental dimension. This indicator serves to assess the extent to which media outlets have a clear legal standing within the legal system and receive adequate protection when carrying out their journalistic functions. Given the critical nature of their content, this indicator is essential for media sustainability, as the issues covered by alternative media often involve sensitive political and economic interests. Findings from the first FGD session (involving alternative media participants) revealed several important observations. On one hand, alternative media demonstrate professionalism in journalistic practice; on the other, their legal position remains in a gray area. This ambiguity not only creates administrative vulnerability but also directly affects the ability of media outlets to obtain protection when facing news disputes, criminalization, or legal pressure. Alternative media managers recognize that media sustainability cannot be separated from a political and legal ecosystem that protects, recognizes, and provides certainty for journalistic work. Unfortunately, nearly all participants reported that, in practice, alternative media continue to operate within this "gray zone": partially recognized, but not fully protected.

1. Legal status exists, but remains vulnerable

Several alternative media outlets operate under different legal forms, including foundations, communities, or non-profit organizations. While these structures provide ideological flexibility, they often limit access to formal legal protection, particularly when facing disputes or legal threats. One participant recounted how the media outlet they managed was forced to relocate because it was considered "too critical." Legal status exists, but it does not automatically guarantee safety: "At first, we were sharing office space, but gradually we were seen as 'dangerous' because of our critical issues. Legally, we are a foundation, but the protection feels distant." (Devi P. Wihardjo, Existensil.com).

2. Mechanisms are in place, but difficult to implement

Most participants recognized the importance of protection provided by the Press Council, professional journalist organizations, and media solidarity networks. Media outlets that have registered with the Press Council tend to be relatively better protected; however, the path toward registration is far from easy. It requires standard operating procedures (SOPs), administrative capacity, and organizational structures that many alternative media outlets find burdensome. There is a clear gap between formal requirements and the actual capacities of small media organizations. Most outlets—both those with legal status and those without—remain in the process of Press Council verification. Some requirements are considered particularly onerous, such as the stipulation that editors-in-chief must hold a senior-level journalist certification. Obtaining such certification requires both financial resources and a lengthy process. "Why must it be a limited liability company (PT)? We saw the Press Council regulations requiring accreditation (verification). We fulfilled the legal entity requirements in stages. Verification is meant to safeguard media integrity, which is why we eventually established a PT." (Manager of ProgreSIP.id).

3. Political Pressure and Intimidation

Participants described a legal landscape that is often hostile to critical journalism. Civil lawsuits, criminal complaints, and political pressure pose real threats. In such conditions, alternative media—small, resource-poor, and legally unestablished—are the most vulnerable. Even when protection mechanisms exist, internal capacity to use them is often insufficient: there are no legal staff, no litigation funds, and no standardized crisis-response procedures. "I hope that many aspects of legal protection can be simplified, as well as security measures, because those affected now are not only journalists, but also social media managers and even sources, especially since many of our sources are academics," said Anggi Lubis from The Conversation Indonesia. Thus, a legal framework is not merely about the existence of rules, but about how accessible and usable those rules are for alternative media in Indonesia.

4. Administrative Challenges

Several participants identified administrative issues—such as financial audits, editorial SOPs, and functional separation—as part of complex legal requirements.

Some media outlets fail to "scale up" because of disorganized financial records; others struggle to secure partnerships because they are perceived as lacking a "credible" legal structure. "There are local media outlets that are actually profitable, but for three years they didn't know their own financial reports. When they tried to seek funding, they were immediately overwhelmed." said Asep from Ekuatorial. These challenges illustrate that legal recognition cannot be separated from organizational governance. Legal status demands professionalism, and for alternative media, this often requires significant resource investment. Several participants cautioned against placing the entire burden of sustainability on media organizations alone. Legal frameworks, digital infrastructure, protection mechanisms, and public media literacy are external factors that should be the responsibility of the state and the broader media ecosystem. "This indicator should not add to the burden borne solely by media outlets. If media literacy is low and the legal framework is weak, isn't that the responsibility of the state and other stakeholders?" said Evi Mariani from Project Multatuli. This perspective aligns with the view that media viability is a shared responsibility—beyond mere survival in the market.

5. Resilience Grows from Solidarity

Despite persistent limitations, alternative media demonstrate another form of "protection": resilience rooted in community support and networks. Some outlets survive through the backing of labor unions; others strengthen ties with their audience communities; still others build impact-reporting systems to establish public legitimacy for their work. "Our funding has been greatly supported by labor union networks. But we also realize that without media literacy within the community, our voices can easily be marginalized," said Guruh Dwi Riyanto of ProgreSip. Solidarity is not a substitute for the law, but it functions as a form of social protection when legal mechanisms feel slow and unresponsive.

The second phase of the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involved stakeholders connected to the alternative media ecosystem. With regard to recognition and legal protection, the forum offered several important observations. The issue extends beyond legal status alone to how policies, regulations, and the broader legal ecosystem shape whether journalistic work by alternative media is conducted in a safe or hostile environment. From the government's perspective, a key challenge lies in distinguishing between media outlets that genuinely perform journalistic functions and those that merely produce content. Farida Dewi from the Ministry

of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi) emphasized that the state is still seeking ways to protect the public without undermining freedom of expression. "Our main concern is legal recognition—ensuring that, whatever the form, there is a legal anchor that serves as their corridor," she said.

This uncertainty arises because the digital landscape enables boundless information production. On the one hand, the state seeks to ensure credibility and security in the digital public sphere; on the other, mechanisms for categorizing alternative media remain unclear. As a result, legal protection is often delayed, ambiguous, or limited to established media organizations.

