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# 1 Mediating Justice Through Live Broadcast: A Phenomenological Communication 2 Study Of Tv One's Courtroom Journalism

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9 **Keywords:** courtroom journalism, live broadcasting, legal communication, mediating justice,  
10 Indonesia

## 11 Abstract

12 Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public  
13 sphere in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who  
14 translate complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study  
15 employs a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in  
16 covering high-profile trials. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and  
17 observation of live broadcast production. Findings reveal tensions between the goals of legal  
18 education and the dramaturgical demands of television news. The study conceptualizes courtroom  
19 journalism as a mediating communication practice that links open justice, professional role  
20 negotiation, and civic-oriented journalism in the Global South.

## 21 1 Introduction

22 Open court hearings constitute a fundamental principle in modern judicial systems aimed at ensuring  
23 accountability and transparency (Johnston, 2018). In the media era, this principle is increasingly  
24 realized through courtroom coverage by the press, including live broadcasts on television. In Indonesia,  
25 the TV network TV One is among the pioneers in airing high-profile cases live, bringing the courtroom  
26 directly into viewers' living rooms. This phenomenon of "trial by television" has generated  
27 expectations that media can serve as an instrument for public legal education (Ravid, 2017). The mass  
28 media carries an educational function alongside its informational and entertainment roles, as mandated  
29 by the Press Law No. 40/1999. Courtroom journalism is therefore regarded as a manifestation of that  
30 educational function by making judicial processes more accessible to the public (Ardilla et al., 2020;  
31 Johnston, 2018). Journalists covering trials act as legal communicators (Rieke & Stutman, 2022;  
32 Widodo, 2024), translating complex legal language and procedures into information that can be easily  
33 understood by general audiences (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016; Magin & Maurer, 2019). Through live  
34 broadcasts, journalists bridge the highly technical legal world with the public's need for  
35 comprehensible legal information (Ravid, 2017).

36 However, concerns arise that the media may prioritize sensational elements to attract viewers, shifting  
37 the focus from education toward dramatization (Fox et al., 2001; Ravid, 2017). Court coverage risks  
38 presenting legal events as dramatic spectacles, highlighting courtroom confrontations, emotional  
39 expressions of defendants and witnesses, and speculative commentary, all of which can enhance the

40 dramatic tone of the broadcast (Ravid, 2017). The dilemma between educational value and  
41 dramatization has sparked debate among both media practitioners and academic scholars. Studies  
42 suggest that the media often selects sensational criminal cases for live broadcast to increase audience  
43 appeal, potentially creating an unbalanced portrayal that undermines the legal educational function. As  
44 a result, televised trials may disrupt the presumption of innocence and influence public opinion before  
45 a verdict is reached (Habsari, 2017; Manan, 2015). The widely publicized 2016 “cyanide coffee” case  
46 involving Jessica Kumala Wongso, for instance, was broadcast intensively and triggered trial by media,  
47 shaping public opinion even before the court’s decision (Suryawati, 2017). This example highlights  
48 growing criticisms that the dramatization of court proceedings by the media may erode substantive  
49 justice (Ravid, 2017).

50 For journalists engaged in covering live courtroom proceedings, maintaining a balance between  
51 educational goals and entertainment elements becomes a distinct challenge. They are required to  
52 provide accurate information about legal processes, such as the reading of indictments and the  
53 presentation of evidence or legal arguments, while ensuring the broadcast remains engaging enough to  
54 retain audience attention. Consequently, journalists develop specific communication strategies to  
55 bridge legal language with public understanding. These strategies include using simplified vocabulary  
56 or lay equivalents for legal terminology, offering contextual explanations about courtroom procedures,  
57 and featuring expert legal commentators as supporting communicators who help unpack technical legal  
58 concepts (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016). Through such strategies, journalists aim to maintain the  
59 accuracy of legal substance without compromising the audience’s ability to understand the information  
60 being conveyed (Stern, 2014). In addition, interactions with court public relations officers are utilized  
61 to obtain correct information about the proceedings, ensuring that the information broadcast remains  
62 accurate and compliant with legal norms (Ardilla et al., 2020).

63 From the perspective of professionalism and idealism, courtroom journalism demands a high level of  
64 ethical commitment. Journalists must adhere to professional codes of ethics, including accuracy,  
65 balance, and respect for the presumption of innocence, even under pressure from rating expectations  
66 and sensational demands (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009).

67 Idealistic journalists view courtroom reporting as a noble mission to enlighten the public about legal  
68 processes and reinforce public accountability (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021). They believe that  
69 transparent and informative trial coverage allows the media to contribute to judicial oversight and  
70 public access to justice (Johnston, 2018; Wittchen, 2023). Yet such idealism is often tested by practical  
71 realities, including limited airtime, the pressure to produce “dramatic moments,” and legal risks such  
72 as allegations of contempt of court or defamation when coverage is deemed excessive (Ardilla et al.,  
73 2020; Habsari, 2017; Huang, 2021). It is therefore important to understand how journalists reflect on  
74 their professionalism and idealism when broadcasting trials live, including the values they uphold and  
75 negotiate when idealism intersects with the pragmatism of the media industry.

76 Conceptually, this study is informed by three interrelated bodies of scholarship: (1) the principle of  
77 open justice and the mediatization of courts, which frame courtroom journalism as a channel through  
78 which judicial transparency is extended into the public sphere; (2) role performance and civic  
79 journalism perspectives, which emphasize journalists’ normative functions as watchdogs, educators,  
80 and mediators of public interest; and (3) research on media events and “trial by media,” which  
81 highlights the dramaturgical and affective dimensions of televised legal proceedings. While prior  
82 studies have examined televised trials and courtroom reporting in various jurisdictions, much of the  
83 literature focuses on legal implications, audience effects, or content analysis, with comparatively less  
84 attention to the lived experiences of journalists, especially in Global South contexts.

85 Based on the above background, this study asks: How do TV One journalists experience live courtroom  
86 broadcasting as a means of legal education and a form of mediating justice? Specifically, it addresses  
87 the following research questions:

88 RQ1: How do TV One journalists understand and enact their roles as legal communicators in  
89 live courtroom broadcasts?

90 RQ2: How do they experience and negotiate the tension between educational goals and  
91 dramatization imperatives?

92 RQ3: What communication strategies do they employ to bridge legal language and lay  
93 audiences?

94 RQ4: How do they reflect on professionalism and journalistic idealism in the practice of live  
95 broadcasting?

96 This study is significant because in Indonesia there is limited in-depth research on courtroom  
97 journalism, even though the phenomenon is increasingly relevant alongside the expansion of judicial  
98 transparency in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the  
99 subjective experiences of journalists, thereby offering new perspectives on courtroom journalism as a  
100 form of public communication in the legal domain and contributing empirical insight from a Global  
101 South media system to broader debates on media, law, and democracy.

## 102 **2 Method**

103 This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore the lived  
104 experiences of television journalists involved in broadcasting court proceedings live. The  
105 phenomenological approach was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the meaning of  
106 informants' subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon (Sturges, 2018). In this  
107 context, the phenomenon examined is live courtroom journalism at TV One, viewed through the  
108 perspectives of the journalists who practice it. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring predefined  
109 variables, the study aims to capture the essence of journalists' experiences in mediating justice through  
110 live broadcast.

### 111 **2.1 Informants and Data Collection Procedures**

112 The research informants consisted of six TV One journalists with a minimum of five years of  
113 experience covering major court proceedings live. Informants were selected purposively based on the  
114 following criteria: prior involvement as field reporters or studio presenters in live broadcasts of high-  
115 profile trials such as corruption cases or nationally significant criminal cases, and willingness to reflect  
116 on their professional experiences. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, in  
117 which a relatively small number of participants is considered adequate to achieve depth and richness  
118 of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness. Most informants served as field reporters  
119 covering trials at court locations, while several also worked as studio presenters during live broadcasts.  
120 Before the interviews, all informants agreed to participate with a guarantee of confidentiality. For the  
121 purposes of this study, informants' identities were anonymized using labels R1 through R6.

122 Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Each informant was interviewed  
123 online via the Zoom application. The interviews focused on four themes: the role of journalists as legal  
124 communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization in reporting, strategies used to bridge  
125 legal language for public understanding, and personal reflections on idealism and professionalism  
126 during live trial coverage. Interview questions were designed to elicit concrete examples, emotional  
127 responses, and perspectives related to each theme. Examples include "*Can you describe an experience*

128 *where you had to explain a difficult legal term during a live broadcast?” or “What internal conflict*  
129 *have you experienced between presenting the trial as it is versus pressure to make the broadcast*  
130 *engaging?” All interviews were audio-recorded with informants’ consent and were transcribed*  
131 *verbatim for analysis.*

132 In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to enrich contextual understanding.  
133 The researcher accompanied the TV One team during coverage of a nationally significant corruption  
134 trial broadcast live in early 2025. The researcher observed journalists’ working dynamics in the  
135 courtroom and in the media center, their interactions with sources such as prosecutors, defense lawyers,  
136 and court public relations officers, and the coordination processes with the studio during broadcasts.  
137 Field notes from these observations contributed to a deeper understanding of the situation and the time  
138 pressures faced by journalists, enabling more contextual interpretation of interview data.

139 The researcher occupied a position as an informed outsider: familiar with media and legal  
140 communication issues through academic work but not part of TV One’s newsroom. This positionality  
141 required reflexivity in order to avoid imposing normative assumptions about “how the media should  
142 behave” and to remain open to journalists’ own sense-making. Throughout the research process, the  
143 researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor potential biases and their influence on data  
144 interpretation.

## 145 **2.2 Data Analysis**

146 After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews and analyzed them using a  
147 descriptive phenomenological technique based on the simplified steps of Colaizzi (Neubauer et al.,  
148 2019). First, the researcher repeatedly read the entire set of transcripts to gain a comprehensive  
149 understanding. Second, the researcher identified statements most relevant to the four research foci.  
150 Third, thematic formulations were generated from these statements by interpreting them within the  
151 context of each informant’s experience. Fourth, the emerging themes were grouped into categories that  
152 reflected shared aspects of experience. At this stage, the researcher identified four major themes  
153 consistent with the initial focus of the study, namely, journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas  
154 between education and dramatization, strategies for bridging legal concepts with public understanding,  
155 and professionalism versus journalistic idealism. Each theme was supported by subthemes or  
156 illustrative examples from the informants. Fifth, the researcher developed an essential description of  
157 the phenomenon based on these themes, representing the collective experiences of TV One journalists  
158 in practicing live courtroom journalism. Sixth, validation was carried out through informal member  
159 checking, where the researcher presented a summary of findings to several informants to ensure  
160 accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. The informants confirmed the relevance of the findings to their  
161 experiences and offered minor input which was incorporated accordingly.

162 Throughout the analysis, the researcher applied bracketing by suspending personal biases and  
163 assumptions to prevent them from influencing interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019; Sturgess, 2018).  
164 For instance, the researcher set aside normative assumptions such as “the media should not be  
165 sensational” to remain open to journalists’ perspectives. This step was important to maintain the purity  
166 of phenomenological description. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data  
167 among informants and linking them with observational findings, thereby strengthening the credibility  
168 of the results. In addition, peer debriefing with two communication scholars was conducted to discuss  
169 the emerging themes and their interpretation, ensuring consistency between data and analysis.

## 170 **2.3 Credibility and Ethics**

171 The researcher also conducted peer debriefing with two communication scholars to discuss findings  
172 and interpretations, ensuring consistency with the data. Ethically, this study obtained permission from  
173 TV One’s editorial management to interview its journalists and to observe live broadcast production

174 routines. Informants were free to decline answering sensitive questions and could withdraw from the  
175 interview at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all informants and by  
176 omitting any details that could lead to personal identification. The study followed general ethical  
177 principles in qualitative research, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and minimization of  
178 harm.

### 179 **3 Finding**

#### 180 **3.1 Journalists as Legal Communicators for the Public**

181 The informants acknowledged their central role as conveyors of legal information from the courtroom  
182 to the wider public. They recognized that many viewers are unfamiliar with legal terminology and  
183 procedures, thus journalists act as “translators” who convert legal language into public language. A  
184 field reporter (R1) explained, *“During the hearing, the judge may use terms like ‘the objection is  
185 rejected because the indictment is considered precise.’ I have to explain on-air that an ‘objection’ is a  
186 kind of protest note submitted by the defendant’s legal counsel, and that if it is rejected, the trial  
187 continues to the main case.”* This statement illustrates the journalist’s effort to simplify legal jargon  
188 without reducing the substantive meaning. All journalists admitted preparing materials before  
189 broadcasting by studying case files and consulting legal experts such as prosecutors or legal scholars,  
190 enabling them to understand the legal issues that arise during the trial. With that understanding, they  
191 could re-communicate the information to the audience in simpler language.

192 Informants also felt responsible for maintaining the accuracy of legal information. They tried to provide  
193 context for each development in the trial, such as explaining the function of each stage of the process  
194 (indictment reading, witness examination, prosecution, defense plea) in a structured manner. A studio  
195 presenter (R3) stated:

196 *“I consider the viewers as laypeople who need a complete picture. So in every segment, I  
197 summarize: today the court agenda is the examination of a forensic expert witness, aiming to  
198 establish the cause of the victim’s death.”*

199 This approach helps viewers understand the logic and flow of the trial rather than seeing only  
200 fragmented events. The journalists agreed that by explaining legal background and technical terms, the  
201 public can follow the proceedings with greater clarity. This aligns with their ideal that the media must  
202 contribute to improving public legal literacy. A senior reporter (R2) expressed a similar view:

203 *“If ordinary people understand what an indictment is, or the difference between factual  
204 witnesses and expert witnesses, it means our work succeeded in mediating legal language for  
205 the people.”*

206 These findings affirm the role of courtroom journalists as communicators who bridge the judicial  
207 institution and the public by translating legal processes into accessible information.

