

Child Friendly Journalism in Indonesia: Compliance with PPRA and UNICEF

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Abstract

This study investigates the compliance of Indonesian national (Sindonews.com) and local (Poskota.co.id) online media with the Child Friendly Journalism Guidelines (PPRA) issued by the Indonesian Press Council and UNICEF's standards on reporting about children. Using quantitative content analysis of 282 child related news articles published in January, June, and December 2024, the research applied 117 indicators grouped into five dimensions: identity protection, language and narrative sensitivity, visual and audio representation, privacy and digital traces, and legal and journalistic ethics. The findings show partial compliance: both outlets performed relatively well in protecting children's privacy and digital traces but scored lowest in legal and ethical compliance. Identity protection and language sensitivity reflected only moderate adherence, with repeated issues such as disclosure of sensitive details and sensationalist framing across outlets. Statistical analysis confirmed no significant differences between national and local media, suggesting systemic challenges rather than outlet specific weaknesses. These results highlight tensions between commercial pressures and child rights standards in Indonesian journalism. By applying social responsibility theory and framing analysis, this study contributes to scholarly debates on ethical reporting and emphasizes the need for stronger institutional enforcement, participatory monitoring, and trauma informed approaches to safeguard children's rights in media coverage.

Keywords: child friendly journalism, media ethics, PPRA, UNICEF guidelines, online journalism

1. Introduction

The protection of children in the media has emerged as a central concern in global and Indonesian contexts, as children are recognized as vulnerable groups whose rights must be safeguarded under international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 1989), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018), and the UNICEF Guidelines on Responsible Representation (UNICEF *et al.*, 2020). In Indonesia, this mandate is reinforced through the Child Protection Law and the Press Council's *Pedoman Pemberitaan Ramah Anak* (PPRA; *Child-Friendly Journalism Guidelines*) (Press Council of Indonesia, 2019). Within this framework, the role of journalism is shaped by the Social Responsibility Theory of the press, which stresses accountability in representing vulnerable groups with dignity, privacy, and accuracy (Wilkins & Christians, 2009; McQuail, 2010), as well as by development communication theories that highlight media's transformative role in advancing social change and empowering marginalized voices (Rogers, 1974; Servaes, 2020). Complementing these perspectives, framing theory (Entman, 1993) and discourse theory (Fowler, 1991; Dijk, 2014) illustrate how media narratives actively construct social realities that can either empower or stigmatize children.

Recent scholarship has extended these foundations to contemporary challenges, including the negotiation of journalistic culture (Hanitzsch, 2007; Raemy *et al.*, 2024), epistemic practices in data journalism (Ramsälv *et al.*, 2024), and ethical risks intensified by audience metrics and algorithmic environments (Perez Vallejos *et al.*, 2021; Haim & Neuberger, 2022; Costello *et al.*, 2023; Saldías, 2024). Studies further demonstrate how social media use among children and adolescents heightens risks of anxiety, depression, and privacy violations (Bozzola *et al.*, 2022; Hilty *et al.*, 2023; Akter *et al.*, 2025; Kim *et al.*, 2025). Barthes (1977) reminds us that images carry connotative meanings (Allen, 2004), while visual

representations in journalism often privilege sensationalism over ethical safeguards (Zelizer, 2004; Mony & Megawati, 2021). At the national level, Indonesian research shows that despite the presence of PPRA, online outlets continue to disclose sensitive details of children (Mustika & Pranawati, 2021; Nurbaya & Pratiwi, 2023; Padang & Esther, 2025), pointing to weak institutional enforcement of ethical standards.

1.1 Literature Review

Research on journalism involving children has evolved from ethical discussions to empirical evaluations of media responsibility. Across global contexts, child related reporting remains entangled with sensationalism, market competition, and weak institutional regulation. Studies from Europe and Asia reveal that newsrooms frequently fail to protect minors' identities or psychological safety, even when formal guidelines exist. Ciboci (2019) found that European news outlets often breach ethical standards by using stigmatizing details and emotionally charged narratives. Similarly, Foot (2024) and Washington (2024) highlighted how trauma insensitive framing in online journalism perpetuates victim blaming and digital harm. These findings emphasize that the challenge of child sensitive reporting is universal, not confined to a single country or culture.