The Press Council has emphasized that alternative media can still be verified as long as they meet the requirements set out in the Press Law. However, this process requires adjustments, given that the characteristics of alternative media differ from those of mainstream outlets. "Verification is not limited to mainstream media. Some alternative media meet both administrative and factual requirements. Going forward, a redefinition is needed so they are not left in a gray area," said Niken, a representative of the Press Council. In practice, however, many alternative media outlets face long queues, incomplete administrative documentation, and limited resources to establish legal entities. They find themselves in a paradox: expected to operate professionally, yet not fully recognized legally. From the perspective of media workers' organizations, institutional arrangements are also crucial to protecting workers. "We cannot ignore the law as a safety net, but there must be space that allows small organizations to continue to exist without abandoning workers' rights," said Ikhsan Raharjo of Sindikasi. Legal recognition is not merely about permits; it also concerns fair institutional structures, financial transparency, and internal mechanisms that prevent the exploitation of workers under the guise of non-profit operations. Farida Dewi from Komdigi further proposed that the Press Council review verification requirements to better accommodate the diverse conditions of media organizations across Indonesia. "Media in major cities are clearly different from those in smaller towns or remote areas. That difference alone already matters," she noted.

6. Legal Advocacy Literacy

Alternative media frequently operate in sensitive domains—poverty, gender, minority rights, and conflict-related issues—where they face risks of criminal

reporting, intimidation, and informal censorship. “Sometimes it’s not fear, but a lack of understanding of the legal side—journalistic rights, procedures, and protections,” said Unggul Sagena of Safenet. The absence of legal literacy leaves alternative media vulnerable to legal entanglements, while legal aid mechanisms are not always readily available. In contexts of information restriction, alternative media often become vital channels for citizens—yet the irony is that legal uncertainty itself can constrain this role. Several participants stressed that legal recognition should not be viewed merely as an administrative obligation, but as a tool for protecting journalists. Without clear institutional status, alternative journalists struggle to seek police protection, access press dispute resolution mechanisms, invoke the Press Law to resist criminalization, or advocate their cases through the Press Council.

7. Independence and Financing

Alternative media often emerge in response to the failure of mainstream media to uphold independence. “If mainstream media consistently adhered to journalistic ethics, perhaps alternative media would not need to exist,” said Fransisca Ria Susanti of PPMN. In practice, alternative media shoulder a dual burden: remaining independent and public-oriented while surviving without substantial commercial funding. This is where regulation often feels insufficiently adaptive, as prevailing standards are still designed for large media models. Consequently, more media-friendly policies are needed for small outlets with structural constraints. Legal recognition is a critical external variable shaping the trajectory of alternative media. “This aspect of legal recognition is heavily dependent on external actors. Many alternative media outlets fail to meet administrative requirements not because they are unwilling, but because the system has yet to create sufficient space for them,” said Muhamad Heychael of Remotivi.

Based on inputs from the two FGDs above, several policy recommendations and indicators for the implementation of a Media Viability Assessment are proposed as follows:

1. Formal Recognition

The state, through the Press Council, needs to ensure that alternative media obtain clear and equal legal status comparable to that of mainstream media. This includes

simplifying legal incorporation processes, recognizing alternative outlets as press institutions (through Press Council verification), and providing safeguards against regulations that may potentially restrict editorial freedom in news production.

2. Access to Legal Assistance

Alternative media must have easy and affordable access to legal assistance, including support from professional organizations, advocacy mechanisms, and fair dispute-resolution processes (for example, through the Press Council). This should include pro bono schemes or litigation subsidies tailored to the needs of small media outlets.

3. Protection of Media Workers

There is a need for stronger systems to protect media workers from the criminalization of reporting, digital and physical intimidation, and gender-based violence within newsrooms. Secure reporting channels and journalist safety protocols should be reinforced—both through state mechanisms and civil society networks. Clear and binding regulations for law enforcement agencies (police and prosecutors) are required to ensure that press disputes are handled through the Press Council. These official rules and guidelines should be easily understood and publicly accessible.

4. Legal Literacy for Media Managers

Alternative media outlets need support to better understand press regulations and other relevant legal provisions, develop editorial SOPs (including verification procedures, right of reply, and documentation), and manage legal risks from the outset. Capacity-building through training and mentoring in SOP development, as well as hands-on legal advocacy, is more effective than regulatory socialization alone.

5. Collaborative and Solidarity Networks

There should be expanded access to, and strengthened capacity for, cross-organizational networks among alternative media communities at national and international levels, including legal aid organizations, universities, donors, and media support institutions. These networks can function as case referral hubs, platforms for resource sharing, early-warning systems, and vehicles for joint policy advocacy.

II. Six Indicators of Viability

After reviewing the concepts and implementation of media viability assessments in various countries, and taking into account the empirical conditions of media and journalism in Indonesia, the working group selected six media viability indicators to be measured as follows: quality content; public engagement; organizational strengthening; financial sustainability; technological adaptation; and legal recognition and protection.All of the indicators outlined here encompass two dimensions: the internal capacity of alternative media organizations and the external environment, including the government, the Press Council, strategic actors within the journalism ecosystem, and the broader public.

Pertama, konten yang berkualitas

Quality news content may take various forms, text, photographs, infographics, video, and audio. Indicators of quality content are reflected through independent reporting that emphasizes qualitative rather than purely quantitative measures. Such content must be public-interest oriented, accurate in covering marginalized and minority groups, grounded in human rights principles, critical toward dominant powers, and original (with transparent citation of information sources). The availability of quality content is influenced by several conditions, including:

- The level of public demand for quality journalism;
- The degree of public participation as sources of information;
- The openness of information from government institutions; and
- The presence of a culture of collaboration in journalistic reporting.

Background

Following the digital disruption era, journalism faces a new set of distinctive challenges. As access to information gathering, processing, and dissemination becomes increasingly open—particularly through the rise of social media—media organizations are compelled to redefine their business strategies. Many outlets have chosen to compete in terms of quantity and speed of content production. Yet, as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) remind us, the primary obligation of journalism is to the truth. Upholding that responsibility is far from easy. Reporting demands journalists to apply a rigorous discipline of verification, requiring time, persistence, and often substantial financial resources.