#### 208 **3.2 The Dilemma Between Education and Dramatization in Live Broadcasts**

209 This theme strongly emerged from all informants’ experiences. They faced a two-directional pressure:  
210 on one hand, ideally, courtroom broadcasts should be treated as purely informative and educational  
211 news coverage; on the other hand, the live television format demands dramatic elements to attract  
212 viewers. Field reporters R1 and R4 revealed that production teams often instructed them to highlight  
213 emotional or confrontational moments in the courtroom.

214 *“A producer once said, ‘if there’s tension between the judge and the lawyer, report it  
215 immediately, that’s a good moment!’”* R4 explained.

216 As a result, reporters often found themselves in a dilemma. When trials proceed monotonously (such  
217 as long document readings), there is a temptation to embellish reports with opinions or speculation to  
218 avoid boring the audience. However, journalists also understood that excessive dramatization could  
219 obscure legal substance and unfairly influence public opinion. R2 admitted having been reprimanded  
220 by an editor for unintentionally dramatizing a defendant's reaction:

221 *"I once said 'Defendant X looked panicked and repeatedly wiped sweat...'. The editor was*  
222 *angry because we are not infotainment. Since then, I've been more careful, only reporting facts*  
223 *without dramatic additions."*

224 Nevertheless, some informants acknowledged that dramaturgy cannot be entirely avoided. Certain  
225 courtroom situations are inherently dramatic, such as the victim's family weeping hysterically or heated  
226 debates between defense lawyers and prosecutors. These moments naturally become the focus of  
227 camera attention. The dilemma lies in editorial decisions regarding how far journalists should exploit  
228 such emotions. R3 explained:

229 *"I have to choose words carefully: if a witness cries, I report the fact 'the witness cried while*  
230 *recalling the events,' without exaggerating it with sensational wording."*

231 This reflects an effort to maintain balance. Journalists still report dramatic elements because they are  
232 part of the event, but refrain from excessive sensationalism.

233 Several journalists also acknowledged the presence of rating pressure. The success of a live courtroom  
234 program is partly judged by audience ratings, which implicitly encourages production teams to look  
235 for dramatic angles. Field journalists often found themselves at a crossroads between adhering to  
236 journalistic ideals that emphasize information and education or following commercial pressures for  
237 sensationalism.

238 *"Honestly, as a journalist I want to educate the public. But sometimes the boss asks for an*  
239 *angle with a 'wow factor'. This is our inner struggle in every major trial,"* said R6.

240 Overall, this dilemma is a collective experience among TV One journalists. They are fully aware of  
241 their moral responsibility not to sacrifice accuracy and fairness for dramatization, even though the  
242 media industry demands appealing content.

### 243 3.3 Strategies for Bridging Legal Language with Public Understanding

244 The study identified several communication strategies that journalists use to ensure that trial  
245 information is easily understood by the general audience. The first strategy is simplification of legal  
246 terminology. As mentioned previously, journalists replace legal terms with everyday equivalents or  
247 provide brief on-air definitions. For example, "interlocutory decision" is explained as "a temporary  
248 decision issued in the middle of the trial," or "criminal execution" is described by reporters as "the  
249 implementation of punishment for a convicted person."

250 The second strategy is contextual elaboration. Journalists not only report what happens in the  
251 courtroom but also provide background information about the case and its legal relevance. This  
252 resembles a news feature style, in which reporters insert historical context or case chronology during  
253 breaks in the trial. R1 gave an example: during a corruption trial, *"While waiting for the judges to*  
254 *deliberate, I reminded viewers: this case began with a sting operation last year involving an official*  
255 *from Ministry X, causing a state financial loss of...."* This strategy helps viewers understand the  
256 context of each stage of the trial.

257 The third strategy is the use of expert sources. In several broadcasts, TV One invited legal scholars or  
258 experts as analysts in the studio. Journalists moderated discussions with these experts to clarify

259 technical aspects. For instance, when there was debate over the legal articles in the indictment, the  
260 presenter would ask, “*What does this article mean, and why do the prosecutor and defense interpret it*  
261 *differently?*” The expert’s explanation helped clarify matters for viewers. R3 stated that experts were  
262 very helpful:

263           *“My language has limitations. With an expert present, technical terms like ‘elements of an*  
264 *offense’ can be explained thoroughly without fear of error.”*

265 Expert presence also enhances credibility and analytical depth.

266 The fourth strategy involves visualization and graphics. The production team prepares supporting  
267 visuals such as infographics showing trial procedures, diagrams of relationships among actors in the  
268 case, or highlighted points of the indictment. Journalists use these visuals while explaining the case,  
269 giving audiences a visual reference. Research observation noted that, during complex trials, TV One  
270 displayed a timeline of the case on the screen while reporters explained each stage accordingly. This  
271 technique helps viewers understand lengthy legal processes.

272 Fifth, journalists maintain a communicative tone and language style. They avoid rigid or overly formal  
273 reporting and instead adopt a conversational tone, as if explaining to a friend. R2 noted:

274           *“I always imagine explaining things to my mother at home. So I choose simple words, use a*  
275 *friendly tone, and avoid sounding preachy.”*

276 This humanistic approach makes viewers feel included in a conversation rather than lectured, thereby  
277 increasing their understanding. These strategies demonstrate journalists’ proactive efforts to bridge the  
278 legal knowledge gap between legal professionals and lay audiences. While challenges remain in  
279 responding quickly to unexpected legal terminology during trials, experience has shaped the journalists  
280 into flexible communicators.

### 281 3.4 Reflections on Professionalism and Journalistic Idealism in Live Broadcasts

282 The informants reflected on the values they uphold and the conflicts they experience between idealism  
283 and practical demands. Generally, all journalists emphasized their commitment to objectivity and  
284 accuracy. They understood that the fate of a defendant is at stake in the courtroom, so reporting must  
285 not be biased or prejudicial.

286           *“We are not judges, so we must remain balanced. I always insert the phrase ‘allegedly’ to*  
287 *remind viewers that no verdict has been issued,”* said R4.

288 This shows adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence. Several journalists admitted having  
289 been contacted by defense lawyers or court public relations officers when objections arose concerning  
290 their reports. R2 recounted:

291           *“Once the legal counsel protested because we referred to their client as a ‘corruptor.’ In fact,*  
292 *the person was only a defendant. We acknowledged the mistake and corrected it. That was a*  
293 *lesson on caution.”*

294 Such experiences strengthened their professional discipline regarding the use of precise and neutral  
295 terminology.

296 From an idealistic perspective, the TV One journalists expressed pride that their work helps the public  
297 gain a better understanding of the law. Many saw themselves as journalists with an educator idealism.  
298 R5 stated,

299           *“I entered journalism because I wanted to be a watchdog. Covering trials is part of social*  
300           *control so the law remains transparent. There is personal satisfaction when my coverage helps*  
301           *people understand the law and monitor justice.”*

302 This reflects the belief that courtroom journalism embodies the press’s watchdog function and serves  
303 the public interest in the legal system. Some informants even described their work as “an act of  
304 educating as a form of devotion,” illustrating the strong idealism they hold.

305 However, their idealism is not free from real-world constraints. Time pressure and speed often made it  
306 difficult for journalists to achieve ideal-quality reporting. During a trial, reporters must multitask:  
307 listening to courtroom testimony, taking notes, and preparing for live reporting simultaneously. Under  
308 such conditions, R3 admitted having once failed to cross-check a piece of information before  
309 broadcasting due to time pressure.

310           *“There was a moment I mistakenly mentioned the prosecutor’s name, and the presenter*  
311           *corrected me immediately. I was very embarrassed, but it reminded me that accuracy is number*  
312           *one.”*

313 This highlights the challenge of maintaining professionalism under time constraints.

314 Organizational interests also sometimes played a role. When a trial involved a prominent political  
315 figure, editorial attention was heightened. R6 diplomatically noted,

316           *“We are certainly independent, but the editorial team has certain considerations regarding the*  
317           *reporting angle, especially when it concerns a public figure.”*

318 Although not elaborated, this implies that journalists sometimes negotiate between idealism of  
319 independence and the media organization’s agenda-setting dynamics. Nevertheless, journalists  
320 expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their reporting despite external pressures.

321 Another reflection pertains to personal qualities they developed through courtroom journalism.  
322 Covering lengthy trials trained journalists in patience and diligence. R2 noted,

323           *“I used to get bored easily. After covering long trials, I learned to be patient and focused. If*  
324           *you lose concentration even for a moment, you might miss important facts.”*

325 They also gained legal knowledge over time, which enhanced their competence as specialized legal  
326 journalists. Ultimately, the informants agreed that despite ethical dilemmas, time pressure, and industry  
327 demands, they found meaning in their work. *“It is a demanding but noble job,”* said R1, *“We serve as*  
328 *information bridges. As long as we uphold ethics and quality, I believe we contribute positively to*  
329 *society and the justice system.”* These reflections affirm that the idealism of TV One’s courtroom  
330 journalists remains intact, coexisting with the professionalism they continually refine amid practical  
331 challenges.

## 332 **4 Discussion**

333 The findings of this study enrich our understanding of courtroom journalism as a form of  
334 communication practice in the legal sphere. In general, the experiences of TV One journalists reaffirm  
335 the role of the press as a mediator of justice, namely a medium that brings judicial processes before the  
336 public, thereby expanding the principle of open justice through broadcast channels (Bosland &  
337 Townend, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). This is in line with international literature that  
338 views court journalism as essential in a democracy because it provides citizens with access to “witness”  
339 the enforcement of the law and to assess whether the process is fair (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021,  
340 2025). By foregrounding journalists’ lived experiences, this study moves beyond normative debates

341 about whether trials should be televised and instead examines how open justice is enacted and  
342 negotiated at the level of everyday practice in a commercial newsroom.

343 The journalists in this study play the role of translating legal language and procedures into formats that  
344 can be understood by laypeople. This confirms the position of journalists as public legal  
345 communicators, as argued by Magin and Maurer (2019), who state that court beat reporting requires  
346 specific competencies to bridge the worlds of law and society (Magin & Maurer, 2019). The ability of  
347 the informants to translate legal jargon is consistent with practical guidelines on legal journalism in  
348 many countries, where court reporters are expected to understand legal terminology so that they can  
349 explain it accurately to the public. In this way, journalists function as a kind of informal “teacher” for  
350 society on matters of legal literacy. This educational contribution is important, given that public legal  
351 awareness is often low; the mass media can serve as a vehicle for improving legal literacy (Sevignani,  
352 2022).

353 On the other hand, the findings also highlight the dilemma of education versus dramatization faced by  
354 journalists. The informants experience a pull between their idealism to present trials as they are in an  
355 informative manner and the pragmatism of the industry that demands dramatic elements to make  
356 broadcasts attractive. This dilemma parallels the findings of Ravid (2017), who notes that the television  
357 format often pushes for sensational material, thereby reducing the educational potential of coverage  
358 (Ravid, 2017). Wittchen (2023) further shows that in sensational crime reporting, journalists face  
359 ethical challenges in maintaining objectivity amid pressure to exploit emotional aspects (Wittchen,  
360 2023). This study finds that TV One journalists try to balance these two demands: they report dramatic  
361 facts that genuinely occur (such as emotional outbursts in court) but strive not to exaggerate or add  
362 narrative embellishment. This attitude demonstrates internalization of journalistic ethics and aligns  
363 with the ideal of objectivity, which continues to be upheld as a foundational norm (Schudson, Michael ;  
364 Anderson, 2009). The journalists are aware of the dangers of falling into sensationalism: the public  
365 may gain a distorted picture of legal processes, and public trust in the judiciary may be negatively  
366 affected (Ravid, 2017). Ardilla et al. (2020) also highlight that uncontrolled live broadcasts of trials  
367 can violate the presumption of innocence and affect the evidentiary process in court (Ardilla et al.,  
368 2020). Therefore, journalists’ efforts to maintain neutral language and avoid judgment in their reporting  
369 deserve appreciation as a form of professional responsibility. This phenomenon of “keeping distance”  
370 from dramatization is consistent with the concept of strategic ritual to maintain objectivity, where  
371 journalists consciously avoid excessive interpretation and adhere strictly to facts (Wittchen, 2023) .

372 At the same time, this study confirms that dramatic elements are inherently part of trials as media  
373 events. High-profile cases often stir public emotions, and the media functions as a stage on which legal  
374 drama is watched by the masses (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011). In this context, journalists are in a  
375 difficult position: they must report human-interest aspects (which are often dramatic) but must not  
376 descend into cheap infotainment, making it necessary to maintain a balance between “informing” and  
377 “entertaining” in courtroom news (Masduki, 2017). The findings of this study show that journalists  
378 attempt to walk this tightrope reasonably well, for example through the choice of factual and non-  
379 hyperbolic wording when describing dramatic situations. Such skills are likely honed through  
380 experience and ethical awareness that the credibility of legal reporting must be preserved. In the long  
381 term, journalists’ choice to prioritize education over sensation can enhance public trust in both the  
382 media and the judiciary. Research indicates that informative transparency of courts through the media  
383 can strengthen public confidence in the legal system (Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). Conversely,  
384 if the media are perceived as overly judgmental or deliberately polarizing opinion, an erosion of trust  
385 may occur (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011). Therefore, this dilemma must continue to be managed  
386 through ethical codes and internal editorial guidelines. It may be necessary to develop specific  
387 guidelines for courtroom journalism, as has been proposed by the Indonesian Press Council, so that

388 journalists have clear guidance in balancing educational functions and the demands of dramatization  
389 (Manan, 2015).