In the Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts, discussions on ethical reporting have intensified since the issuance of the PPRA by the Indonesian Press Council. The PPRA, closely aligned with UNICEF's *Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on Children*, aims to operationalize child protection principles within national journalism practices. However, research consistently shows that the implementation of these frameworks remains uneven. Mustika and Pranawati (2020, 2021) conducted systematic analyses of online coverage in *Tribunnews.com* and revealed recurrent violations of the PPRA, particularly in the indirect exposure of minors through contextual identifiers such as schools, families, or neighborhoods. Mony and Megawati (2021) observed similar trends in reports on sexual crime victims, where journalists adopted police rhetoric that tended to criminalize children rather than protect them. These patterns demonstrate that the presence of ethical guidelines alone does not guarantee compliance.

Further studies confirm that institutional and commercial pressures within Indonesian online media hinder ethical consistency. Malik (2017) conceptualized this phenomenon as the persistence of "yellow journalism," where speed and sensationalism outweigh social responsibility. Nurbaya and Pratiwi (2023) examined the implementation of PPRA in *iNews* and *Medcom.id* and found that ethical compliance was largely dependent on individual editorial discretion rather than systemic newsroom policies. Tyas Utami and Putri (2023) documented comparable issues in *Poskota.co.id*, where editorial routines favored dramatization and crime-oriented framing over anonymity and empathy. The recurring themes in these studies reveal that newsroom ethics often collapse under commercial imperatives, reflecting a structural rather than individual weakness.

Empirical inquiries have also explored the gap between awareness and action. Sofian *et al.* (2021) observed that while most journalists claim to understand ethical principles concerning children, few receive formal training on trauma-sensitive reporting. The absence of enforcement mechanisms by the Press Council or media regulators further limits accountability. International scholarship mirrors these challenges. Haim and Neuberger (2022); Costello *et al.* (2023) note that digital journalism ecosystems tend to reward visibility, virality, and audience metrics, often at the expense of ethical reflection. When commercial imperatives dominate newsroom decision making, children's rights and journalistic empathy are frequently deprioritized. This structural tension also emerges in Indonesia, where digital platforms amplify exposure risks and perpetuate stigmatizing narratives long after publication.

While most prior studies have offered descriptive assessments, few have systematically measured compliance with child-friendly reporting indicators. The majority of Indonesian research focuses on qualitative observation or thematic analysis of selected news samples. As a result, the degree of adherence to PPRA and UNICEF guidelines across media types especially between national and local outlets remains underexplored. No large scale quantitative study has yet established how consistently media organizations protect minors' privacy, avoid stigmatizing language, and ensure ethical visuals. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence that can inform regulators or guide newsroom reform.

This study seeks to fill that gap by providing quantitative data on ethical compliance across Indonesian online media. By analyzing 282 child related news articles from *Sindonews.com* and *Poskota.co.id* using 117 indicators derived from PPRA and UNICEF guidelines, the study aims to map the extent to which child protection principles have been internalized in newsroom practices. The comparison between a national and a local outlet also provides insight into whether ethical challenges stem from institutional scale or systemic conditions affecting Indonesian journalism as a whole. Through this approach, the study contributes to broader scholarly efforts to evaluate how social responsibility and child rights intersect within the rapidly evolving digital news ecosystem.

1.2 Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined children and the media, most scholarship has predominantly focused on global contexts such as the representation of children in media systems of Western societies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Beyens & Valkenburg, 2022), framing dynamics in political and social discourse (Karlsson & Sjøvaag 2018; Angelo

2019), or general journalism practices related to children's rights (Calvert & Wilson, 2008; Ciboci, 2019). In Indonesia, however, research remains largely normative, emphasizing journalistic ethics and child friendly reporting guidelines (Press Council of Indonesia, 2019; UNICEF *et al.*, 2020), along with legal instruments such as the Child Protection Act and Presidential Decree No. 36/1990. What is missing is a systematic analysis of how mainstream Indonesian media frame issues concerning children through the lens of Social Responsibility Theory and how these practices align with child protection standards and international frameworks such as the CRC and SDGs 16. This study addresses the gap by conducting a quantitative content analysis of 282 child related news articles, employing 117 indicators from PPRA and UNICEF Guidelines, systematically grouped into five dimensions. In doing so, it not only provides empirical evidence of Indonesian media compliance with child sensitive reporting but also advances theoretical understanding by integrating framing analysis with social responsibility theory, thereby contributing both to academic debates and to policy recommendations for ethical journalism practice.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the identified gaps and the importance of ensuring ethical child representation in journalism, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do Indonesian national online media comply with the *Pedoman Pemberitaan Ramah Anak (PPRA)* issued by the Indonesian Press Council and the UNICEF guidelines on reporting about children?