For alternative media, many of which are born from the idealism of their founders, pro-

ducing quality content is not optional. In many cases, this consistency is precisely what distinguishes them from the mainstream media. Nevertheless, the challenge is significant, given the typically lean editorial teams and limited financial capacity. The ability to produce quality content thus becomes a crucial indicator in assessing media viability. It serves as the foundation for alternative media to build public trust and community legitimacy, and to play a meaningful role in advancing democratic values and human rights (HR), particularly in amplifying the voices of minority, vulnerable, and marginalized groups.

Detailed Indicators of Quality Content are as follows:

1. Media prioritizes public interest
    a. Do journalists and media workers have sufficient understanding of the concept of public interest?
    b. Is this understanding reflected in reporting and other media products?
    c. Does the media have a consistent mechanism to determine and assess the direction of public-interest reporting?

2. Media consistently upholds independence in reporting
    a. Does the media have an adequately structured editorial team?
    b. Does it regularly hold editorial meetings for planning and evaluation of coverage?
    c. Is there a clear separation between editorial and commercial activities?
    d. Does the media have internal guidelines or SOPs outlining editorial workflows?
    e. Does it maintain an internal structure (such as an Ombudsman) to oversee editorial integrity?

3. Media applies a human rights and democratic perspective
    a. Do editorial staff have adequate understanding of human rights and democratic values?
    b. Is this understanding implemented in their reporting and other media products?
    c. Does the media organization conduct structured activities to refresh or strengthen human rights awareness?

4. Media provides accurate information about minority, vulnerable, and marginalized groups
    a. Do media members have sufficient understanding of the rights of minority, vulnerable, and marginalized groups?

b. Is that understanding reflected in reporting and other products?
c. Does the organization conduct regular capacity-building activities on these issues?
d. Does the media proactively engage with minority, vulnerable, and marginalized communities in reporting and other operations?

5. Media serves as a critical voice toward dominant powers
   a. Do journalists understand the media's watchdog function toward power?
   b. Is this watchdog role evident in their reporting and products?
   c. Does the organization conduct structured activities to maintain awareness of this function?

6. Media prioritizes content quality over quantity and speed
   a. Does the media implement rigorous verification processes in reporting?
   b. Does it have experience and discipline in producing in-depth or investigative reports?
   c. Does the media avoid burdening reporters and editors with coverage that focuses merely on quantity?
   d. Does the media avoid burdening reporters and editors with coverage that prioritizes speed of production or broadcast over quality?
   e. Does the media provide a platform for public comments, complaints, or corrections related to content quality?

7. Media upholds responsibility for content originality
   a. Does the media cite sources accurately and transparently?
   b. Does it have internal guidelines or SOPs for source attribution?
   c. Does it provide a public mechanism for comments, complaints, or corrections related to content originality?

8. Media outlets conduct internal evaluations and public audits (based on surveys or other methods) to assess the impact and relevance of their news content for the public.

Second, Public Engagement

The working group defines public participation through the following aspects:

- The public contributes to content creation and information distribution.

- The media provides a platform for writings (content) produced by the public, audiences, or communities.
- The media invites the public to engage in joint activities and collective actions.
- The public can propose coverage themes—through open editorial meetings (both online and offline), polls, or surveys.
- The media offers a platform for the public to provide feedback on content.
- The media involves the public in advocating policy changes, whether through training, campaigns, or advocacy initiatives.
- The media gives space for the public, audience, or community to actively disseminate ideas, concepts, and narratives.
- The media builds community spaces that connect audiences and the wider public around shared interests.

Background

Independent media operate primarily to serve the public interest, most visibly through the production of high-quality reporting. However, this is not a one-way, producer–consumer relationship. The media has a responsibility to involve the public in editorial processes. Fundamentally, as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) argue, journalism should provide a public forum for citizens to comment on, and even criticize, news content. Over time, the relationship between media and the public has expanded beyond newsroom activities. This pattern is especially visible among alternative media, which often extend their roles into campaigns, public education, and advocacy, using various platforms including social media and community initiatives. For alternative media, whether locally based or issue-oriented, the public is no longer viewed merely as an audience to be measured in numbers and statistics. Metrics such as readership or viewership remain important but are not the sole indicators of success.

Alternative media tend to shift focus from audiences to communities, positioning themselves as integral parts of the communities they serve. Within this perspective, public participation in media work, and conversely, media involvement in civic movements, becomes a key indicator of media viability. Public support and trust are essential in building and sustaining a media ecosystem that is healthy, fair, and democratic. The collaborative relationship between media and the public plays a vital role in nurturing democracy and advancing human rights.

Detailed Indicators of Public Engagement are as follows:

1. Media provides platforms and access for public feedback to comment on, discuss, correct, and elaborate on content
   a. Is the media open to comments, corrections, criticism, and suggestions from the public or audience?
   b. Does the media maintain dedicated channels for receiving such feedback?
   c. Does the media have internal guidelines or SOPs for responding to public comments, corrections, criticism, or suggestions?

2. Media facilitates public contribution to content creation and distribution
   a. Does the media host discussion groups or similar forums that include audiences, communities, or the general public?
   b. Does the media organize open editorial meetings, either online or offline?
   c. Does the media conduct audience polls?
   d. Does the media carry out audience surveys?
   e. Does the media apply other methods to involve the public in editorial processes?

3. Media provides space for public or community works
   a. Does the media accept and publish works submitted by the public, audiences, or communities (such as articles, photos, illustrations, videos, or other creative forms)?
   b. Does the media allocate a specific section on its website for public contributions?
   c. Does the media use other platforms to showcase public work?
   d. Does the media maintain communication channels (e.g., discussion groups or newsletters) to engage contributors whose works have been published?
   e. Does the media have a guideline or SOP for publishing public contributions?

4. Media enables public contribution to funding
   a. Does the media accept public, audience, or community financial support?
   b. Does the media run donation programs?
   c. Does the media have membership mechanisms?
   d. Does the media have subscription mechanisms?
   e. Does the media organize other initiatives involving public funding?
   f. Does the media maintain communication channels (e.g., discussion groups or newsletters) with financial contributors?
   g. Does the media have a guideline or SOP for managing public fundraising?