390 With regard to communication strategies for bridging law and the public, the findings of this study are  
391 concrete and highly applicable. Language simplification, provision of context, involving experts, and  
392 visualization are techniques that are well-known in the practice of explanatory journalism (Parisi,  
393 2009). The success of journalists in implementing these strategies is reflected in public appreciation.  
394 For instance, TV One’s live trial programs often receive positive feedback for being informative. The  
395 strategy of involving legal experts also aligns with the trend of interdisciplinary collaboration in  
396 modern journalism, in which journalists are not reluctant to bring in experts to enrich and verify  
397 information (Ward, 2018). This helps maintain the accuracy of substantive content, particularly  
398 because journalists typically do not have formal legal education. It also reflects the role of media as a  
399 knowledge broker that connects expert sources with the public (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). From a  
400 communication perspective, the effort to reshape complex terminology into easily understood forms is  
401 a manifestation of democratic communication, a type of communication that is inclusive and accessible  
402 to different segments of the public (Sevignani, 2022)

403 The communication strategies of TV One journalists also demonstrate adaptation to the characteristics  
404 of television as a medium. The use of infographics and visuals is an example of leveraging the strengths  
405 of an audio-visual medium for educational purposes. This is consistent with Dick’s (2014) study, which  
406 emphasizes the importance of visual elements in covering legal processes to make them more engaging  
407 for contemporary audiences accustomed to visual information (Dick, 2014). Certainly, not all legal  
408 concepts can be easily visualized, but steps such as creating case timelines or graphics depicting the  
409 structure of a case greatly help audiences grasp the logic and flow of legal processes. This study  
410 supports the recommendation that media should be creative in presenting legal information without  
411 compromising accuracy. This approach could be replicated in other types of court reporting; for  
412 example, newspapers and online media can also include supporting infographics. In this way, the  
413 practices of TV One journalists can serve as a small model of how legal communication to the public  
414 can be carried out effectively.

415 In terms of professionalism and idealism, this study reveals the internal dynamics experienced by  
416 journalists. On one hand, they adhere to the core values of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and  
417 verification, especially in sensitive coverage such as trials (Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009). They  
418 realize that mistakes in reporting can have serious consequences for both the credibility of the media  
419 and the judicial process. This resonates with Wittchen’s (2023) findings that legal reporters often feel  
420 a heavier ethical burden because their reporting directly intersects with the fates of defendants and  
421 victims (Wittchen, 2023). TV One journalists appear to shoulder this burden seriously, as seen in their  
422 reflective accounts of being consistently careful with their wording and the information they present.  
423 Their adherence to ethical codes, such as not taking sides and using terms like “defendant” instead of  
424 “perpetrator,” reflects their professionalism. This is parallel to studies in other countries, such as  
425 Denmark, where court reporters place great emphasis on writing facts without interpretation to avoid  
426 accusations of bias (Wittchen, 2023).

427 On the other hand, the journalists’ idealism as agents of public enlightenment is clearly visible. They  
428 view their work as meaningful in serving the public interest, a form of civic-minded journalism. This  
429 recalls the concept of civic journalism, in which journalists seek to empower citizens with information  
430 needed for democratic participation (Mellado, 2015). Courtroom coverage can be considered part of  
431 civic journalism because it relates to justice and the law, which are pillars of democracy. The  
432 informants’ idealism, expressed in their sense of “helping to safeguard justice,” indicates that their  
433 professional identity leans toward the role of watchdog and educator rather than mere entertainer  
434 (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In role performance studies, watchdog and civic educator roles are part of

435 normative orientations embraced by journalists in many countries (Mellado, 2015). These findings  
436 confirm that Indonesian journalists, at least in the legal field, also embody these roles.

437 From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to three main strands of scholarship. First, it  
438 extends work on open justice and courtroom media by conceptualizing live courtroom journalism as a  
439 form of “mediating justice” in which journalists translate institutional transparency into communicative  
440 practices shaped by commercial and ethical constraints. Second, it enriches role performance and civic  
441 journalism research by documenting how journalists in a Global South context enact hybrid roles, as  
442 legal translators, educators, and performers, while navigating structural pressures such as ratings and  
443 editorial agendas. Third, it nuances debates on “trial by media” by showing that sensationalism is not  
444 simply an outcome imposed from above, but an arena of ongoing negotiation at the level of individual  
445 journalists who attempt to “hold the line” through strategic language choices and professional rituals.

446 Practically, the findings have implications for newsrooms, regulators, and judicial institutions. For  
447 news organizations, the study suggests the need for explicit internal guidelines on courtroom  
448 broadcasting, ongoing training in legal basics for journalists, and editorial support that rewards  
449 accuracy and educational value rather than sensationalism alone. For regulators and press councils, the  
450 findings support initiatives to develop specific ethical codes for courtroom journalism that protect both  
451 the presumption of innocence and the public’s right to information. For courts, the study indicates that  
452 constructive engagement with journalists—through accessible public relations officers, media  
453 briefings, and educational materials, can enhance the quality of coverage without undermining judicial  
454 independence.

455 Contextually, this study adds an important Global South perspective to predominantly Western debates  
456 on court transparency and media. Indonesia’s media system, marked by commercial competition, high  
457 public interest in high-profile trials, and expanding digital access, represents a fertile setting in which  
458 to observe how open justice is mediated in practice. The experiences of TV One journalists demonstrate  
459 that even in a competitive television market, journalistic idealism and professionalism can persist,  
460 albeit within negotiated boundaries. Future comparative work could explore whether similar patterns  
461 occur in other countries in the region or among different types of media, such as online platforms and  
462 social media live streams.

463 The lived experiences of journalists also reaffirm that the meaning of a job, such as covering court  
464 proceedings, is shaped by intensive interaction between journalists and their social environment  
465 (courts, newsrooms, and the public). Each journalist interprets their role not only through formal job  
466 descriptions but also through the values they hold and the audience responses they perceive. The  
467 journalists’ deep sense of mission in educating the public suggests that they experience their work as  
468 a public calling. This is consistent with theories of identity and the meaning of work, which state that  
469 workers who see their jobs as meaningful tend to have higher satisfaction and performance.

470

## 471 **5 Conclusion**

472 The experiences of TV One journalists in broadcasting court proceedings live illustrate how the media  
473 mediates the administration of justice to the public through communicative and ethical approaches.  
474 Journalists function as legal communicators who translate judicial processes into accessible public  
475 information while upholding accuracy and factual integrity. They face the dilemma of balancing their  
476 educational function against pressures for dramatization in televised formats. However, through  
477 professional awareness, journalists strive to prioritize educational value without entirely disregarding  
478 the human-interest elements inherent to courtroom events. Various communication strategies are  
479 employed, from simplifying legal terminology and providing contextual explanations to involving

480 experts and utilizing visual elements, all aimed at bridging the gap between legal language and public  
481 understanding. Throughout their work, journalists reflect on the importance of maintaining  
482 professionalism—including neutrality, adherence to ethical codes, and disciplined verification—while  
483 preserving their idealism as media workers committed to serving the public interest.

484 Live courtroom journalism can be regarded as a concrete manifestation of the press’s democratic  
485 function: informing the public while overseeing the judiciary as a form of transparent accountability.  
486 When journalists are able to navigate challenges ethically and creatively, live broadcasts of court  
487 hearings become not only a spectacle but also a source of guidance—mass legal education that  
488 enlightens society while simultaneously encouraging courts to operate with greater openness and  
489 fairness. In this way, the media truly plays the role of a bridge mediating justice in the public sphere.  
490 This study contributes to theoretical debates on open justice, role performance, and trial by media by  
491 foregrounding the lived experiences of journalists in a Global South context and by showing how legal  
492 education, dramaturgy, and professionalism intersect in everyday newsroom practice. Sustaining this  
493 practice requires collective efforts, such as editorial support, proportionate regulation that does not  
494 excessively constrain press freedom, and improved journalistic capacity in legal reporting.

495 Naturally, this study has limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively small and drawn from  
496 a single television station, thus not fully representing the broader spectrum of courtroom journalism in  
497 Indonesia. Insights from other media organizations or from print and online journalists may differ.  
498 Second, this research focuses on journalists’ perspectives, while the views of audiences or judicial  
499 actors regarding live trial broadcasts remain unexplored. Future studies may investigate the impact of  
500 live courtroom broadcasts on public legal understanding or public perceptions of the judiciary, for  
501 example through audience research or experimental designs. Additionally, comparative studies across  
502 different media organizations or national contexts could reveal whether similar strategies and dilemmas  
503 are experienced by journalists elsewhere and could help refine a more general model of mediating  
504 justice through media.

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History

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Interactive review activated: 20 Apr 2026

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Initial recommendation to the Editor: Minor revision is required

EVALUATION

**Q 1** Please list your revision requests for the authors and provide your detailed comments, including highlighting limitations and strengths of the study and evaluating the validity of the methods, results, and data interpretation. If you have additional comments based on Q2 and Q3 you can add them as well.

Reviewer 1 | 03 Apr 2026 | 00:15

#1

After careful and thorough reading, there are several points that the author needs to improve:

1. In the abstract, the researcher should explain the data analysis method used in this study.
2. In the introduction, provide supporting data regarding the number of times TV One has broadcast live court hearings and the year in which the first live court hearing was broadcast.
3. In the methodology, explain why the researcher chose TV One journalists as research informants, even though other TV stations also broadcast live court hearings.
4. In addition, the researcher should conduct direct interviews to obtain data, as this study also uses participator observation data collection techniques in addition to interviews.
5. In the research results, there is a sentence that should be corrected because it has a different meaning. The term "studying case files" is inappropriate, as it seems as if the journalists were studying the indictment files held by the prosecutor or judge. Use appropriate words.
6. In the discussion, incorporate Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy theory in analyzing the research results.

[Review supporting file - 1119062](#)

Corresponding Author: Aan Widodo | 21 Apr 2026 | 08:59

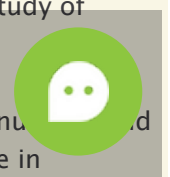
#2

RESPONSE TO REVIEWER 1

Manuscript ID : 1823963

Manuscript Title : Mediating Justice Through Live Courtroom Broadcast: A Phenomenological Study of Journalist Lived Experiences in Indonesian Television

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Reviewer 1 for the careful reading of our manuscript and for providing constructive and insightful comments. The feedback has been extremely valuable in improving the clarity, methodological rigor, and theoretical contribution of this study. We have carefully revised the manuscript in response to all comments. For ease of reference, all revisions have been clearly highlighted in red in the revised manuscript.



# Mediating Justice Through Live Broadcast: A Phenomenological Communication Study Of Tv One's Courtroom Journalism

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### **Scope Statement**

This manuscript fits the scope of Media Governance and the Public Sphere by examining how live courtroom broadcasting functions as a mediated channel connecting judicial institutions and the public. The study investigates the role of television journalists in translating complex legal proceedings into accessible information through live broadcasts. By analysing journalists' lived experiences in covering court trials, the article contributes to discussions on media's role in shaping public access to justice, transparency, and legal communication. The findings highlight how journalistic practices negotiate tensions between legal norms, media logic, and public interest, situating courtroom journalism within broader debates on media governance and democratic public communication.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

**The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest**

### **Credit Author Statement**

**Aan Widodo:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Rr Dijan Widijowati:** Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft. **Syahrul Hidayanto:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Supervision, Writing – original draft. **Wa Ode Sitti Nurhaliza:** Data curation, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft.

### **Keywords**

courtroom journalism, Indonesia, Legal communication, Live broadcasting, mediating justice

### **Abstract**

Word count: 107

Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public sphere in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who translate complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study employs a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in covering high-profile trials. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and observation of live broadcast production. Findings reveal tensions between the goals of legal education and the dramaturgical demands of television news. The study conceptualizes courtroom journalism as a mediating communication practice that links open justice, professional role negotiation, and civic-oriented journalism in the Global South.

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## ***Ethics statements***

### ***Studies involving animal subjects***

Generated Statement: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

### ***Studies involving human subjects***

Generated Statement: The studies involving humans were approved by Ethics Committee of Tidar University. Ethical Approval No.B/1134/UN57.L1/PT.01.04.2025. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

### ***Inclusion of identifiable human data***

Generated Statement: No potentially identifiable images or data are presented in this study.

### ***Data availability statement***

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### ***Generative AI disclosure***

The author(s) verify and take full responsibility for the use of generative AI in the preparation of this manuscript. Generative AI was used in preparing this manuscript, the authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5) to assist with language editing and improving clarity of expression.

In review

# 1 Mediating Justice Through Live Broadcast: A Phenomenological Communication 2 Study Of Tv One's Courtroom Journalism

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9 **Keywords:** courtroom journalism, live broadcasting, legal communication, mediating justice,  
10 Indonesia

## 11 Abstract

12 Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public  
13 sphere in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who  
14 translate complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study  
15 employs a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in  
16 covering high-profile trials. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and  
17 observation of live broadcast production. Findings reveal tensions between the goals of legal  
18 education and the dramaturgical demands of television news. The study conceptualizes courtroom  
19 journalism as a mediating communication practice that links open justice, professional role  
20 negotiation, and civic-oriented journalism in the Global South.