RQ2: To what extent do Indonesian local online media comply with the same guidelines?

RQ3: What differences in compliance can be identified between national and local online media in reporting children's issues?

RQ4: Which dimensions of the PPRA and UNICEF guidelines show the highest levels of non compliance in both national and local online media coverage?

RQ5: How does the framing of children's issues by online media reflect the principles of development journalism and social responsibility theory?

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To measure the level of compliance of national and local online media with the *Pedoman Pemberitaan Ramah Anak (PPRA)* and UNICEF guidelines using a quantitative content analysis approach with 117 coding indicators across five dimensions.
2. To compare the degree of compliance between national online media (*Sindonews.com*) and local online media (*Poskota.co.id*).
3. To identify recurring patterns of non compliance in the reporting of children's issues.
4. To contextualize media practices within the theoretical frameworks of development journalism and social responsibility theory.
5. To provide academic insights and policy recommendations for strengthening child protection in online journalism.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study applied a quantitative content analysis to examine the compliance of Indonesian online news media with the *Pedoman Pemberitaan Ramah Anak (PPRA)* and UNICEF guidelines on child sensitive reporting. Content analysis allows for systematic, replicable, and objective coding of news texts, enabling descriptive and comparative assessment of compliance.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised 1,008 child related news articles published from January to December 2024, including 648 articles from *Sindonews.com* (national outlet) and 360 from *Poskota.co.id* (local outlet). The unit of analysis was every news item involving children as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses of crime.

From this population, a sample of 282 articles was selected using a cluster purposive sampling strategy. Specifically, three constructed months-January, June, and December 2024-were chosen to represent the beginning, middle, and end of the year, ensuring temporal variation in coverage. Within these clusters, all eligible child related articles were included, resulting in 162 articles from *Sindonews.com* and 120 articles from *Poskota.co.id*.

2.3 Measurement and Coding

The coding instrument was based on 117 indicators derived from the PPRA and UNICEF (2020) guidelines. These indicators were grouped into five dimensions: (1) Protection of child identity, (2) Language and narrative sensitivity, (3) Visual and audio representation, (4) Privacy and digital traces in social media, and (5) Legal and journalistic ethics compliance. Indicators were scored on a four point scale (0 = not relevant, 1 = non compliance, 2 = partial compliance, 3 = full compliance). From an initial pool of 1,008 child-related news items identified in the three sampling months, 282 items met inclusion criteria and were coded. No attrition occurred, and each article was coded only once.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

Three trained coders conducted the coding process. A pilot test with 30 randomly selected articles published July 2024, 15 articles from Sindonews.com (national outlet) and 15 articles from Poskota.co.id (local outlet) was used to establish inter-coder reliability. Cronbach's Alpha exceeded 0.90, indicating high reliability. Construct validity was ensured through alignment with PPRA and UNICEF frameworks.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version **26**, a computer software program. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate mean scores by indicator, dimension, and media outlet. Inferential tests included **independent sample t-tests** to compare national and local media, and **ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc tests** to examine differences across rubrics and child status categories. Results were interpreted using **development journalism** and **social responsibility theory**.

3. Results

The overall compliance did not significantly differ between the two outlets (Local M = 2.32, National M = 2.31; $p = 0.83$; Cohen's $d = 0.28$). Nevertheless, dimension specific analysis reveals distinct compliance patterns across both media outlets, and it can be seen from Table 1.

Table 1. Compliance scores by dimension and outlet (mean and standard deviation)

Dimension	Local (poskota) M	Local (poskota) SD	National (sindonews) M	National (sindonews) SD
Identity Protection	2.45	0.35	2.40	0.33
Language and Narrative Sensitivity	2.10	0.40	2.05	0.38
Visual and Audio	2.35	0.32	2.30	0.30
Privacy and Digital Traces	2.50	0.28	2.45	0.30
Legal and Journalistic Ethics	2.01	0.30	1.98	0.32

Table 1 presents the mean compliance scores across five dimensions for both local and national media outlets. Values represent mean compliance scores on a 3-point scale (1 = non-compliant, 3 = fully compliant). Higher values indicate stronger adherence to child friendly reporting standards.