5. Media has dedicated personnel or teams for community or audience management
    a. Does the media have staff or a team outside the editorial unit specifically responsible for managing communities or audiences?
    b. Does the media maintain platforms, such as discussion groups or newsletters, to manage community relations?

6. Media provides accessible physical spaces for public activities
    a. Does the media provide physical spaces open to the public, audience, or communities for collaborative events aligned with public interests?
    b. Does the media regularly organize joint activities with the public in such spaces?
    c. Does the media prioritize access for vulnerable and marginalized groups?

7. Media engages in non-editorial collaborations with communities on public interest issues
    a. Does the media open itself to collaboration beyond editorial work with the public, audiences, or communities?
    b. Does the media regularly organize trainings?
    c. Is the media involved in campaigns addressing public interest issues?
    d. Does the media participate in advocacy efforts related to public causes?
    e. Does the media have other programs or methods for collaboration with citizens outside editorial work?

8. Media is trusted as a civic ally in advancing democracy and human rights
    a. Are the media's reports cited or referenced in civil society discussions and movements?
    b. Is the media regularly invited or included in civil society collaborations or coalitions?
    c. Does the media frequently receive invitations to cover civil society activities?
    d. Does the media regularly receive press releases related to civic or advocacy event?

Third, Organizational Strengthening

The concept and standards for strengthening alternative media organizations include the following:

- Alternative media are established as legal entities (PT, CV, cooperatives, or foundations).

- Media operations are managed by a managerial team, rather than by individuals.
- The organization has a humanistic and progressive vision and mission.
- It has periodically formulated work programs.
- It establishes an organizational structure that enables the newsroom to operate independently and autonomously.
- It has human resources (HR) with expertise in content/editorial work, public engagement, and financial management.
- It supports capacity building for both staff and the organization.
- It builds a work culture that incorporates team aspirations, including the development of work SOPs, organizational rules, and clear rights and obligations.
- It provides recognition and appreciation to team members for their work achievements.
- It pays attention to staff welfare, including the provision of health and employment benefits

These conditions is highly dependent on the broader ecosystem, particularly the availability of capacity-building and training services for human resources and media institutions to strengthen management, as well as access to healthcare and employment protection services.

Background

Research conducted by PR2Media highlights the importance of news media having formal legal status. Legal incorporation serves as a key mechanism for protecting alternative media from attacks and threats of violence. Once a media outlet is legally established, the Press Council is obligated to provide institutional protection. This requirement is explicitly stated in Article 9 paragraph (2) of the Press Law, which mandates that every press company must take the form of an Indonesian legal entity. Examples of such legal entities include limited liability companies (PT), foundations, and cooperatives. Legal status therefore constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for safeguarding alternative media from various threats. Beyond legal incorporation, alternative media must also strengthen their organizational structures. This includes establishing routine managerial governance, articulating a clear vision and mission, formulating work programs, adopting internal regulations, and collectively managing human resources. Strong organizational structures are essential for carrying out roles, responsibilities, and authority in pursuit of shared goals. Effective organization enables alternative media to develop ideas,

strategic planning, working relationships, and long-term strategies, while also facilitating collaboration among staff and the establishment of sustainable organizational systems.

The organizational strengthening indicator assesses alternative media from the perspective of internal capacity, including whether the outlet has legal status, a functional management system, fair remuneration and benefits, and agreed-upon work systems and organizational culture. PR2Media's findings reaffirm that legal incorporation is a critical foundation for protection. As stipulated in Article 9 paragraph (2) of the Press Law, press companies must be legally incorporated in Indonesia, commonly as PTs, foundations, or cooperatives. In addition to formal legal status, alternative media are expected to strengthen organizational governance through consistent management practices, shared visions and missions, structured work programs, and collectively managed human resources. Sound organizational practices enable media outlets to better anticipate challenges, plan strategically, and define future directions, while also ensuring smoother collaboration within editorial teams and greater institutional sustainability. Research by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) and Brave Media shows that alternative media in Indonesia generally emerge from a desire to offer counter-narratives distinct from mainstream media and to provide critical perspectives on government and power structures. These outlets are often founded by small groups of individuals who share similar values and later expand by bringing in others with aligned commitments. This trajectory can be seen in the establishment of Floresa.co in Labuan Bajo, Flores (East Nusa Tenggara), Bollo.id in Makassar, and Progresip in Jakarta.

Floresa.co, for example, was founded in response to local political, cultural, and economic conditions marked by persistent social inequality. The outlet is deeply connected to its surrounding social, political, and cultural context. While key actors such as government institutions, NGOs, and church leaders exist, their involvement in improving community welfare has often been limited. Floresa positions itself as part of a broader social movement ecosystem—seeking solutions to community problems and orienting its journalism toward the public interest. Based on experience in East Nusa Tenggara, Floresa's founders argue that neutrality in such contexts often leads to oppression; therefore, media must take a clear stance in favor of the public interest. Floresa adheres to the journalistic code of ethics and collaborates with communities and NGOs that share similar perspectives on social issues. Similarly, Bollo.id, as articulated by its editor Kamsah Hasan, was established to amplify the voices of those who are marginalized and excluded from public discourse due to the dominance of majority-group agendas.

Details of the Organizational Strengthening Indicators are as follows:

1. Legal entity status
   a. Does the managed media outlet already have a formal legal entity?
   b. Are there difficulties in establishing a legal entity, and what obstacles are encountered?
   c. What kind of support is needed under these conditions?

2. Media institution management
   a. What does the system or form of media management look like?
   b. Does the media outlet have a work program?
   c. Is there a division of roles between editorial, managerial, and financial functions, with distinct human resources assigned to each?
   d. Has an organizational structure been established that allows the newsroom to operate independently?
   e. What obstacles are encountered with the chosen system?

3. Salaries, services, and facilities
   a. Does the media outlet provide salaries in accordance with the Manpower Law?
   b. If not, what measures are taken and what obstacles are encountered?
   c. What services are already available (support for human resources in receiving salaries, honoraria, employment and health facilities, appreciation, and capacity building)?