## 21 1 Introduction

22 Open court hearings constitute a fundamental principle in modern judicial systems aimed at ensuring  
23 accountability and transparency (Johnston, 2018). In the media era, this principle is increasingly  
24 realized through courtroom coverage by the press, including live broadcasts on television. In Indonesia,  
25 the TV network TV One is among the pioneers in airing high-profile cases live, bringing the courtroom  
26 directly into viewers' living rooms. This phenomenon of "trial by television" has generated  
27 expectations that media can serve as an instrument for public legal education (Ravid, 2017). The mass  
28 media carries an educational function alongside its informational and entertainment roles, as mandated  
29 by the Press Law No. 40/1999. Courtroom journalism is therefore regarded as a manifestation of that  
30 educational function by making judicial processes more accessible to the public (Ardilla et al., 2020;  
31 Johnston, 2018). Journalists covering trials act as legal communicators (Rieke & Stutman, 2022;  
32 Widodo, 2024), translating complex legal language and procedures into information that can be easily  
33 understood by general audiences (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016; Magin & Maurer, 2019). Through live  
34 broadcasts, journalists bridge the highly technical legal world with the public's need for  
35 comprehensible legal information (Ravid, 2017).

36 However, concerns arise that the media may prioritize sensational elements to attract viewers, shifting  
37 the focus from education toward dramatization (Fox et al., 2001; Ravid, 2017). Court coverage risks  
38 presenting legal events as dramatic spectacles, highlighting courtroom confrontations, emotional  
39 expressions of defendants and witnesses, and speculative commentary, all of which can enhance the

40 dramatic tone of the broadcast (Ravid, 2017). The dilemma between educational value and  
41 dramatization has sparked debate among both media practitioners and academic scholars. Studies  
42 suggest that the media often selects sensational criminal cases for live broadcast to increase audience  
43 appeal, potentially creating an unbalanced portrayal that undermines the legal educational function. As  
44 a result, televised trials may disrupt the presumption of innocence and influence public opinion before  
45 a verdict is reached (Habsari, 2017; Manan, 2015). The widely publicized 2016 “cyanide coffee” case  
46 involving Jessica Kumala Wongso, for instance, was broadcast intensively and triggered trial by media,  
47 shaping public opinion even before the court’s decision (Suryawati, 2017). This example highlights  
48 growing criticisms that the dramatization of court proceedings by the media may erode substantive  
49 justice (Ravid, 2017).

50 For journalists engaged in covering live courtroom proceedings, maintaining a balance between  
51 educational goals and entertainment elements becomes a distinct challenge. They are required to  
52 provide accurate information about legal processes, such as the reading of indictments and the  
53 presentation of evidence or legal arguments, while ensuring the broadcast remains engaging enough to  
54 retain audience attention. Consequently, journalists develop specific communication strategies to  
55 bridge legal language with public understanding. These strategies include using simplified vocabulary  
56 or lay equivalents for legal terminology, offering contextual explanations about courtroom procedures,  
57 and featuring expert legal commentators as supporting communicators who help unpack technical legal  
58 concepts (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016). Through such strategies, journalists aim to maintain the  
59 accuracy of legal substance without compromising the audience’s ability to understand the information  
60 being conveyed (Stern, 2014). In addition, interactions with court public relations officers are utilized  
61 to obtain correct information about the proceedings, ensuring that the information broadcast remains  
62 accurate and compliant with legal norms (Ardilla et al., 2020).

63 From the perspective of professionalism and idealism, courtroom journalism demands a high level of  
64 ethical commitment. Journalists must adhere to professional codes of ethics, including accuracy,  
65 balance, and respect for the presumption of innocence, even under pressure from rating expectations  
66 and sensational demands (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009).

67 Idealistic journalists view courtroom reporting as a noble mission to enlighten the public about legal  
68 processes and reinforce public accountability (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021). They believe that  
69 transparent and informative trial coverage allows the media to contribute to judicial oversight and  
70 public access to justice (Johnston, 2018; Wittchen, 2023). Yet such idealism is often tested by practical  
71 realities, including limited airtime, the pressure to produce “dramatic moments,” and legal risks such  
72 as allegations of contempt of court or defamation when coverage is deemed excessive (Ardilla et al.,  
73 2020; Habsari, 2017; Huang, 2021). It is therefore important to understand how journalists reflect on  
74 their professionalism and idealism when broadcasting trials live, including the values they uphold and  
75 negotiate when idealism intersects with the pragmatism of the media industry.

76 Conceptually, this study is informed by three interrelated bodies of scholarship: (1) the principle of  
77 open justice and the mediatization of courts, which frame courtroom journalism as a channel through  
78 which judicial transparency is extended into the public sphere; (2) role performance and civic  
79 journalism perspectives, which emphasize journalists’ normative functions as watchdogs, educators,  
80 and mediators of public interest; and (3) research on media events and “trial by media,” which  
81 highlights the dramaturgical and affective dimensions of televised legal proceedings. While prior  
82 studies have examined televised trials and courtroom reporting in various jurisdictions, much of the  
83 literature focuses on legal implications, audience effects, or content analysis, with comparatively less  
84 attention to the lived experiences of journalists, especially in Global South contexts.

85 Based on the above background, this study asks: How do TV One journalists experience live courtroom  
86 broadcasting as a means of legal education and a form of mediating justice? Specifically, it addresses  
87 the following research questions:

88 RQ1: How do TV One journalists understand and enact their roles as legal communicators in  
89 live courtroom broadcasts?

90 RQ2: How do they experience and negotiate the tension between educational goals and  
91 dramatization imperatives?

92 RQ3: What communication strategies do they employ to bridge legal language and lay  
93 audiences?

94 RQ4: How do they reflect on professionalism and journalistic idealism in the practice of live  
95 broadcasting?

96 This study is significant because in Indonesia there is limited in-depth research on courtroom  
97 journalism, even though the phenomenon is increasingly relevant alongside the expansion of judicial  
98 transparency in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the  
99 subjective experiences of journalists, thereby offering new perspectives on courtroom journalism as a  
100 form of public communication in the legal domain and contributing empirical insight from a Global  
101 South media system to broader debates on media, law, and democracy.

## 102 2 Method

103 This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore the lived  
104 experiences of television journalists involved in broadcasting court proceedings live. The  
105 phenomenological approach was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the meaning of  
106 informants' subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon (Sturges, 2018). In this  
107 context, the phenomenon examined is live courtroom journalism at TV One, viewed through the  
108 perspectives of the journalists who practice it. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring predefined  
109 variables, the study aims to capture the essence of journalists' experiences in mediating justice through  
110 live broadcast.

### 111 2.1 Informants and Data Collection Procedures

112 The research informants consisted of six TV One journalists with a minimum of five years of  
113 experience covering major court proceedings live. Informants were selected purposively based on the  
114 following criteria: prior involvement as field reporters or studio presenters in live broadcasts of high-  
115 profile trials such as corruption cases or nationally significant criminal cases, and willingness to reflect  
116 on their professional experiences. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, in  
117 which a relatively small number of participants is considered adequate to achieve depth and richness  
118 of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness. Most informants served as field reporters  
119 covering trials at court locations, while several also worked as studio presenters during live broadcasts.  
120 Before the interviews, all informants agreed to participate with a guarantee of confidentiality. For the  
121 purposes of this study, informants' identities were anonymized using labels R1 through R6.

122 Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Each informant was interviewed  
123 online via the Zoom application. The interviews focused on four themes: the role of journalists as legal  
124 communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization in reporting, strategies used to bridge  
125 legal language for public understanding, and personal reflections on idealism and professionalism  
126 during live trial coverage. Interview questions were designed to elicit concrete examples, emotional  
127 responses, and perspectives related to each theme. Examples include "Can you describe an experience

128 *where you had to explain a difficult legal term during a live broadcast?” or “What internal conflict*  
129 *have you experienced between presenting the trial as it is versus pressure to make the broadcast*  
130 *engaging?” All interviews were audio-recorded with informants’ consent and were transcribed*  
131 *verbatim for analysis.*

132 In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to enrich contextual understanding.  
133 The researcher accompanied the TV One team during coverage of a nationally significant corruption  
134 trial broadcast live in early 2025. The researcher observed journalists’ working dynamics in the  
135 courtroom and in the media center, their interactions with sources such as prosecutors, defense lawyers,  
136 and court public relations officers, and the coordination processes with the studio during broadcasts.  
137 Field notes from these observations contributed to a deeper understanding of the situation and the time  
138 pressures faced by journalists, enabling more contextual interpretation of interview data.

139 The researcher occupied a position as an informed outsider: familiar with media and legal  
140 communication issues through academic work but not part of TV One’s newsroom. This positionality  
141 required reflexivity in order to avoid imposing normative assumptions about “how the media should  
142 behave” and to remain open to journalists’ own sense-making. Throughout the research process, the  
143 researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor potential biases and their influence on data  
144 interpretation.

## 145 **2.2 Data Analysis**

146 After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews and analyzed them using a  
147 descriptive phenomenological technique based on the simplified steps of Colaizzi (Neubauer et al.,  
148 2019). First, the researcher repeatedly read the entire set of transcripts to gain a comprehensive  
149 understanding. Second, the researcher identified statements most relevant to the four research foci.  
150 Third, thematic formulations were generated from these statements by interpreting them within the  
151 context of each informant’s experience. Fourth, the emerging themes were grouped into categories that  
152 reflected shared aspects of experience. At this stage, the researcher identified four major themes  
153 consistent with the initial focus of the study, namely, journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas  
154 between education and dramatization, strategies for bridging legal concepts with public understanding,  
155 and professionalism versus journalistic idealism. Each theme was supported by subthemes or  
156 illustrative examples from the informants. Fifth, the researcher developed an essential description of  
157 the phenomenon based on these themes, representing the collective experiences of TV One journalists  
158 in practicing live courtroom journalism. Sixth, validation was carried out through informal member  
159 checking, where the researcher presented a summary of findings to several informants to ensure  
160 accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. The informants confirmed the relevance of the findings to their  
161 experiences and offered minor input which was incorporated accordingly.

162 Throughout the analysis, the researcher applied bracketing by suspending personal biases and  
163 assumptions to prevent them from influencing interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019; Sturgess, 2018).  
164 For instance, the researcher set aside normative assumptions such as “the media should not be  
165 sensational” to remain open to journalists’ perspectives. This step was important to maintain the purity  
166 of phenomenological description. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data  
167 among informants and linking them with observational findings, thereby strengthening the credibility  
168 of the results. In addition, peer debriefing with two communication scholars was conducted to discuss  
169 the emerging themes and their interpretation, ensuring consistency between data and analysis.

## 170 **2.3 Credibility and Ethics**

171 The researcher also conducted peer debriefing with two communication scholars to discuss findings  
172 and interpretations, ensuring consistency with the data. Ethically, this study obtained permission from  
173 TV One’s editorial management to interview its journalists and to observe live broadcast production

174 routines. Informants were free to decline answering sensitive questions and could withdraw from the  
175 interview at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all informants and by  
176 omitting any details that could lead to personal identification. The study followed general ethical  
177 principles in qualitative research, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and minimization of  
178 harm.

### 179 **3 Finding**

#### 180 **3.1 Journalists as Legal Communicators for the Public**

181 The informants acknowledged their central role as conveyors of legal information from the courtroom  
182 to the wider public. They recognized that many viewers are unfamiliar with legal terminology and  
183 procedures, thus journalists act as “translators” who convert legal language into public language. A  
184 field reporter (R1) explained, “*During the hearing, the judge may use terms like ‘the objection is  
185 rejected because the indictment is considered precise.’ I have to explain on-air that an ‘objection’ is a  
186 kind of protest note submitted by the defendant’s legal counsel, and that if it is rejected, the trial  
187 continues to the main case.*” This statement illustrates the journalist’s effort to simplify legal jargon  
188 without reducing the substantive meaning. All journalists admitted preparing materials before  
189 broadcasting by studying case files and consulting legal experts such as prosecutors or legal scholars,  
190 enabling them to understand the legal issues that arise during the trial. With that understanding, they  
191 could re-communicate the information to the audience in simpler language.

192 Informants also felt responsible for maintaining the accuracy of legal information. They tried to provide  
193 context for each development in the trial, such as explaining the function of each stage of the process  
194 (indictment reading, witness examination, prosecution, defense plea) in a structured manner. A studio  
195 presenter (R3) stated:

196 *“I consider the viewers as laypeople who need a complete picture. So in every segment, I  
197 summarize: today the court agenda is the examination of a forensic expert witness, aiming to  
198 establish the cause of the victim’s death.”*

199 This approach helps viewers understand the logic and flow of the trial rather than seeing only  
200 fragmented events. The journalists agreed that by explaining legal background and technical terms, the  
201 public can follow the proceedings with greater clarity. This aligns with their ideal that the media must  
202 contribute to improving public legal literacy. A senior reporter (R2) expressed a similar view:

203 *“If ordinary people understand what an indictment is, or the difference between factual  
204 witnesses and expert witnesses, it means our work succeeded in mediating legal language for  
205 the people.”*

206 These findings affirm the role of courtroom journalists as communicators who bridge the judicial  
207 institution and the public by translating legal processes into accessible information.

#### 208 **3.2 The Dilemma Between Education and Dramatization in Live Broadcasts**

209 This theme strongly emerged from all informants’ experiences. They faced a two-directional pressure:  
210 on one hand, ideally, courtroom broadcasts should be treated as purely informative and educational  
211 news coverage; on the other hand, the live television format demands dramatic elements to attract  
212 viewers. Field reporters R1 and R4 revealed that production teams often instructed them to highlight  
213 emotional or confrontational moments in the courtroom.

214 *“A producer once said, ‘if there’s tension between the judge and the lawyer, report it  
215 immediately, that’s a good moment!’”* R4 explained.