Subgroup analyses confirmed that Privacy and Digital Traces obtained the highest mean scores in both local and national outlets, while Legal and Journalistic Ethics consistently received the lowest. This pattern suggests that while outlets exercise greater caution in protecting children's digital presence, enforcement of legal and ethical frameworks in reporting remains weak. Sensitivity analyses did not substantially alter these patterns. This comparison of results is clearly visible in Figure 1.

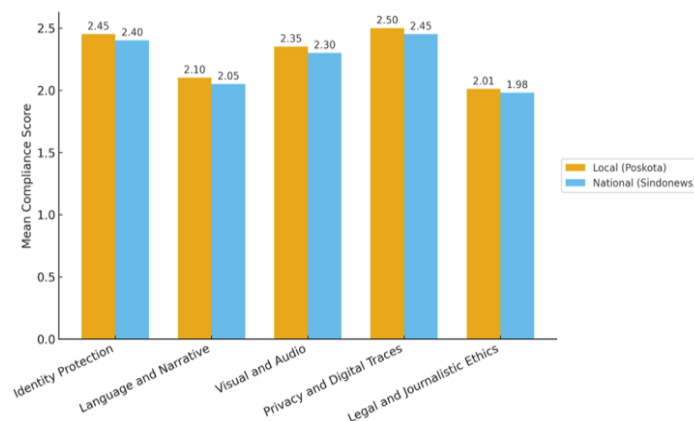


Figure 1. Compliance scores by dimension and outlet

Figure 1. Compliance scores by dimension and outlet. The figure shows that privacy and digital traces received the highest scores across both outlets, while legal and journalistic ethics consistently scored the lowest.

To contextualize the quantitative findings, this section integrates excerpts from analyzed news articles published by Sindonews.com and Poskota.co.id in 2024. These examples illustrate how journalists' linguistic, visual, and editorial choices reveal the rationales underlying ethical compliance and violation of the Child Friendly Journalism Guidelines (PPRA) and UNICEF standards.

3.1 Protecting Children's Identity in Media Coverage

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, the identity protection dimension obtained mean scores of **2.45 in local media** and **2.40 in national media**, indicating only partial compliance with the PPRA and UNICEF guidelines. The lack of significant difference ($p > 0.05$) suggests that weaknesses in protecting children's identities are systemic rather than outlet specific. Table 2 shows the highest, medium, and lowest indicators obtained for the child identity protection dimension.

Table 2. Identity protection indicators

Indicator rank	Indicator	Mean (M)	Description
Highest	Media uses initials of children (I001)	2.87	Consistently applied in both media
Middle	Avoid mentioning detailed addresses (I006)	2.13	Often inconsistent, esp. in local press
Lowest	Withholding parents' full names (I012)	1.40	Frequently violated, esp. in crime reporting

Table 2 highlights the strongest and weakest practices in protecting children's identities. While initials are consistently used, parental names and addresses are often insufficiently concealed.

The results indicate that identity protection is the strongest dimension across both national and local media, with the highest mean score found in the consistent use of children's initials (**I001, M = 2.87**). This finding suggests that anonymity in naming has become a relatively internalized journalistic practice. Nevertheless, gaps remain, especially regarding withholding parental names (**I012, M = 1.40**) and avoiding detailed addresses (**I006, M = 2.13**), which continue to expose children indirectly to identification risks. This imbalance reflects only partial implementation of ethical principles, whereby surface level anonymity is respected, but contextual identifiers remain insufficiently concealed.

For example, *Poskota.co.id* (2024, January 4) reported, "The Women and Children Protection Unit of South Jakarta Police arrested a man suspected of molesting his 11-year-old stepdaughter" [*Unit Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak Polres Metro Jakarta Selatan mengamankan seorang pria yang diduga mencabuli putri tirinya berusia 11 tahun*].

Likewise, *Sindonews.com* (2024, December 25) revealed indirect identification by writing: "The child victim lived with her mother and stepfather in Ciledug, ". Such details compromise protection despite anonymization.

3.2 Language Sensitivity and Empathy in Child Reporting

Language sensitivity produced the lowest compliance across dimensions, with mean scores of **2.05 for national** and **2.10 for local outlets** (see Table 1). Statistical tests showed no significant difference ($p = 0.27$), revealing a pervasive tendency to use stigmatizing or sensational language. Table 3 shows the highest, medium, and lowest indicators obtained for the language sensitivity.