4. Building a work culture
   a. Is the media system equipped with rules that are jointly formulated?
   b. What rules are in place?
   c. What obstacles are encountered in implementing the work culture?

Fourth, Financial Sustainability

We define the indicators of media financial sustainability as follows:
   a. The presence of diversified funding sources (the more diversified, the more viable)
   b. Non-profit-oriented financial management (at a minimum: break-even point/BEP)
   c. The ability to manage finances transparently
   d. The media's capacity to access a variety of funding sources

e. The media's capacity to create funding opportunities from its audience
f. The existence of an accountable financial management system to prevent fraud

The conditions above are strongly influenced by factors such as the availability of funding from the government, industry, and philanthropy oriented toward the development of mainstream and/or alternative media, as well as the extent of audience demand for alternative journalistic content that makes them willing to contribute financially, either through membership fees, donations, and/or news subscriptions.

Background

The sustainability of alternative media is one of the questions most frequently raised with their managers. This question arises due to the limited availability of funding sources for newly established media outlets. Under these constraints, alternative media are required to respond to what can be done in such conditions. Although from a human rights perspective, some activists do not agree that financial resources in the form of money are the sole source of organizational sustainability. There are other sources in the form of public support through various means (hereinafter referred to as capacities or alternative resources beyond money). This research specifically seeks to examine the diversity of these resources, namely whether, by developing various existing capacities—including funding—alternative media are able to survive in such circumstances.

The sustainability of alternative media is the aspect most frequently questioned by the public toward their managers. This question emerges from the reality of limited funding sources for new media. Under these constraints, alternative media must respond to what can be done. From a human rights perspective, financial resources in the form of money are not the sole factor for organizational sustainability. There are other factors in the form of public support through various means (hereinafter referred to as capacities or other non-monetary resources). This measurement indicator will also examine the diversity of resources, not limited to monetary sources, but also aspects such as volunteerism, community support, and others. This includes innovation in seeking new funding opportunities, with reference to fulfilling audience needs for alternative journalistic content that encourages them to be willing to pay membership fees and subscribe to news content on a regular basis.

Citra Diah Prastuti, Editor-in-Chief and Director of Kantor Berita Radio (KBR), stated that sufficient funding is very important to pay salaries, support reporting activities, and

enable innovation. This was affirmed by Damar from Jaring.id, who noted that the funding process is crucial for strengthening capacity. To create high-quality content, efforts are not limited to routine news production but also include conducting research on current conditions. Ni Nyoman Wira from Kompas.com stated that funding is important, but high-quality content is even more important. Devi P. Wihardjo from Existensil.com explained that her media outlet, which was newly established in 2025, began its funding through cooperation with social institutions/NGOs, which did not yet include honoraria for writers or journalists and was still based on a social movement approach.

Evi Mariani, Founder and Executive Director of Project Multatuli, stated that indicators of operational resilience and financial health are important, but journalistic impact is more important. This involves not only orderly and sound financial management, but also high-quality content with measurable impact, including how alternative media are able to engage their audiences. Evi proposed impact reporting as an indicator of sustainability. In terms of funding, Bandung Bergerak has chosen a diversified funding strategy, including opening a café and a library as well as selling books to sustain itself financially in addition to receiving funding from NGOs. Similar approaches are also implemented by Floresa, which has also opened a café. Both manage community engagement by routinely organizing discussions with the community in these cafés. Meanwhile, Progresip has developed its business by becoming a production house for videos on labor union issues. Konde.co has developed its business by undertaking various activities ("palugada," meaning "whatever you need, we provide"), such as writing books, organizing events, holding paid classes, selling merchandise online, selling books and other products at exhibitions, collecting membership fees, and managing community-based fundraising initiatives.

Bollo.id throughout 2025 has also been designing an ecosystem by building a café and a library. "We want Bollo to become a space for citizens' discussions. And from our initial funds, when we need to carry out large and complex reporting, we contribute our own resources because only 50% of our funding comes from external sources, while we reject all forms of funding provided by the government and state-owned enterprises," said Didit Hariyadi, Editor-in-Chief of Bollo.id.

In the case of Konde.co, in 2024, 85% of its funding came from grants. This year, it has begun opening new revenue streams; in addition to its community-based funding, it has also started business activities, although these have not yet reached the 20% level. Konde has also opened classes sold to the general public, sells merchandise, experiments with event organizing, and opens booths for direct offerings. The available funds are not only intended to ensure survival and proper office and operational management, but also

to ensure that editorial staff are paid fairly. To guarantee accountability, Konde.co has routinely conducted institutional financial audits and audits for each program. Its audit reports can be accessed on the Konde.co website as a form of transparency to the public.

Asep Saefullah stated that he has always believed that for media there are three key elements: audiences, funding sources, and content. "Financial sustainability is not merely about the availability of funds; there is also the need to distinguish between a business model and a revenue model, as these are two different things. Revenue streams from diversified funding sources must be developed. An additional aspect that needs to be included in sustainability is the availability of a business plan. Each media outlet must have a regular business plan to remain sustainable. At the very least, it should clearly outline what will be done, the proportions, how it will be carried out, the potential revenue, and this includes the appropriate distribution of human resources."

Furthermore, Guruh Dwi Riyanto from Progresip stated that the ongoing problem of limited human resources has made it difficult for alternative media to develop their businesses. "In practice, we can only assign one person to handle business development and community management. This is not yet effective." Anggi Lubis from The Conversation Indonesia stated that existing funding is uneven and more concentrated in media outlets that already have large business scales and market-size-based models. She expressed hope for non-competitive funding such as philanthropic support. "We strongly hope that local philanthropy can help, but as a media organization that has its own rules and guidelines on fundraising, this also makes us very limited." Felix Lamuri, Deputy Director of the Asosiasi Media Siber Indonesia (AMSI), stated that alternative media must prepare their business sustainability in distributing information to the public. Muhammad Heychael from Remotivi assessed that financial sustainability can be seen from the ability to generate financing from the represented community through diverse schemes. This is referred to as capacity. Thus, it is not limited to funds for operational needs, but also includes support in the form of capacity or labor, a spirit of volunteerism, and other elements that are important to be properly managed.