216 As a result, reporters often found themselves in a dilemma. When trials proceed monotonously (such  
217 as long document readings), there is a temptation to embellish reports with opinions or speculation to  
218 avoid boring the audience. However, journalists also understood that excessive dramatization could  
219 obscure legal substance and unfairly influence public opinion. R2 admitted having been reprimanded  
220 by an editor for unintentionally dramatizing a defendant's reaction:

221 *"I once said 'Defendant X looked panicked and repeatedly wiped sweat...'. The editor was*  
222 *angry because we are not infotainment. Since then, I've been more careful, only reporting facts*  
223 *without dramatic additions."*

224 Nevertheless, some informants acknowledged that dramaturgy cannot be entirely avoided. Certain  
225 courtroom situations are inherently dramatic, such as the victim's family weeping hysterically or heated  
226 debates between defense lawyers and prosecutors. These moments naturally become the focus of  
227 camera attention. The dilemma lies in editorial decisions regarding how far journalists should exploit  
228 such emotions. R3 explained:

229 *"I have to choose words carefully: if a witness cries, I report the fact 'the witness cried while*  
230 *recalling the events,' without exaggerating it with sensational wording."*

231 This reflects an effort to maintain balance. Journalists still report dramatic elements because they are  
232 part of the event, but refrain from excessive sensationalism.

233 Several journalists also acknowledged the presence of rating pressure. The success of a live courtroom  
234 program is partly judged by audience ratings, which implicitly encourages production teams to look  
235 for dramatic angles. Field journalists often found themselves at a crossroads between adhering to  
236 journalistic ideals that emphasize information and education or following commercial pressures for  
237 sensationalism.

238 *"Honestly, as a journalist I want to educate the public. But sometimes the boss asks for an*  
239 *angle with a 'wow factor'. This is our inner struggle in every major trial,"* said R6.

240 Overall, this dilemma is a collective experience among TV One journalists. They are fully aware of  
241 their moral responsibility not to sacrifice accuracy and fairness for dramatization, even though the  
242 media industry demands appealing content.

### 243 3.3 Strategies for Bridging Legal Language with Public Understanding

244 The study identified several communication strategies that journalists use to ensure that trial  
245 information is easily understood by the general audience. The first strategy is simplification of legal  
246 terminology. As mentioned previously, journalists replace legal terms with everyday equivalents or  
247 provide brief on-air definitions. For example, "interlocutory decision" is explained as "a temporary  
248 decision issued in the middle of the trial," or "criminal execution" is described by reporters as "the  
249 implementation of punishment for a convicted person."

250 The second strategy is contextual elaboration. Journalists not only report what happens in the  
251 courtroom but also provide background information about the case and its legal relevance. This  
252 resembles a news feature style, in which reporters insert historical context or case chronology during  
253 breaks in the trial. R1 gave an example: during a corruption trial, *"While waiting for the judges to*  
254 *deliberate, I reminded viewers: this case began with a sting operation last year involving an official*  
255 *from Ministry X, causing a state financial loss of...."* This strategy helps viewers understand the  
256 context of each stage of the trial.

257 The third strategy is the use of expert sources. In several broadcasts, TV One invited legal scholars or  
258 experts as analysts in the studio. Journalists moderated discussions with these experts to clarify

259 technical aspects. For instance, when there was debate over the legal articles in the indictment, the  
260 presenter would ask, “*What does this article mean, and why do the prosecutor and defense interpret it*  
261 *differently?*” The expert’s explanation helped clarify matters for viewers. R3 stated that experts were  
262 very helpful:

263           *“My language has limitations. With an expert present, technical terms like ‘elements of an*  
264 *offense’ can be explained thoroughly without fear of error.”*

265 Expert presence also enhances credibility and analytical depth.

266 The fourth strategy involves visualization and graphics. The production team prepares supporting  
267 visuals such as infographics showing trial procedures, diagrams of relationships among actors in the  
268 case, or highlighted points of the indictment. Journalists use these visuals while explaining the case,  
269 giving audiences a visual reference. Research observation noted that, during complex trials, TV One  
270 displayed a timeline of the case on the screen while reporters explained each stage accordingly. This  
271 technique helps viewers understand lengthy legal processes.

272 Fifth, journalists maintain a communicative tone and language style. They avoid rigid or overly formal  
273 reporting and instead adopt a conversational tone, as if explaining to a friend. R2 noted:

274           *“I always imagine explaining things to my mother at home. So I choose simple words, use a*  
275 *friendly tone, and avoid sounding preachy.”*

276 This humanistic approach makes viewers feel included in a conversation rather than lectured, thereby  
277 increasing their understanding. These strategies demonstrate journalists’ proactive efforts to bridge the  
278 legal knowledge gap between legal professionals and lay audiences. While challenges remain in  
279 responding quickly to unexpected legal terminology during trials, experience has shaped the journalists  
280 into flexible communicators.

### 281 3.4 Reflections on Professionalism and Journalistic Idealism in Live Broadcasts

282 The informants reflected on the values they uphold and the conflicts they experience between idealism  
283 and practical demands. Generally, all journalists emphasized their commitment to objectivity and  
284 accuracy. They understood that the fate of a defendant is at stake in the courtroom, so reporting must  
285 not be biased or prejudicial.

286           *“We are not judges, so we must remain balanced. I always insert the phrase ‘allegedly’ to*  
287 *remind viewers that no verdict has been issued,”* said R4.

288 This shows adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence. Several journalists admitted having  
289 been contacted by defense lawyers or court public relations officers when objections arose concerning  
290 their reports. R2 recounted:

291           *“Once the legal counsel protested because we referred to their client as a ‘corruptor.’ In fact,*  
292 *the person was only a defendant. We acknowledged the mistake and corrected it. That was a*  
293 *lesson on caution.”*

294 Such experiences strengthened their professional discipline regarding the use of precise and neutral  
295 terminology.

296 From an idealistic perspective, the TV One journalists expressed pride that their work helps the public  
297 gain a better understanding of the law. Many saw themselves as journalists with an educator idealism.  
298 R5 stated,

299 *“I entered journalism because I wanted to be a watchdog. Covering trials is part of social*  
300 *control so the law remains transparent. There is personal satisfaction when my coverage helps*  
301 *people understand the law and monitor justice.”*

302 This reflects the belief that courtroom journalism embodies the press’s watchdog function and serves  
303 the public interest in the legal system. Some informants even described their work as “an act of  
304 educating as a form of devotion,” illustrating the strong idealism they hold.

305 However, their idealism is not free from real-world constraints. Time pressure and speed often made it  
306 difficult for journalists to achieve ideal-quality reporting. During a trial, reporters must multitask:  
307 listening to courtroom testimony, taking notes, and preparing for live reporting simultaneously. Under  
308 such conditions, R3 admitted having once failed to cross-check a piece of information before  
309 broadcasting due to time pressure.

310 *“There was a moment I mistakenly mentioned the prosecutor’s name, and the presenter*  
311 *corrected me immediately. I was very embarrassed, but it reminded me that accuracy is number*  
312 *one.”*

313 This highlights the challenge of maintaining professionalism under time constraints.

314 Organizational interests also sometimes played a role. When a trial involved a prominent political  
315 figure, editorial attention was heightened. R6 diplomatically noted,

316 *“We are certainly independent, but the editorial team has certain considerations regarding the*  
317 *reporting angle, especially when it concerns a public figure.”*

318 Although not elaborated, this implies that journalists sometimes negotiate between idealism of  
319 independence and the media organization’s agenda-setting dynamics. Nevertheless, journalists  
320 expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their reporting despite external pressures.

321 Another reflection pertains to personal qualities they developed through courtroom journalism.  
322 Covering lengthy trials trained journalists in patience and diligence. R2 noted,

323 *“I used to get bored easily. After covering long trials, I learned to be patient and focused. If*  
324 *you lose concentration even for a moment, you might miss important facts.”*

325 They also gained legal knowledge over time, which enhanced their competence as specialized legal  
326 journalists. Ultimately, the informants agreed that despite ethical dilemmas, time pressure, and industry  
327 demands, they found meaning in their work. *“It is a demanding but noble job,”* said R1, *“We serve as*  
328 *information bridges. As long as we uphold ethics and quality, I believe we contribute positively to*  
329 *society and the justice system.”* These reflections affirm that the idealism of TV One’s courtroom  
330 journalists remains intact, coexisting with the professionalism they continually refine amid practical  
331 challenges.

## 332 4 Discussion

333 The findings of this study enrich our understanding of courtroom journalism as a form of  
334 communication practice in the legal sphere. In general, the experiences of TV One journalists reaffirm  
335 the role of the press as a mediator of justice, namely a medium that brings judicial processes before the  
336 public, thereby expanding the principle of open justice through broadcast channels (Bosland &  
337 Townend, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). This is in line with international literature that  
338 views court journalism as essential in a democracy because it provides citizens with access to “witness”  
339 the enforcement of the law and to assess whether the process is fair (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021,  
340 2025). By foregrounding journalists’ lived experiences, this study moves beyond normative debates

341 about whether trials should be televised and instead examines how open justice is enacted and  
342 negotiated at the level of everyday practice in a commercial newsroom.

343 The journalists in this study play the role of translating legal language and procedures into formats that  
344 can be understood by laypeople. This confirms the position of journalists as public legal  
345 communicators, as argued by Magin and Maurer (2019), who state that court beat reporting requires  
346 specific competencies to bridge the worlds of law and society (Magin & Maurer, 2019). The ability of  
347 the informants to translate legal jargon is consistent with practical guidelines on legal journalism in  
348 many countries, where court reporters are expected to understand legal terminology so that they can  
349 explain it accurately to the public. In this way, journalists function as a kind of informal “teacher” for  
350 society on matters of legal literacy. This educational contribution is important, given that public legal  
351 awareness is often low; the mass media can serve as a vehicle for improving legal literacy (Sevignani,  
352 2022).

353 On the other hand, the findings also highlight the dilemma of education versus dramatization faced by  
354 journalists. The informants experience a pull between their idealism to present trials as they are in an  
355 informative manner and the pragmatism of the industry that demands dramatic elements to make  
356 broadcasts attractive. This dilemma parallels the findings of Ravid (2017), who notes that the television  
357 format often pushes for sensational material, thereby reducing the educational potential of coverage  
358 (Ravid, 2017). Wittchen (2023) further shows that in sensational crime reporting, journalists face  
359 ethical challenges in maintaining objectivity amid pressure to exploit emotional aspects (Wittchen,  
360 2023). This study finds that TV One journalists try to balance these two demands: they report dramatic  
361 facts that genuinely occur (such as emotional outbursts in court) but strive not to exaggerate or add  
362 narrative embellishment. This attitude demonstrates internalization of journalistic ethics and aligns  
363 with the ideal of objectivity, which continues to be upheld as a foundational norm (Schudson, Michael ;  
364 Anderson, 2009). The journalists are aware of the dangers of falling into sensationalism: the public  
365 may gain a distorted picture of legal processes, and public trust in the judiciary may be negatively  
366 affected (Ravid, 2017). Ardilla et al. (2020) also highlight that uncontrolled live broadcasts of trials  
367 can violate the presumption of innocence and affect the evidentiary process in court (Ardilla et al.,  
368 2020). Therefore, journalists’ efforts to maintain neutral language and avoid judgment in their reporting  
369 deserve appreciation as a form of professional responsibility. This phenomenon of “keeping distance”  
370 from dramatization is consistent with the concept of strategic ritual to maintain objectivity, where  
371 journalists consciously avoid excessive interpretation and adhere strictly to facts (Wittchen, 2023) .

372 At the same time, this study confirms that dramatic elements are inherently part of trials as media  
373 events. High-profile cases often stir public emotions, and the media functions as a stage on which legal  
374 drama is watched by the masses (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011). In this context, journalists are in a  
375 difficult position: they must report human-interest aspects (which are often dramatic) but must not  
376 descend into cheap infotainment, making it necessary to maintain a balance between “informing” and  
377 “entertaining” in courtroom news (Masduki, 2017). The findings of this study show that journalists  
378 attempt to walk this tightrope reasonably well, for example through the choice of factual and non-  
379 hyperbolic wording when describing dramatic situations. Such skills are likely honed through  
380 experience and ethical awareness that the credibility of legal reporting must be preserved. In the long  
381 term, journalists’ choice to prioritize education over sensation can enhance public trust in both the  
382 media and the judiciary. Research indicates that informative transparency of courts through the media  
383 can strengthen public confidence in the legal system (Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). Conversely,  
384 if the media are perceived as overly judgmental or deliberately polarizing opinion, an erosion of trust  
385 may occur (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011). Therefore, this dilemma must continue to be managed  
386 through ethical codes and internal editorial guidelines. It may be necessary to develop specific  
387 guidelines for courtroom journalism, as has been proposed by the Indonesian Press Council, so that

388 journalists have clear guidance in balancing educational functions and the demands of dramatization  
389 (Manan, 2015).