Table 3. Language sensitivity indicators

Indicator rank	Indicator	Mean (M)	Description
Highest	Neutral wording in legal context (I018)	2.70	Neutral terms used, esp. in national media
Middle	Avoid sensational labels (I022)	1.85	Local media still stigmatizing
Lowest	Trauma-informed vocabulary (I025)	1.20	Rarely applied in reporting

Table 3 shows compliance with language sensitivity. Neutral legal wording is common, but sensational labels and trauma-informed terms remain underutilized.

The second dimension, language sensitivity, shows mixed compliance. While neutral wording in legal contexts (**I018, M = 2.70**) is commonly used, sensational labels (**I022, M = 1.85**) and trauma informed vocabulary (**I025, M = 1.20**) remain weak points, particularly in local outlets. This result underscores a recurring issue in journalistic practice: even when formal neutrality is maintained, the lack of empathetic framing and trauma sensitive reporting perpetuates stigmatization of child victims or offenders.

The headline "Young Bandit in Bekasi Arrested by Police" [*Bandit Cilik di Bekasi Digaruk Polisi*] published by *Poskota.co.id* (2024, June 17) exemplifies the stigmatizing language that criminalizes minors instead of portraying them as children requiring protection.

Similarly, the Sindonews article (2024, December 2), "Child kills father and grandmother in Lebak Bulus, cries and

expresses remorse” [*Anak bunuh ayah dan nenek di Lebak Bulus, menangis dan menyesal*] exemplifies the emotional framing that often dominates Indonesian crime reporting involving minors, blurring ethical boundaries between empathy and sensationalism.

3.3 Visual and Audio Representation of Children

As indicated in Table 1, the visual and audio representation dimension scored **2.30 in national** and **2.35 in local outlets**, showing partial adherence to ethical norms. Although some outlets blurred images or avoided identifiable visuals, many still published photographs and footage that indirectly exposed children’s identities. The lack of significant difference ($p > 0.05$) demonstrates that sensationalist visual strategies are common across both media types. Table 4 shows the highest, medium, and lowest indicators obtained for the visual and audio indicators.

Table 4. Visual and audio indicators

Indicator rank	Indicator	Mean (M)	Description
Highest	Blurring children’s faces (I046)	2.60	Practiced in national outlets
Middle	Use of generic imagery (I050)	1.95	Mixed practice
Lowest	Avoid sensational visuals (I053)	1.10	Persistent violations, esp. in local crime news

Table 4 outlines practices in visual and audio representation. While face blurring is common, reliance on generic or sensational visuals undermines ethical standards.

The third dimension reveals substantial gaps in visual and audio ethics. The practice of blurring children’s faces (I046, $M = 2.60$) is relatively strong, but reliance on generic imagery (I050, $M = 1.95$) is inconsistent, and sensational visuals (I053, $M = 1.10$) remain widespread, especially in local crime reporting. These findings suggest that while compliance with explicit regulatory requirements (such as face blurring) is increasingly routine, subtler ethical demands such as avoiding dramatization remain neglected.

In one *Poskota.co.id* photo (2024, January 12), four teenage boys were shown standing between several uniformed police officers inside a police office, with the official emblem clearly visible in the background. Although their faces were pixelated, their physical build, clothing, and setting made them easily identifiable as minors under custody. This visual choice reflects partial anonymization but still reinforces a stigmatizing frame by visually associating the children with criminality and law enforcement authority.

Sindonews.com (2024, December 2) also embedded CCTV footage from the “Gamma” case without censoring the child victim, further breaching visual protection standards under PPRA.

3.4 Privacy and Children’s Digital Traces

The privacy and digital traces dimension achieved relatively higher compliance, with mean scores of **2.45 in national media** and **2.50 in local media** (see Table 1). While these averages suggest greater caution in handling children’s digital footprints, risks persist, particularly through the reproduction of viral videos and social media screenshots. The statistical results ($p = 0.61$) again confirm that both local and national outlets face similar challenges in balancing visibility and protection. Table 5 shows the highest, medium, and lowest indicators obtained for the privacy and digital traces indicators.

Table 5. Privacy and digital traces indicators

Indicator rank	Indicator	Mean (M)	Description
Highest	Avoiding publication of online accounts (I061)	2.50	Generally respected
Middle	Minimizing viral crime details (I067)	1.80	Often inconsistent
Lowest	Avoiding exploitation of digital traces (I070)	1.00	Heavily violated in viral coverage

Table 5 demonstrates privacy and digital trace practices. Online accounts are usually withheld, but viral content and traces are frequently exploited.