Details of the Financial Sustainability Indicators cover the following aspects:

Resources

1. What resources are available (funds, volunteerism, support from communities/ other groups for your media)?
2. How do you generate financial income to sustain the media outlet?

3. What difficulties are encountered in obtaining funding/financial resources?
4. What difficulties are encountered in obtaining non-financial resources (capacity beyond funding)?

Revenue and Management

1. How are these non-financial resources managed?
2. How are funds/financial resources managed?
3. Does the media outlet have financial rules to ensure transparency and to manage finances in order to prevent fraud?

New Funding Opportunities

1. How does your media outlet create new funding opportunities?
2. To what extent have audience needs for alternative journalism content made them willing to pay contributions or subscribe?
3. How does the government provide attention or support regarding this funding?
4. Are there new opportunities that you have created, and how were they developed?

Fifth, Technological Adaptation

The working group defines technological adaptation as encompassing the following aspects:

a. The ability of media organizations to access and manage news production and distribution technologies that are relevant to journalistic work.
b. The capacity of media human resources to operate and utilize technology effectively.
c. The ability of media organizations to mitigate and respond to digital attacks (on websites and social media accounts.
d. Journalists' competence in digital security

The conditions outlined above are strongly influenced by the following factors: the level of audience literacy in accessing and using technology; the availability of evenly distributed technological infrastructure; the accessibility of public information for the production of journalistic content; the absence of government intervention in digital communication related to the production and distribution of journalistic products (for example, regulations that restrict press freedom, internet shutdowns, etc.); the absence of intervention by digital platform providers in digital communication related to the production and distribution of

journalistic products (for example, censorship, shadow banning, and similar practices); and the public's freedom to protect and control their personal data

Background

Adaptation to technological developments has become a key factor in determining whether a media outlet can survive and function healthily amid rapid changes in the digital ecosystem. Technology is no longer merely a production tool; it has become the foundation of the entire journalistic value chain—from how news is produced and distributed to how it is consumed by the public. As patterns of information consumption evolve quickly, media organizations that fail to adapt risk losing relevance, trust, and ultimately sustainability. Technological adaptation is crucial because it shapes a media outlet's ability to balance its social function with economic viability. Audiences are no longer just recipients of news, but also producers and curators of information. Media organizations must understand these behaviors through analytics, distribution platforms, and content personalization strategies in order to remain connected to public needs. In this sense, the ability to read audience data and adjust news formats is an integral part of a technology-based survival strategy.

Beyond understanding audiences, technological adaptation is also closely linked to organizational efficiency and resilience. The digitalization of newsroom processes enables journalists to work faster, more collaboratively, and across multiple platforms. The use of technologies such as modern content management systems (CMS), news automation, or artificial intelligence for research and verification can increase productivity while maintaining accuracy. However, adaptation is not merely about acquiring software; it involves a transformation of work culture—how editorial teams, management, and technology units cultivate innovative thinking and openness to change.

In a broader context, technological adaptation is also shaped by external factors beyond media organizations themselves. One key factor is the level of digital literacy among audiences. Digitally literate communities are better equipped to assess information, understand how media operate, and value quality journalism. Low digital literacy, by contrast, creates fertile ground for hoaxes and disinformation that can undermine the information ecosystem. Another critical factor is access to reliable internet infrastructure. Without equitable and affordable digital infrastructure, the distribution of digital news becomes uneven and remains concentrated in urban areas.

In addition, openness and access to public information are essential prerequisites for data-driven and accountability journalism. When governments and public institutions restrict access to data, media lose their capacity to perform their role as social watchdogs. Equally important are government policies that support digital freedom. Transparent and non-repressive regulations enable media to operate without political pressure, censorship, or the threat of blocking, while safeguarding freedom of expression in the digital sphere.

Finally, a factor of growing significance is the transparency and fairness of digital platform algorithms. In a media ecosystem that relies heavily on algorithm-driven distribution, machine decisions about what appears on public timelines shape news exposure and even media revenue. Without transparency and fairness, local, alternative, or independent media are easily marginalized by viral non-journalistic content. Technological adaptation, together with supportive external conditions, thus forms a critical foundation of media viability. Media organizations that can innovate within a healthy digital environment are not only more likely to survive economically, but also to play a vital role in strengthening public literacy and the quality of information.

The detailed indicators for technological adaptation are as follows:

1. Assessing the capacity of digital system infrastructure and human resources (HR) capable of operating it in the production of journalistic content
    a. Does the media organization have a flexible and integrated CMS (content management system)–based workflow?
    b. Does it have up-to-date digital production tools (multimedia: photography, video, audiovisual, infographics, social media)?
    c. Does it have internal data analytics tools (data dashboards, user insights, engagement metrics, Google Analytics)?
    d. Does it have the capacity to mitigate and respond to cyberattacks and to protect data?
    e. Do staff members have the skills to operate digital tools?
    f. Does the organization have an innovative culture that enables continuous adaptation to emerging technologies?

2. Assessing audience access to digital infrastructure, the role of the state, and global digital platforms.
    a. Do audiences have adequate digital literacy?

b. Do audiences have sufficient access to the internet?
c. Is there openness and availability of public information?
d. Do government policies support digital freedom?
e. Are digital platform algorithms transparent and fair, enabling alternative media content to be widely distributed?

Sixth, Legal Recognition and Protection

The working group defines legal recognition and protection as follows:

- Ease of verification by the Press Council
- Equal recognition at the level of press-related legislation
- Equal support from the Press Council for alternative media in cases of journalistic disputes or violence
- Strong regulations to safeguard press freedom and freedom of expression
- Tax relief for media organizations during periods of crisis
- Recognition of journalistic products as a basic public need
- Protection of copyright for journalistic works and products
- Equal treatment in the practice of journalism
- Transparent and diverse regulations on media ownership

Background

Alternative media in Indonesia face significant challenges despite their strategic role in maintaining information diversity in the public sphere and amplifying the interests of minority and marginalized groups. This group of media outlets typically emerges from activism, community initiatives, or citizen journalism, and therefore often struggles to obtain formal recognition (verification) from state institutions such as the Press Council. This situation arises because the media verification requirements set by the Press Council tend to be more accommodating to mainstream media.