390 With regard to communication strategies for bridging law and the public, the findings of this study are  
391 concrete and highly applicable. Language simplification, provision of context, involving experts, and  
392 visualization are techniques that are well-known in the practice of explanatory journalism (Parisi,  
393 2009). The success of journalists in implementing these strategies is reflected in public appreciation.  
394 For instance, TV One's live trial programs often receive positive feedback for being informative. The  
395 strategy of involving legal experts also aligns with the trend of interdisciplinary collaboration in  
396 modern journalism, in which journalists are not reluctant to bring in experts to enrich and verify  
397 information (Ward, 2018). This helps maintain the accuracy of substantive content, particularly  
398 because journalists typically do not have formal legal education. It also reflects the role of media as a  
399 knowledge broker that connects expert sources with the public (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). From a  
400 communication perspective, the effort to reshape complex terminology into easily understood forms is  
401 a manifestation of democratic communication, a type of communication that is inclusive and accessible  
402 to different segments of the public (Sevignani, 2022)

403 The communication strategies of TV One journalists also demonstrate adaptation to the characteristics  
404 of television as a medium. The use of infographics and visuals is an example of leveraging the strengths  
405 of an audio-visual medium for educational purposes. This is consistent with Dick's (2014) study, which  
406 emphasizes the importance of visual elements in covering legal processes to make them more engaging  
407 for contemporary audiences accustomed to visual information (Dick, 2014). Certainly, not all legal  
408 concepts can be easily visualized, but steps such as creating case timelines or graphics depicting the  
409 structure of a case greatly help audiences grasp the logic and flow of legal processes. This study  
410 supports the recommendation that media should be creative in presenting legal information without  
411 compromising accuracy. This approach could be replicated in other types of court reporting; for  
412 example, newspapers and online media can also include supporting infographics. In this way, the  
413 practices of TV One journalists can serve as a small model of how legal communication to the public  
414 can be carried out effectively.

415 In terms of professionalism and idealism, this study reveals the internal dynamics experienced by  
416 journalists. On one hand, they adhere to the core values of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and  
417 verification, especially in sensitive coverage such as trials (Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009). They  
418 realize that mistakes in reporting can have serious consequences for both the credibility of the media  
419 and the judicial process. This resonates with Wittchen's (2023) findings that legal reporters often feel  
420 a heavier ethical burden because their reporting directly intersects with the fates of defendants and  
421 victims (Wittchen, 2023). TV One journalists appear to shoulder this burden seriously, as seen in their  
422 reflective accounts of being consistently careful with their wording and the information they present.  
423 Their adherence to ethical codes, such as not taking sides and using terms like "defendant" instead of  
424 "perpetrator," reflects their professionalism. This is parallel to studies in other countries, such as  
425 Denmark, where court reporters place great emphasis on writing facts without interpretation to avoid  
426 accusations of bias (Wittchen, 2023).

427 On the other hand, the journalists' idealism as agents of public enlightenment is clearly visible. They  
428 view their work as meaningful in serving the public interest, a form of civic-minded journalism. This  
429 recalls the concept of civic journalism, in which journalists seek to empower citizens with information  
430 needed for democratic participation (Mellado, 2015). Courtroom coverage can be considered part of  
431 civic journalism because it relates to justice and the law, which are pillars of democracy. The  
432 informants' idealism, expressed in their sense of "helping to safeguard justice," indicates that their  
433 professional identity leans toward the role of watchdog and educator rather than mere entertainer  
434 (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In role performance studies, watchdog and civic educator roles are part of

435 normative orientations embraced by journalists in many countries (Mellado, 2015). These findings  
436 confirm that Indonesian journalists, at least in the legal field, also embody these roles.

437 From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to three main strands of scholarship. First, it  
438 extends work on open justice and courtroom media by conceptualizing live courtroom journalism as a  
439 form of “mediating justice” in which journalists translate institutional transparency into communicative  
440 practices shaped by commercial and ethical constraints. Second, it enriches role performance and civic  
441 journalism research by documenting how journalists in a Global South context enact hybrid roles, as  
442 legal translators, educators, and performers, while navigating structural pressures such as ratings and  
443 editorial agendas. Third, it nuances debates on “trial by media” by showing that sensationalism is not  
444 simply an outcome imposed from above, but an arena of ongoing negotiation at the level of individual  
445 journalists who attempt to “hold the line” through strategic language choices and professional rituals.

446 Practically, the findings have implications for newsrooms, regulators, and judicial institutions. For  
447 news organizations, the study suggests the need for explicit internal guidelines on courtroom  
448 broadcasting, ongoing training in legal basics for journalists, and editorial support that rewards  
449 accuracy and educational value rather than sensationalism alone. For regulators and press councils, the  
450 findings support initiatives to develop specific ethical codes for courtroom journalism that protect both  
451 the presumption of innocence and the public’s right to information. For courts, the study indicates that  
452 constructive engagement with journalists—through accessible public relations officers, media  
453 briefings, and educational materials, can enhance the quality of coverage without undermining judicial  
454 independence.

455 Contextually, this study adds an important Global South perspective to predominantly Western debates  
456 on court transparency and media. Indonesia’s media system, marked by commercial competition, high  
457 public interest in high-profile trials, and expanding digital access, represents a fertile setting in which  
458 to observe how open justice is mediated in practice. The experiences of TV One journalists demonstrate  
459 that even in a competitive television market, journalistic idealism and professionalism can persist,  
460 albeit within negotiated boundaries. Future comparative work could explore whether similar patterns  
461 occur in other countries in the region or among different types of media, such as online platforms and  
462 social media live streams.

463 The lived experiences of journalists also reaffirm that the meaning of a job, such as covering court  
464 proceedings, is shaped by intensive interaction between journalists and their social environment  
465 (courts, newsrooms, and the public). Each journalist interprets their role not only through formal job  
466 descriptions but also through the values they hold and the audience responses they perceive. The  
467 journalists’ deep sense of mission in educating the public suggests that they experience their work as  
468 a public calling. This is consistent with theories of identity and the meaning of work, which state that  
469 workers who see their jobs as meaningful tend to have higher satisfaction and performance.

470

## 471 **5 Conclusion**

472 The experiences of TV One journalists in broadcasting court proceedings live illustrate how the media  
473 mediates the administration of justice to the public through communicative and ethical approaches.  
474 Journalists function as legal communicators who translate judicial processes into accessible public  
475 information while upholding accuracy and factual integrity. They face the dilemma of balancing their  
476 educational function against pressures for dramatization in televised formats. However, through  
477 professional awareness, journalists strive to prioritize educational value without entirely disregarding  
478 the human-interest elements inherent to courtroom events. Various communication strategies are  
479 employed, from simplifying legal terminology and providing contextual explanations to involving

480 experts and utilizing visual elements, all aimed at bridging the gap between legal language and public  
481 understanding. Throughout their work, journalists reflect on the importance of maintaining  
482 professionalism—including neutrality, adherence to ethical codes, and disciplined verification—while  
483 preserving their idealism as media workers committed to serving the public interest.

484 Live courtroom journalism can be regarded as a concrete manifestation of the press's democratic  
485 function: informing the public while overseeing the judiciary as a form of transparent accountability.  
486 When journalists are able to navigate challenges ethically and creatively, live broadcasts of court  
487 hearings become not only a spectacle but also a source of guidance—mass legal education that  
488 enlightens society while simultaneously encouraging courts to operate with greater openness and  
489 fairness. In this way, the media truly plays the role of a bridge mediating justice in the public sphere.  
490 This study contributes to theoretical debates on open justice, role performance, and trial by media by  
491 foregrounding the lived experiences of journalists in a Global South context and by showing how legal  
492 education, dramaturgy, and professionalism intersect in everyday newsroom practice. Sustaining this  
493 practice requires collective efforts, such as editorial support, proportionate regulation that does not  
494 excessively constrain press freedom, and improved journalistic capacity in legal reporting.

495 Naturally, this study has limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively small and drawn from  
496 a single television station, thus not fully representing the broader spectrum of courtroom journalism in  
497 Indonesia. Insights from other media organizations or from print and online journalists may differ.  
498 Second, this research focuses on journalists' perspectives, while the views of audiences or judicial  
499 actors regarding live trial broadcasts remain unexplored. Future studies may investigate the impact of  
500 live courtroom broadcasts on public legal understanding or public perceptions of the judiciary, for  
501 example through audience research or experimental designs. Additionally, comparative studies across  
502 different media organizations or national contexts could reveal whether similar strategies and dilemmas  
503 are experienced by journalists elsewhere and could help refine a more general model of mediating  
504 justice through media.

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- 571  
 572

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No	Perihal	Tanggal
6	Bukti konfirmasi review dan Hasil Review dari Reviewer 2,	20 April 2026

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Universitas  
Bhayangkara  
Jakarta Raya

Aan Widodo <aan.widodo@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id>

## Independent review report submitted (ID 1823963)

1 message

Frontiers in Communication Editorial Office

<communication.editorial.office@frontiersin.org>

Reply-To: Frontiers in Communication Editorial Office <communication.editorial.office@frontiersin.org>

To: aan.widodo@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Fri, Apr 17, 2026 at 8:41

PM

Dear Dr Widodo,

A new report has been submitted by Reviewer 2.

As soon as all reviewers have submitted their comments, you will be able to access the reports in the Review Forum, enabling you to start your revisions.

If you have any questions, the quickest way to contact us is through the chatbot in the Review Forum.

You can track the progress of your manuscript using the button below:

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Best regards,

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### Manuscript details

Manuscript title: Mediating Justice Through Live Broadcast: A Phenomenological Communication Study Of Tv One's Courtroom Journalism

Manuscript ID: 1823963

Authors: Aan Widodo, Wa Ode Sitti Nurhaliza, Syahrul Hidayanto and Rr Dijan Widijowati

Journal: Frontiers in Communication, section Media Governance and the Public Sphere

Article type: Original Research

Submitted on: 05 Mar 2026

If you encounter any technical issue, contact [support@frontiersin.org](mailto:support@frontiersin.org), with y026B49BwPU7Zhc as reference.



**Initial recommendation to the Editor:** Minor revision is required

▼ EVALUATION

**Q 1** Please list your revision requests for the authors and provide your detailed comments, including highlighting limitations and strengths of the study and evaluating the validity of the methods, results, and data interpretation. If you have additional comments based on Q2 and Q3 you can add them as well.

 **Reviewer 2** | 17 Apr 2026 | 13:41

#1

The manuscript addresses a relevant topic by investigating the mediation of justice through live broadcasts of court proceedings on Indonesian television, focusing on the experiences of journalists from the TV One network. This is an original subject of interest to debates on media and justice in non-Western contexts. The text is well organized, with clearly delimited research questions (RQ1–RQ4), a detailed methodological description, and attention to ethical procedures. The discussion also demonstrates engagement with the relevant literature. Despite these strengths, some aspects deserve revision to strengthen the article's contribution. First, given that this is an international journal, it would be important to provide a more in-depth contextualization of TV One's role within Indonesia's media ecosystem. It is recommended that the authors clarify why this particular network was chosen and to what extent it represents or differs from other national media actors. Regarding the sample, its size and the selection criteria presented (minimum of five years of experience and involvement in high-profile cases) are adequate for a qualitative study. Nevertheless, it would be useful to justify why other roles (such as editors, producers, or news directors) were not included. On the conceptual level, the manuscript would benefit from a more precise definition of what the authors mean by "journalistic idealism," a central concept for interpreting the results but one that remains relatively under-specified throughout the text. Another important aspect concerns the "Global South" framework. Although the article mentions this perspective the discussion still seems incipient. It is suggested that the authors deepen how local specificities (legal system and culture, media legislation, media ownership structures, and levels of trust in the judiciary) influence journalists' experiences. This would enrich the study's perspective, which, along with a comparison to the literature on other regional experiences, would strengthen the discussion on the "Global South" perspective. Finally, it would be important to provide additional clarification regarding the informed ethical approval. The committee mentioned belongs to "Tidar University," while the authors are affiliated with other institutions. It is recommended that the authors explain this institutional connection and confirm the procedures followed, in order to ensure full ethical transparency for the reader. Therefore, a major revision is recommended, with a positive outlook for reconsideration after the suggested adjustments have been made.

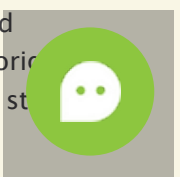
 **Corresponding Author:** Aan Widodo | 21 Apr 2026 | 09:17

#2

Dear Reviewer 2.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the reviewer for the thorough evaluation and constructive feedback. We appreciate the positive assessment of the manuscript's relevance, originality, and methodological clarity. The reviewer's insightful suggestions have significantly helped us strengthen the theoretical depth, contextual clarity, and overall contribution of this study.

We have carefully revised the manuscript in response to all comments. All revisions have been clearly highlighted in the revised manuscript for ease of reference.



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No	Perihal	Tanggal
7	Bukti konfirmasi submit revisi dan respon kepada Reviewer 1 dan Artikel revisi yang disubmit.	24 April 2026

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## Response to Reviewer 1

**Manuscript ID** : 1823963

**Manuscript Title** : Mediating Justice Through Live Courtroom Broadcast: A Phenomenological Study of Journalist Lived Experiences in Indonesian Television

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Reviewer 1 for the careful reading of our manuscript and for providing constructive and insightful comments. The feedback has been extremely valuable in improving the clarity, methodological rigor, and theoretical contribution of this study. We have carefully revised the manuscript in response to all comments. For ease of reference, all revisions addressing Reviewer 1's comments have been clearly highlighted in red in the revised manuscript.