Among the five dimensions, privacy and digital traces emerge as the weakest, with the lowest mean scores overall. Avoiding publication of online accounts (I061, $M = 2.50$) shows moderate compliance, but minimizing viral crime details (I067, $M = 1.80$) and avoiding exploitation of digital traces (I070, $M = 1.00$) are consistently violated. This pattern reflects the pressures of virality driven journalism, where children’s digital identities become commodified for clicks and shares.

Poskota.co.id (2024, January 15) reported, “12 Teenagers Attempting a Brawl in Tangerang Arrested by Police, Actions Caught on Social Media” [*12 Remaja Hendak Tawuran di Tangerang Diamankan Polisi, Aksinya Terpantau Lewat*

Medsos]. The article reproduced social media footage of minors without anonymization, extending their digital exposure. In *Sindonews.com*'s article "Viral: Two Teenage Girls Duel with Sickles in Palembang, Police Conduct Investigation" [*Viral 2 Remaja Putri Duel Pakai Celurit di Palembang, Polisi Lakukan Penyelidikan*] (*Sindonews.com*, 2024, January 15), the portal reposted footage circulating on TikTok and Instagram showing two teenage girls involved in a violent altercation. Although the report aimed to highlight the police response, the inclusion of the unblurred video and identifiable setting amplified the children's digital exposure. By republishing viral content, the media effectively extended the girls' online trace and reinforced stigmatization, contrary to the PPRA and UNICEF guidelines that prohibit reproducing or embedding child-related content from social media.

3.5 Legal Compliance and Journalistic Ethics

Legal and ethical compliance received the lowest scores overall, averaging **1.98 for national** and **2.01 for local media** (Table 1; Figure 1). Despite the presence of strong legal frameworks such as the **Juvenile Criminal Justice System Act (Indonesia, 2012)**, and the **Child Protection Law (Indonesia, 2014)**, enforcement remains inconsistent. SPSS results confirmed no significant differences ($p = 0.72$) between media types, reinforcing that gaps are systemic. Table 6 shows the highest, medium, and lowest indicators obtained for the legal compliance and journalistic ethics indicators.

Table 6. Legal compliance and journalistic ethics indicators

Indicator rank	Indicator	Mean (M)	Description
Highest	Referring to child protection law (I083)	2.75	Mostly in national outlets
Middle	Following SPPA juvenile procedures (I095)	1.95	Inconsistently applied
Lowest	Avoiding exposure of underage suspects (I110)	1.20	Frequently violated in local crime reporting

Table 6 captures adherence to legal and ethical norms. While references to laws are frequent, protections for underage suspects are often neglected.

The sixth dimension demonstrates uneven adherence to legal and ethical frameworks. While references to child protection law (I083, M = 2.75) are relatively common, compliance with juvenile justice procedures (I095, M = 1.95) and avoidance of exposing underage suspects (I110, M = 1.20) remains weak. This suggests that legal norms are acknowledged but not consistently internalized in newsroom practices, especially at the local level.

For instance, *Poskota.co.id* (2024, January 20) published the article "Stepfather Impregnates Stepdaughter, Neighborhood Chief in Pandeglang Now Imprisoned" [*Setubuhi Anak Tiri Hingga Hamil, Ketua RT di Pandeglang Kini Mendekam di Penjara*]. The explicit description of sexual acts and family relations violates the PPRA's non exploitation principle.

Similarly, *Sindonews.com* (2024, December 30) ran the article "Grandfather in Gowa Brutally Abuses Grandchild to Death" [*Kakek di Gowa Tega Aniaya Cucu Hingga Tewas*], presenting sensational violence without ethical framing or trauma awareness. These examples reveal that ethical breaches often arise not from ignorance but from newsroom routines driven by market pressure and sensational appeal.

To further clarify how ethical (non) compliance appears in practice, selected excerpts from the analyzed news articles are presented below. These examples reflect the editorial and linguistic rationales that shape compliance and violation patterns across five ethical dimensions.