Many alternative media outlets do not have formal legal status, whether as limited liability companies (PT), CVs, or foundations, even though legal entity status is a mandatory requirement to obtain verification from the Press Council. The reasons range from limited human resources among media managers, complex registration processes, to insufficient capital.

The absence of legal recognition renders alternative media legally and politically vulnerable. They are frequently subjected to pressure and intervention from various interest groups. Without legal recognition, their basic rights—such as freedom of expression and legal protection for journalists and media managers—are also severely limited. Consequently, they have minimal access to legal protection mechanisms when facing threats, criminalization, or lawsuits related to news content. This is despite the fact that press freedom in Indonesia is guaranteed by Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press. Within the context of Indonesia's media ecosystem, media viability is not determined solely by internal factors such as media management, quality products (content), public engagement, financial sustainability, or technology adoption. Media viability is also shaped by legal aspects that protect the media ecosystem, including alternative media. A supportive legal environment is the foundation of media sustainability.

Therefore, a media viability assessment tool becomes relevant to include the indicator of "Legal Recognition and Protection." This indicator aims to evaluate the extent to which the national legal system provides space for alternative media to operate legally, safely, and on an equal footing with mainstream media. This indicator aims to evaluate the extent to which the national legal system provides space for alternative media to operate legally, safely, and on an equal footing with mainstream media. This measurement is important to ensure that the contribution of alternative media to information democracy can be carried out without fear. This assessment tool can also serve as a basis for policy advocacy so that media regulation in Indonesia becomes more inclusive and recognizes the diversity of all forms of media in society. "Legal Recognition and Protection" thus becomes a crucial foundation in measuring the sustainability of a healthy, fair, and democratic media ecosystem.

Details of the Legal Recognition and Protection Indicators are as follows:

1. Legal status and formal recognition. To measure the level of formal legality and recognition by state institutions of the existence of media outlets.
    a. Do alternative media receive facilitation in verification by the Press Council?
    b. Do alternative media have official legal entity status?
    c. Do alternative media obtain access to reporting rights similar to those of mainstream media?
    d. Do alternative media receive equal treatment in journalistic work?
    e. Do alternative media receive equal recognition at the level of press-related laws
    f. Are there policies that regard journalistic products as a basic public necessity?

g. Are there policies that regard journalistic products as a basic public necessity?
h. Do press regulations in Indonesia recognize alternative media?
i. Are there legal loopholes that cause alternative media to be considered non-press?
j. Are there realistic verification standards for alternative media?

2. Legal protection for journalists and media. To measure the extent to which media workers receive legal protection in carrying out journalistic duties.
   a. Have journalists/alternative media ever faced intimidation, violence, or criminalization in their journalistic work?
   b. Do alternative media have internal protection mechanisms (policies) for journalists (e.g., reporting safety SOPs, digital security policies, etc.)?
   c. Do journalists from alternative media have access to legal assistance (such as LBH Pers, AJI, SAFEnet, etc.)?
   d. Do law enforcement officials respect and understand the protection of journalistic work as regulated in Law No. 40 of 1999?
   e. Do media managers understand Press Law No. 40/1999, the ITE Law, and derivative regulations related to digital media?
   f. Do authorities treat alternative media on an equal footing with mainstream media?
   g. Does the alternative media ecosystem provide equal access to coverage, press conferences, and public data without discrimination?
   h. Do media organizations have internal policy documents on legal protection, sensitive reporting, and digital security?
   i. Are media organizations actively participating in legal training or mentoring and journalistic ethics programs?
   j. Do media organizations apply the Journalistic Code of Ethics and correction mechanisms or the right of reply?

3. Freedom of expression and anti-censorship. To measure the level of press freedom and independence from legal or political intervention.
   a. Are there strong regulations to protect press freedom and freedom of expression?
   b. Has the media ever experienced censorship, blocking, content takedowns, or political/legal pressure?
   c. Can the media report on sensitive issues without legal threats or pressure from authorities?
   d. Is there discriminatory treatment against alternative media in coverage of public issues?

e. Are there regulations or legal practices that restrict the freedom of expression of community or non-commercial media?

4. Access to justice and press dispute mechanisms. To measure the extent to which media can obtain justice and legal defense
   a. If a dispute or journalistic violence occurs, do alternative media receive the same support from the Press Council?
   b. How easy is it for media to obtain legal support or public advocacy when disputes arise?
   c. Do media know about and can they access press dispute resolution mechanisms (Press Council, LBH Pers, etc.)?
   d. Are cases involving alternative media resolved proportionally in accordance with press ethics, rather than under general criminal law?
   e. Is there local/national policy support for the protection of community and alternative media?
   f. Do alternative media have solidarity networks or collaborative legal advocacy among media and civil society organizations?
   g. Is there local/national policy support for the protection of community and alternative media?
   h. Do authorities refer reporting-related cases to the Press Council first?
   i. Are there official guidelines for the police/prosecutors on handling press disputes?
   j. Are these guidelines understandable and easily accessible to the public? Are pro bono or affordable legal services available, and do alternative media know how to access them?

5. Support for media. To measure the extent of central/local government support for alternative media.
   a. Are there tax incentives for media in times of crisis?
   b. Is there copyright protection for journalistic products/works?
   c. Are there open and diverse media ownership regulations?
   d. Do local or national governments have programs that support community and alternative media?
   e. Are there regulations that hinder alternative media activities (e.g., licensing, taxation, the ITE Law)?
   f. Do alternative media have participatory space in the formulation of public policies related to media?