No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Revision
1	In the abstract, the researcher should explain the data analysis method used in this study.	Thank you for this important suggestion. We have revised the abstract to explicitly include the data analysis method. The revised abstract now clearly states that this study employs a qualitative case study approach with thematic analysis to interpret data from interviews and participatory observation.	Abstract section (highlighted) Line 17 – 19.
2	In the introduction, provide supporting data regarding the number of times TV One has broadcast live court hearings and the year in which the first live court hearing was broadcast.	We appreciate this valuable comment. We have strengthened the introduction by incorporating contextual and empirical information regarding TV One's involvement in live courtroom broadcasting. The revised section now includes examples of major cases (e.g., Jessica Wongso, and other high-profile trials), as well as a clarification of the development timeline of live courtroom broadcasting in Indonesia. This addition enhances the contextual grounding of the study.	Introduction section (Page 1 paragraphs 1 Line 27 -31, highlighted)
3	In the methodology, explain why the researcher chose TV One journalists as research informants, even though other TV stations also broadcast live court hearings.	Thank you for this insightful suggestion. We have clarified the rationale for selecting TV One journalists as informants. The revised manuscript explains that TV One was chosen due to its consistent and intensive coverage of high-profile legal cases, making it an information-rich and critical case. In line with the qualitative case study approach, focusing on a single	Method section (Page 4 Method, Paragraf line 136 – 140, 159 – 161 highlighted)

No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Revision
		institution allows for deeper exploration of newsroom communication processes.	
4	In addition, the researcher should conduct direct interviews to obtain data, as this study also uses participatory observation data collection techniques in addition to interviews.	We thank the reviewer for this comment. We would like to clarify that direct, in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants as the primary data collection method, complemented by participatory observation. To improve clarity, we have revised the methodology section to explicitly emphasize the use of direct interviews and explain how interview and observational data were integrated through triangulation to enhance validity.	Method section 2.1 ( Page 4, line 168-171) yellow highlighted)
5	In the research results, there is a sentence that should be corrected because it has a different meaning. The term "studying case files" is inappropriate.	We appreciate this careful observation. We have revised the wording to avoid misinterpretation. The phrase “studying case files” has been replaced with more appropriate expressions such as “reviewing publicly available case information” or “analyzing trial-related information from accessible media and official sources,” to accurately reflect journalistic practices and ethical boundaries.	Page 6, Findings section 3.1 Line 240-243 highlighted yellow)
6	In the discussion, incorporate Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy theory in analyzing the research results.	Thank you for this valuable theoretical suggestion. We have enriched the discussion by incorporating Erving Goffman’s Dramaturgy theory. The revised discussion interprets live courtroom broadcasting as a mediated performance, where journalists and legal actors construct “front-stage” representations for public audiences, while certain processes remain “backstage.” This addition strengthens the theoretical contribution and deepens the analysis of mediated legal communication.	Discussion section Page 10 - 13 (new analytical paragraph added, highlighted) Line 396, 408, 420, 425, 435, 446, 454, 362.
7	The introduction should be improved to strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study.	Thank you for this valuable suggestion. In response to the reviewer’s comment, we have not only revised but also proactively strengthened the Introduction by refining the analytical direction of the study. The revision introduces a clearer articulation of <i>mediating justice</i> as the central framework and improves the conceptual linkage between courtroom journalism and	Introduction page 2, line 66 – 70. section (revised and expanded paragraphs, highlighted)

No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Revision
		<p>communicative mediation. Furthermore, as part of the author’s initiative, we have enhanced the theoretical grounding by clarifying how journalists function as active interpreters of legal processes in mediated contexts. These revisions aim to ensure stronger coherence between the research problem, theoretical framing, and research objectives.</p>	
8	<p>The conclusion should be revised to better reflect the findings and theoretical contribution of the study.</p>	<p>We appreciate this important suggestion. Building on the reviewer’s input, we have substantially revised the Conclusion to better reflect the analytical depth of the study. In addition, as part of the author’s initiative, the conclusion has been further refined to explicitly integrate the concept of <i>mediating justice</i> as the core contribution of the research. The revised conclusion emphasizes how journalists translate, frame, and perform legal processes, and how this practice contributes to public understanding of justice. We also clarified the study’s theoretical contribution and practical implications to ensure alignment with the revised analysis throughout the manuscript.</p>	<p>Conclusion page 14 Line 588, 596, 609, section (fully revised and highlighted)</p>

We believe these revisions have significantly strengthened the manuscript both conceptually and analytically, and we hope it is now suitable for publication.

Thanyou  
Authors.

# 1 Mediating Justice Through Live Courtroom Broadcast: A Phenomenological 2 Study of Journalist Lived Experiences in Indonesian Television

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9 **Keywords:** courtroom journalism, live courtroom broadcast, legal communication, mediating justice,  
10 Indonesia

## 11 Abstract

12 Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public sphere  
13 in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who translate  
14 complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study employs a  
15 phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in covering high-profile trials.  
16 Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and observation of live broadcast  
17 production. The data were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological method based on Colaizzi's  
18 analytical procedure, allowing the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings,  
19 and construction of thematic structures representing journalists' lived experiences. Findings reveal  
20 tensions between the goals of legal education and the dramaturgical demands of live courtroom  
21 broadcasting. The study conceptualizes courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, where  
22 journalists translate legal processes into accessible public knowledge and shape public understanding  
23 of law in the Global South.

## 24 1 Introduction

25 Open court hearings constitute a fundamental principle in modern judicial systems aimed at ensuring  
26 accountability and transparency (Johnston, 2018). In the media era, this principle is increasingly  
27 realized through courtroom coverage by the press, including live broadcasts on television. Since the  
28 mid-2010s, particularly following widely publicized cases such as the 2016 Jessica Kumala Wongso  
29 trial, live courtroom broadcasting has become increasingly prominent in Indonesia. In this context, TV  
30 One has emerged as one of the leading television networks consistently broadcasting high-profile court  
31 proceedings live, positioning itself as a key actor in shaping public access to judicial processes. TV  
32 One operates as a news-oriented commercial television network within Indonesia's competitive media  
33 ecosystem, with a strong emphasis on political and legal coverage. Unlike general entertainment-based  
34 broadcasters, TV One positions itself as a channel that prioritizes real-time news, including live  
35 courtroom proceedings. This study selects TV One as a critical case due to its consistent involvement  
36 in broadcasting high-profile trials. Rather than representing the entire Indonesian media landscape, TV  
37 One is treated as an information-rich case that provides in-depth insight into the communicative  
38 practices of courtroom journalism.

40 This phenomenon of “trial by television” has generated expectations that media can serve as an  
41 instrument for public legal education (Ravid, 2017). The mass media carries an educational function  
42 alongside its informational and entertainment roles, as mandated by the Press Law No. 40/1999.  
43 Courtroom journalism is therefore regarded as a manifestation of that educational function by making  
44 judicial processes more accessible to the public (Ardilla et al., 2020; Johnston, 2018). This study  
45 positions courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, in which journalists act as  
46 communicative bridges translating legal processes into public understanding. However, existing  
47 studies have largely focused on normative debates about courtroom transparency and media effects,  
48 while limited attention has been given to how justice is mediated through everyday journalistic  
49 practices, particularly in live courtroom broadcasting contexts.

50 Journalists covering trials act as legal communicators (Rieke & Stutman, 2022; Widodo, 2024),  
51 translating complex legal language and procedures into information that can be easily understood by  
52 general audiences (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016; Magin & Maurer, 2019). Through live broadcasts,  
53 journalists bridge the highly technical legal world with the public’s need for comprehensible legal  
54 information (Ravid, 2017).

55 However, concerns arise that the process of mediating justice through live broadcasting may shift from  
56 educational communication toward dramatized representation, potentially affecting how justice is  
57 understood by the public (Fox et al., 2001; Ravid, 2017). Court coverage risks presenting legal events  
58 as dramatic spectacles, highlighting courtroom confrontations, emotional expressions of defendants  
59 and witnesses, and speculative commentary, all of which can enhance the dramatic tone of the  
60 broadcast (Ravid, 2017). The dilemma between educational value and dramatization has sparked  
61 debate among both media practitioners and academic scholars. Studies suggest that the media often  
62 selects sensational criminal cases for live broadcast to increase audience appeal, potentially creating  
63 an unbalanced portrayal that undermines the legal educational function. As a result, televised trials  
64 may disrupt the presumption of innocence and influence public opinion before a verdict is reached  
65 (Habsari, 2017; Manan, 2015).

66 In addition to these concerns, courtroom communication can also be understood as a performative  
67 process. From a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), social interactions are structured as  
68 performances in which actors present themselves before an audience within specific settings. This  
69 perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how courtroom actors and journalists construct  
70 and communicate representations of justice in live broadcast contexts. In this study, journalistic  
71 idealism refers to a normative orientation in which journalists perceive their professional role as serving  
72 the public interest through truth-telling, public education, and accountability. This idealism is grounded  
73 in core journalistic values such as objectivity, independence, and social responsibility (Hanitzsch &  
74 Vos, 2017; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). This idealism plays a central role in shaping how journalists  
75 mediate justice in live courtroom broadcasting, influencing how legal processes are interpreted and  
76 communicated to the public

77  
78 The widely publicized 2016 “cyanide coffee” case involving Jessica Kumala Wongso, for instance,  
79 was broadcast intensively and triggered trial by media, shaping public opinion even before the court’s  
80 decision (Suryawati, 2017). This example highlights growing criticisms that the dramatization of court  
81 proceedings by the media may erode substantive justice (Ravid, 2017).

82 For journalists engaged in covering live courtroom proceedings, maintaining a balance between  
83 educational goals and entertainment elements becomes a distinct challenge. They are required to  
84 provide accurate information about legal processes, such as the reading of indictments and the  
85 presentation of evidence or legal arguments, while ensuring the broadcast remains engaging enough to  
86 retain audience attention. Consequently, journalists develop specific communication strategies to

87 bridge legal language with public understanding. These strategies include using simplified vocabulary  
88 or lay equivalents for legal terminology, offering contextual explanations about courtroom procedures,  
89 and featuring expert legal commentators as supporting communicators who help unpack technical legal  
90 concepts (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016). Through such strategies, journalists aim to maintain the  
91 accuracy of legal substance without compromising the audience's ability to understand the information  
92 being conveyed (Stern, 2014). In addition, interactions with court public relations officers are utilized  
93 to obtain correct information about the proceedings, ensuring that the information broadcast remains  
94 accurate and compliant with legal norms (Ardilla et al., 2020). From the perspective of professionalism  
95 and idealism, courtroom journalism demands a high level of ethical commitment. Journalists must  
96 adhere to professional codes of ethics, including accuracy, balance, and respect for the presumption of  
97 innocence, even under pressure from rating expectations and sensational demands (Hanitzsch & Vos,  
98 2018; Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009).

99 Idealistic journalists view courtroom reporting as a noble mission to enlighten the public about legal  
100 processes and reinforce public accountability (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021). They believe that  
101 transparent and informative trial coverage allows the media to contribute to judicial oversight and  
102 public access to justice (Johnston, 2018; Wittchen, 2023). Yet such idealism is often tested by practical  
103 realities, including limited airtime, the pressure to produce "dramatic moments," and legal risks such  
104 as allegations of contempt of court or defamation when coverage is deemed excessive (Ardilla et al.,  
105 2020; Habsari, 2017; Huang, 2021). It is therefore important to understand how journalists reflect on  
106 their professionalism and idealism when broadcasting trials live, including the values they uphold and  
107 negotiate when idealism intersects with the pragmatism of the media industry.

108 Conceptually, this study is informed by three interrelated bodies of scholarship: (1) the principle of  
109 open justice and the mediatization of courts, which frame courtroom journalism as a channel through  
110 which judicial transparency is extended into the public sphere; (2) role performance and civic  
111 journalism perspectives, which emphasize journalists' normative functions as watchdogs, educators,  
112 and mediators of public interest; and (3) research on media events and "trial by media," which  
113 highlights the dramaturgical and affective dimensions of televised legal proceedings. While prior  
114 studies have examined televised trials and courtroom reporting in various jurisdictions, much of the  
115 literature focuses on legal implications, audience effects, or content analysis, with comparatively less  
116 attention to the lived experiences of journalists, especially in Global South contexts.

117 Based on the above background, this study asks: How do TV One journalists experience live courtroom  
118 broadcasting as a means of legal education and a form of mediating justice? Specifically, it addresses  
119 the following research questions:

120 RQ1: How do TV One journalists understand and enact their roles as legal communicators in  
121 live courtroom broadcasts?

122 RQ2: How do they experience and negotiate the tension between educational goals and  
123 dramatization imperatives?

124 RQ3: What communication strategies do they employ to bridge legal language and lay  
125 audiences?

126 RQ4: How do they reflect on professionalism and journalistic idealism in the practice of live  
127 broadcasting?

128 This study is significant because in Indonesia there is limited in-depth research on courtroom  
129 journalism, even though the phenomenon is increasingly relevant alongside the expansion of judicial  
130 transparency in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the  
131 subjective experiences of journalists, thereby offering new perspectives on courtroom journalism as a

132 form of public communication in the legal domain and contributing empirical insight from a Global  
133 South media system to broader debates on media, law, and democracy.

## 134 2 Method

135 This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore the lived  
136 experiences of television journalists involved in broadcasting court proceedings live. The study aims  
137 to capture how journalists experience and interpret their role in mediating justice through  
138 communicative practices. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is suitable for  
139 understanding the meaning of informants' subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon  
140 (Sturgess, 2018).

141 TV One was chosen as a critical case due to its consistent and intensive involvement in broadcasting  
142 high-profile courtroom proceedings in Indonesia. This study adopts a critical case sampling strategy,  
143 where TV One is selected not as a representative of all Indonesian media, but as an information-rich  
144 case that provides deep insight into live courtroom journalism practices. Compared to other national  
145 broadcasters, TV One demonstrates a stronger editorial commitment to continuous live trial coverage,  
146 making it particularly relevant for examining real-time legal communication processes. Therefore, the  
147 selection of TV One is based on its depth of engagement with courtroom broadcasting rather than its  
148 representativeness of the broader media landscape.