4. Discussion

The textual examples presented in the previous section reveal that even when anonymity is formally maintained, linguistic and visual practices frequently reproduce stigmatization, indicating that ethical lapses stem from newsroom routines rather than isolated errors. These patterns highlight that compliance with child-friendly reporting is not merely a matter of individual awareness but is deeply rooted in institutional norms, editorial priorities, and commercial pressures that shape daily journalistic practices. Both local and national outlets demonstrate moderate and relatively equal compliance, indicating systemic rather than outlet-specific weaknesses. Improving child reporting ethics therefore requires institutional approaches, including continuous newsroom training and stronger oversight from the Press Council. As Oswald *et al.* (2016) emphasize, protection of children requires preventive and systemic measures rather than reactive responses to violations. The Indonesian case reflects this global pattern: ethical gaps are cross-media and shaped by structural factors, including commercial pressures and limited editorial gatekeeping.

Using the lens of Social Responsibility Theory (McQuail, 2010; Khan *et al.*, 2020), the press carries a moral obligation to prioritize the rights of vulnerable groups over sensational interests. However, the data indicate that many reports anonymize children's names while still disclosing contextual identifiers such as neighborhoods or parental names. This fragmented practice undercuts full anonymity and exposes children to indirect re-identification. Similar patterns were noted by (Vlad, 2017; Mustika & Pranawati, 2021), showing that identity protection remains inconsistent across contexts.

Thus, reforms must expand beyond prohibiting full names and address contextual details that compromise anonymity.

Indonesian scholarship reinforces this pattern. Document that local outlets frequently disclose neighborhood information or parental names, which undermines protective anonymity (Mustika & Pranawati, 2020; Tyas Utami & Putri, 2023). These practices reflect structural constraints, as local media often face resource limitations and weaker editorial gatekeeping compared to national outlets. Consequently, compliance gaps between media levels indicate not merely negligence but systemic issues tied to market pressures and newsroom routines. The implication is clear: future reforms must go beyond prohibiting the use of full names and extend toward comprehensive anonymization practices, including contextual information that could enable back-tracing a child's identity.

From a normative standpoint, the findings confirm that identity protection remains precarious despite clear ethical codes. Wilkins and Christians (2009) emphasized that journalistic ethics must be more than formal rules—they require continuous moral judgment. The moderate compliance in Indonesia reflects global struggles where commercial imperatives undermine normative standards. This underscores the need for institutional safeguards and monitoring, as partial compliance signals systemic negligence rather than isolated lapses.

Language and narrative sensitivity also remains problematic. While neutral legal wording is frequently adopted, stigmatizing terms and the absence of trauma-informed vocabulary persist. Entman (1993) framing theory explains how such linguistic choices construct stigmatizing narratives that marginalize children rather than empower them. Comparative research supports this concern: Weatherred (2016) found similar patterns in U.S. reporting on child sexual abuse, while Raemy *et al.* (2024) show how journalistic cultures often privilege sensationalism over empathy. Without integrating trauma-informed approaches into newsroom routines, ethical codes risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Visual and audio practices reveal parallel weaknesses. Although blurring children's faces is increasingly applied, sensational visuals remain common, especially in crime reporting. Barthes' semiotic perspective reminds us that images carry connotative meanings (Allen, 2004), while Zelizer (2004) observes that photojournalism often privileges dramatic appeal over ethical safeguards. Recent scholarship Hanáčková (2021); Fuller (2024) confirms that commercial logics continue to override protective norms, a trend equally visible in Indonesian media.

In terms of digital privacy, findings show relatively higher compliance, particularly in withholding online accounts. Yet risks remain in the reproduction of viral content and exploitation of digital traces. Livingstone (2017); Estella (2025) highlight that children's digital footprints create long term vulnerabilities, while (Akuetteh *et al.* 2024) emphasize that virality driven platforms structurally incentivize such risks. This reflects the systemic nature of the challenge: safeguarding children's privacy requires institutional accountability beyond individual journalistic caution.

In summary, partial compliance across all dimensions underscores systemic weaknesses within Indonesian newsrooms, reaffirming the relevance of Social Responsibility and Framing theories in explaining how market logics undermine ethical safeguards.

Beyond individual ethics, the findings suggest that commercial imperatives such as the pursuit of virality, audience metrics, and advertising revenue systematically undermine child sensitive reporting. In the digital newsroom environment, visibility and engagement often take precedence over moral reflection, leading to sensational headlines and stigmatizing portrayals of children.