6. Understanding and compliance with media regulations (this point can still be discussed because it concerns internal media). To measure the level of legal awareness and regulatory compliance.
   a. Do managers understand Press Law No. 40/1999, the ITE Law, and derivative regulations related to digital media?
   b. Do media apply the Journalistic Code of Ethics and correction mechanisms or the right of reply?
   c. Do media have internal policy documents on legal protection, sensitive reporting, and digital security?
   d. Are media actively participating in legal training or mentoring and journalistic ethics programs?
   e. Do alternative media have an organizational structure?
   f. Do alternative media have internal legal documents (editorial regulations, policies, etc.)?

III. Index Measurement Implementation

The methods for data collection and measurement refer to a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. In terms of data collection, four methods are employed: surveys, FGDs, interviews, and document review. In general, the research questions related to media viability to be explored in the field are as follows:

1. What challenges related to the sustainability of alternative media in Indonesia arise within the digital landscape and a political system in transition toward oligarchic democracy?
2. What solutions and recommendations can be applied to mitigate risks and ensure the sustainability of alternative media?

The following are explanations of the scenarios for each measurement method:

A survey, targeting the entire population of subjects, comprising:

- Managers of alternative media, mainstream media, and community media
- Academics in the fields of communication and/or law
- Representatives of media audiences, both general and digital-only readers
- Influencers

- Vulnerable groups
- Media and journalist associations
- Local governments
- Business representatives
- Legal institutions
- Funding institutions and NGOs
- Students and community groups
- Relevant ministries
- Regional House of Representatives (DPRD)

Or a survey targeting specific groups or using sampling, for example:

Journalist groups (2 people per group, totaling 8 people)

- Editors-in-chief (1 from alternative media, 1 from mainstream media)
- Journalists/reporters/editors (excluding media outlets whose editors-in-chief are surveyed above)
- Journalist associations (AJI, PWI, IJTI, PFI)
- Media associations (AMSI, ATVSI, PRSSNI, SPSI)
- Audience groups (2 people per group, totaling 8 people)
- Reader/subscriber forums
- Vulnerable, minority, and marginalized groups
- Young people/adolescents
- Specific communities, for example artists, history communities, religious communities

Or civil society groups (2 people per group, totaling 8 people)

- NGOs/social activists
- Lecturers or researchers
- Philanthropists
- Student organizations (student press, student executive councils)

From a geographic perspective, survey respondents for Indonesia must cover all 38 provinces, and may use regional divisions based on the three time zones (western, central, and eastern) and also refer to the results of the 2024 Press Freedom Index and data on news and journalism media that have been verified by the Press Council. In geographic terms, Indonesia may be divided as follows:

- Central: South Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Bali
- Western: Special Region of Yogyakarta, Riau, Jakarta, East Java, South Sumatra, North Sumatra, West Java, Bengkulu
- Eastern: North Sulawesi, West Papua, Maluku, Gorontalo

Document review, consisting of observation and analysis of the following content:

- Alternative media websites
- Press Council website
- Local government websites
- Alternative media social media accounts
- Article documents published in books or academic journals

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) serves to complement the survey and to further deepen the survey findings. The FGD is specifically intended to explore ideas to mitigate and address problems related to media sustainability. In the context of media viability, at least two FGDs will be conducted: in the western region: Jakarta (Java), and in the eastern region: Denpasar (outside Java and representing Eastern Indonesia). Participants may consist of :

1. Managers of alternative media, mainstream media, and community media,
2. Academics in communication or law,
3. Representatives of general media audiences or digital-only audiences,
4. Influencers,
5. Vulnerable groups,
6. Media and journalist associations,
7. Local governments,
8. Business representatives,
9. Legal institutions,
10. Funding institutions,
11. NGOs,
12. Students,
13. Communities,
14. Relevant ministries
15. Regional House of Representatives (DPRD)

In-depth interviews serve to further deepen the survey results, identify the experiences of alternative media management, and collect ideas for recommendations for improvement.

The list of informants to be interviewed includes/is not limited to:

1. Representatives of alternative media management
    - Issue clusters
    - New/established alternative media clusters
    - Geographic clusters
    - Verification clusters
2. Representatives of media regulators, including: the Press Council, Government (Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs)
3. Selected representatives of audiences/subscribers/members
4. Media academics/researchers (2 people, from Jakarta and outside Jakarta)

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Reading List

- "Measuring Beyond Money: The Media Viability Indicators (MVIs)" (DW Akademie): This framework presents a comprehensive set of indicators to assess media viability across five societal dimensions: economics, politics, content and expertise, technology, and the community. It provides a structured approach for data gathering and comparison. Link: https://www.dw.com/downloads/53435462/dw-akademie-media-viability-indicators.pdf
- "Rethinking Media Viability in the Digital Age" (DW Akademie Discussion Paper): This paper argues for a broader view of media viability beyond just financial aspects, discussing how digital transformation has disrupted traditional business models. Link: https://www.dw.com/downloads/47825755/dwa-discussion-paper-media-viabilityweb.pdf
- "Draft Indicators for Media Viability" (UNESCO): This document outlines a potential sixth category of indicators for media viability as an addition to UNESCO's existing Media Development Indicators (MDI) framework, focusing on the economic, financial, and business aspects. Link: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2022/04/ipdc59_Media_viability_indicators.pdf
- "The Media Viability Manifesto" (mediaviabilitymanifesto.org): A common framework for action developed by the global media development community that emphasizes tailor-made solutions based on specific contexts and a joint understanding of media viability. Link: https://mediaviabilitymanifesto.org/wp-content/uploads/MV_Manifesto-EN-WEB-20240904-1.pdf
- Regional & Country-Specific Studies: Many reports apply these frameworks to specific regions or countries, offering comparative data within those contexts. Examples include studies on East Africa, Bangladesh, and the MENA region.

Lampiran draf tabel indikator media viability Indonesia dan sumber pengukurannya: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1imab5do8vSe5nkVF8u6YpQ5zmrMGwO9p-KpyZgJSC0Ck/edit?usp=sharing

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