As (Prieto-Andrés *et al.* 2025) note, media logic shaped by market competition tends to privilege emotional and moral dramatization over accuracy and empathy. Similarly, (Wang *et al.* 2025) observe that content strategies driven by audience demand can marginalize socially responsible narratives. To reconcile these tensions, media organizations should embed ethical metrics alongside engagement analytics, integrating PPRA and UNICEF indicators into performance dashboards and editorial review systems. Such institutional mechanisms would align market driven production logics with the normative commitments of socially responsible journalism.

This perspective aligns with the broader view of development oriented journalism, where media are expected to balance informational, educational, and participatory functions. As (Ihsaniyati *et al.* 2023) emphasize, communication for social change requires inclusive and dialogic engagement that prioritizes societal welfare over mere audience attraction. In the Indonesian context, the press can adopt this participatory ethos by reframing child related reporting as a form of development communication educating audiences about protection rights while maintaining ethical rigor.

These insights underscore that addressing ethical gaps requires not only newsroom level reforms but also reinforcement through national journalistic accountability systems. Echoing (Saleh 2010), mass media serve not only as information channels but also as educational tools that strengthen public responsibility an essential function that must be reclaimed in child related reporting. Together, these patterns confirm that ethical gaps in Indonesian journalism are structural rather than individual, underscoring the need for systemic accountability discussed below.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that child friendly journalism in Indonesia remains partial: identity protection and digital privacy show moderate adherence, while language and legal ethics remain weakest, reaffirming that ethical journalism requires cultural transformation beyond regulatory compliance.

Theoretically, the findings reaffirm the relevance of Social Responsibility Theory and Framing Theory in explaining how media practices shape the representation of vulnerable groups. The persistence of sensational framing, insufficient anonymization, and weak trauma informed approaches confirms that ethical journalism cannot be achieved solely through formal codes. Instead, it requires a cultural transformation in newsrooms and continuous moral judgment, as emphasized by Wilkins & Christians (2009) and McQuail (2010).

Practically, the results point to three urgent implications. First, enforcement mechanisms must move beyond self regulation, with stronger monitoring from the Press Council and independent watchdogs. Second, continuous training in child sensitive and trauma informed reporting should become a newsroom priority, embedding empathy and accountability into journalistic routines. Third, media institutions must align ethical compliance with their developmental role, contributing to the protection of children's rights as part of the broader sustainable development agenda (SDGs 16).

In conclusion, child friendly journalism is not an optional practice but a professional imperative. To ensure that children's rights are fully protected, Indonesian journalism must institutionalize responsibility, strengthen accountability structures, and embrace empathetic and trauma informed approaches. Only through these systemic reforms can media move from partial compliance toward fulfilling their normative obligation to safeguard the dignity and rights of children in the public sphere. In light of these findings, the study's implications extend beyond academic analysis to practical policy reform and professional accountability in Indonesian journalism.

Beyond newsroom practices, the findings carry regulatory significance. Since legal and ethical compliance scored the lowest, the Press Council should embed measurable PPRA indicators aligned with UNICEF's Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on Children into newsroom licensing and periodic compliance audits. Integrating these standards within the framework of development communication, as suggested by (Ihsaniyati *et al.* 2023), could enhance journalists' role as agents of social learning rather than mere content producers driven by market competition. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection may serve as a coordinating partner for advocacy and cross sector implementation. Professional associations must integrate these indicators into accreditation and performance evaluations to institutionalize accountability in child-related reporting.

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Authors contributions

Yumelda Sari: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, writing-original draft, project administration. Sarwititi Sarwoprasodjo: supervision, methodology review, validation, writing-review and editing. Pudji Muljono: supervision, theoretical framing, writing-review and editing. Amiruddin Saleh: supervision, interpretation of findings, writing-review and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Not applicable. The study analyzed publicly available news articles and did not involve human participants or personally identifiable data beyond what is publicly accessible.

Ethics approval

This study was approved by the Ethical Committee on Social Studies and Humanities, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia (Approval No. 565/KE.01/SK/06/2025), with a research period from June 2025 to May 2026. The ethical clearance ensures that the research complies with national standards for social and humanities research, including respect for participant confidentiality, responsible data handling, and adherence to ethical research principles established by BRIN. All procedures were conducted in accordance with institutional and national ethical guidelines, and no intervention involving human participants occurred beyond the analysis of publicly available materials (news articles). Institutional monitoring may be conducted during the validity period as stipulated in the clearance approval.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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