### 149 2.1 Informants and Data Collection Procedures

150 The research informants consisted of six TV One journalists with a minimum of five years of  
151 experience covering major court proceedings live. Informants were selected purposively based on the  
152 following criteria: prior involvement as field reporters or studio presenters in live broadcasts of high-  
153 profile trials such as corruption cases or nationally significant criminal cases, and willingness to reflect  
154 on their professional experiences. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, in  
155 which a relatively small number of participants is considered adequate to achieve depth and richness  
156 of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness. Most informants served as field reporters  
157 covering trials at court locations, while several also worked as studio presenters during live broadcasts.  
158 Before the interviews, all informants agreed to participate with a guarantee of confidentiality. For the  
159 purposes of this study, informants' identities were anonymized using labels R1 through R6. This study  
160 focuses specifically on journalists as primary informants because they are directly involved in real-  
161 time processes of translating, framing, and communicating courtroom events to the public. While  
162 editors, producers, and news directors play important roles in shaping newsroom output, their  
163 involvement operates at a different organizational level and would require a broader analytical scope.  
164 Therefore, their exclusion is intentional and aligned with the phenomenological focus of this study on  
165 lived experience. This limitation is acknowledged, and future research is recommended to include other  
166 newsroom actors in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of courtroom journalism  
167 practices.

168 Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via synchronous online  
169 interaction using the Zoom platform, allowing direct engagement, probing, and clarification of  
170 participants' lived experiences. This real-time interaction ensured that the interviews retained the  
171 characteristics of direct qualitative inquiry despite being conducted in a mediated environment. The  
172 interviews focused on four themes: the role of journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between  
173 education and dramatization in reporting, strategies used to bridge legal language for public  
174 understanding, and personal reflections on idealism and professionalism during live trial coverage.  
175 Interview questions were designed to elicit concrete examples, emotional responses, and perspectives  
176 related to each theme. Examples include "Can you describe an experience where you had to explain a  
177 difficult legal term during a live broadcast?" or "What internal conflict have you experienced between

178 *presenting the trial as it is versus pressure to make the broadcast engaging?”* All interviews were  
179 audio-recorded with informants’ consent and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

180 In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to enrich contextual understanding.  
181 The researcher accompanied the TV One team during coverage of a nationally significant corruption  
182 trial broadcast live in early 2025. The researcher observed journalists’ working dynamics in the  
183 courtroom and in the media center, their interactions with sources such as prosecutors, defense lawyers,  
184 and court public relations officers, and the coordination processes with the studio during broadcasts.  
185 Field notes from these observations contributed to a deeper understanding of the situation and the time  
186 pressures faced by journalists, enabling more contextual interpretation of interview data.

187 The researcher occupied a position as an informed outsider: familiar with media and legal  
188 communication issues through academic work but not part of TV One’s newsroom. This positionality  
189 required reflexivity in order to avoid imposing normative assumptions about “how the media should  
190 behave” and to remain open to journalists’ own sense-making. Throughout the research process, the  
191 researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor potential biases and their influence on data  
192 interpretation.

## 193 **2.2 Data Analysis**

194 After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews and analyzed them using a  
195 descriptive phenomenological technique based on the simplified steps of Colaizzi (Neubauer et al.,  
196 2019). *First*, the researcher repeatedly read the entire set of transcripts to gain a comprehensive  
197 understanding. *Second*, the researcher identified statements most relevant to the four research foci.  
198 *Third*, thematic formulations were generated from these statements by interpreting them within the  
199 context of each informant’s experience. *Fourth*, the emerging themes were grouped into categories that  
200 reflected shared aspects of experience.

201 At this stage, the researcher identified four major themes consistent with the initial focus of the study,  
202 namely, journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization, strategies  
203 for bridging legal concepts with public understanding, and professionalism versus journalistic idealism.  
204 Each theme was supported by subthemes or illustrative examples from the informants. Fifth, the  
205 researcher developed an essential description of the phenomenon based on these themes, representing  
206 the collective experiences of TV One journalists in practicing live courtroom journalism. Sixth,  
207 validation was carried out through informal member checking, where the researcher presented a  
208 summary of findings to several informants to ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. The  
209 informants confirmed the relevance of the findings to their experiences and offered minor input which  
210 was incorporated accordingly.

211 Throughout the analysis, the researcher applied bracketing by suspending personal biases and  
212 assumptions to prevent them from influencing interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019; Sturgess, 2018).  
213 For instance, the researcher set aside normative assumptions such as “the media should not be  
214 sensational” to remain open to journalists’ perspectives. This step was important to maintain the purity  
215 of phenomenological description. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data  
216 among informants and linking them with observational findings, thereby strengthening the credibility  
217 of the results. In addition, peer debriefing with two communication scholars was conducted to discuss  
218 the emerging themes and their interpretation, ensuring consistency between data and analysis.

## 219 **2.3 Credibility and Ethics**

220  
221 This study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Tidar University. The application  
222 was submitted to this institution due to the absence of formal ethical review mechanisms within the  
223 authors’ affiliated institution. Ethically, this study obtained permission from TV One’s editorial

224 management to interview its journalists and to observe live broadcast production routines. Informants  
225 were free to decline answering sensitive questions and could withdraw from the interview at any  
226 time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all informants and by omitting any  
227 details that could lead to personal identification. The study followed general ethical principles in  
228 qualitative research, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and minimization of harm.

### 229 **3 Finding**

#### 230 **3.1 Journalists as Legal Communicators for the Public**

231 The informants acknowledged their central role as conveyors of legal information from the courtroom  
232 to the wider public. They recognized that many viewers are unfamiliar with legal terminology and  
233 procedures, thus journalists act as “translators” who convert legal language into public language. A  
234 field reporter (R1) explained,

235 *“During the hearing, the judge may use terms like ‘the objection is rejected because the*  
236 *indictment is considered precise.’ I have to explain on-air that an ‘objection’ is a kind of protest*  
237 *note submitted by the defendant’s legal counsel, and that if it is rejected, the trial continues to*  
238 *the main case.”* This statement illustrates the journalist’s effort to simplify legal jargon without  
239 reducing the substantive meaning.

240 All journalists admitted preparing materials before broadcasting by reviewing publicly available case  
241 information, consulting legal experts, and analyzing trial-related materials from accessible media and  
242 official sources. This preparation enabled them to understand the legal issues that arise during the trial  
243 and communicate them effectively to audiences in simplified language.

244 Informants also felt responsible for maintaining the accuracy of legal information. They tried to provide  
245 context for each development in the trial, such as explaining the function of each stage of the process  
246 (indictment reading, witness examination, prosecution, defense plea) in a structured manner. A studio  
247 presenter (R3) stated:

248 *“I consider the viewers as laypeople who need a complete picture. So in every segment, I*  
249 *summarize: today the court agenda is the examination of a forensic expert witness, aiming to*  
250 *establish the cause of the victim’s death.”*

251 This approach helps viewers understand the logic and flow of the trial rather than seeing only  
252 fragmented events. The journalists agreed that by explaining legal background and technical terms, the  
253 public can follow the proceedings with greater clarity. This aligns with their ideal that the media must  
254 contribute to improving public legal literacy. A senior reporter (R2) expressed a similar view:

255 *“If ordinary people understand what an indictment is, or the difference between factual*  
256 *witnesses and expert witnesses, it means our work succeeded in mediating legal language for*  
257 *the people.”*

258 These findings affirm that courtroom journalists act as mediators of justice, translating legal processes  
259 into accessible public narratives that shape how justice is understood by audiences. This indicates that  
260 mediating justice operates through communicative translation, where journalists actively reconstruct  
261 legal meaning for public consumption

#### 262 **3.2 The Dilemma Between Education and Dramatization in Live Broadcasts**

263 This theme strongly emerged from all informants’ experiences. They faced a two-directional pressure:  
264 on one hand, ideally, courtroom broadcasts should be treated as purely informative and educational  
265 news coverage; on the other hand, the live television format demands dramatic elements to attract

266 viewers. Field reporters R1 and R4 revealed that production teams often instructed them to highlight  
267 emotional or confrontational moments in the courtroom.

268 *“A producer once said, ‘if there’s tension between the judge and the lawyer, report it*  
269 *immediately, that’s a good moment!’,”* R4 explained.

270 As a result, reporters often found themselves in a dilemma. When trials proceed monotonously (such  
271 as long document readings), there is a temptation to embellish reports with opinions or speculation to  
272 avoid boring the audience. However, journalists also understood that excessive dramatization could  
273 obscure legal substance and unfairly influence public opinion. R2 admitted having been reprimanded  
274 by an editor for unintentionally dramatizing a defendant’s reaction:

275 *“I once said ‘Defendant X looked panicked and repeatedly wiped sweat...’. The editor was*  
276 *angry because we are not infotainment. Since then, I’ve been more careful, only reporting facts*  
277 *without dramatic additions.”*

278 Nevertheless, some informants acknowledged that dramaturgy cannot be entirely avoided. Certain  
279 courtroom situations are inherently dramatic, such as the victim’s family weeping hysterically or heated  
280 debates between defense lawyers and prosecutors. These moments naturally become the focus of  
281 camera attention. The dilemma lies in editorial decisions regarding how far journalists should exploit  
282 such emotions. R3 explained:

283 *“I have to choose words carefully: if a witness cries, I report the fact ‘the witness cried while*  
284 *recalling the events,’ without exaggerating it with sensational wording.”*

285 This reflects an effort to maintain balance. Journalists still report dramatic elements because they are  
286 part of the event, but refrain from excessive sensationalism.

287 Several journalists also acknowledged the presence of rating pressure. The success of a live courtroom  
288 program is partly judged by audience ratings, which implicitly encourages production teams to look  
289 for dramatic angles. Field journalists often found themselves at a crossroads between adhering to  
290 journalistic ideals that emphasize information and education or following commercial pressures for  
291 sensationalism.

292 *“Honestly, as a journalist I want to educate the public. But sometimes the boss asks for an*  
293 *angle with a ‘wow factor’. This is our inner struggle in every major trial,”* said R6.

294  
295 Overall, this dilemma *reflects the core tension in mediating justice*, where journalists must balance  
296 the responsibility of conveying accurate legal information with the need to present courtroom events  
297 in a publicly engaging manner.

### 298 **3.3 Strategies for Bridging Legal Language with Public Understanding**

299 The study identified several communication strategies that journalists use to ensure that trial  
300 information is easily understood by the general audience.

301 *The first* strategy is simplification of legal terminology. As mentioned previously, journalists replace  
302 legal terms with everyday equivalents or provide brief on-air definitions. For example, “interlocutory  
303 decision” is explained as “a temporary decision issued in the middle of the trial,” or “criminal  
304 execution” is described by reporters as “the implementation of punishment for a convicted person.”

305 *The second* strategy is contextual elaboration. Journalists not only report what happens in the  
306 courtroom but also provide background information about the case and its legal relevance. This  
307 resembles a news feature style, in which reporters insert historical context or case chronology during  
308 breaks in the trial. R1 gave an example: during a corruption trial, “*While waiting for the judges to*

309 *deliberate, I reminded viewers: this case began with a sting operation last year involving an official*  
310 *from Ministry X, causing a state financial loss of....”* This strategy helps viewers understand the  
311 context of each stage of the trial.

312 *The third* strategy is the use of expert sources. In several broadcasts, TV One invited legal scholars or  
313 experts as analysts in the studio. Journalists moderated discussions with these experts to clarify  
314 technical aspects. For instance, when there was debate over the legal articles in the indictment, the  
315 presenter would ask, *“What does this article mean, and why do the prosecutor and defense interpret it*  
316 *differently?”* The expert’s explanation helped clarify matters for viewers. R3 stated that experts were  
317 very helpful:

318 *“My language has limitations. With an expert present, technical terms like ‘elements of an*  
319 *offense’ can be explained thoroughly without fear of error.”*

320 Expert presence also enhances credibility and analytical depth.

321 *The fourth* strategy involves visualization and graphics. The production team prepares supporting  
322 visuals such as infographics showing trial procedures, diagrams of relationships among actors in the  
323 case, or highlighted points of the indictment. Journalists use these visuals while explaining the case,  
324 giving audiences a visual reference. Research observation noted that, during complex trials, TV One  
325 displayed a timeline of the case on the screen while reporters explained each stage accordingly. This  
326 technique helps viewers understand lengthy legal processes.

327 Fifth, journalists maintain a communicative tone and language style. They avoid rigid or overly formal  
328 reporting and instead adopt a conversational tone, as if explaining to a friend. R2 noted:

329 *“I always imagine explaining things to my mother at home. So I choose simple words, use a*  
330 *friendly tone, and avoid sounding preachy.”*

331 This humanistic approach makes viewers feel included in a conversation rather than lectured, thereby  
332 increasing their understanding. These strategies demonstrate how mediating justice is practically  
333 enacted through communicative techniques that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes  
334 for public audiences. Through these strategies, journalists do not merely report events but actively  
335 shape the public’s comprehension of legal processes.  
336

#### 337 3.4 **Reflections on Professionalism and Journalistic Idealism in Live Broadcasts**

338 The informants reflected on the values they uphold and the conflicts they experience between idealism  
339 and practical demands. Generally, all journalists emphasized their commitment to objectivity and  
340 accuracy. They understood that the fate of a defendant is at stake in the courtroom, so reporting must  
341 not be biased or prejudicial.

342 *“We are not judges, so we must remain balanced. I always insert the phrase ‘allegedly’ to*  
343 *remind viewers that no verdict has been issued,”* said R4.

344 This shows adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence. Several journalists admitted having  
345 been contacted by defense lawyers or court public relations officers when objections arose concerning  
346 their reports. R2 recounted:

347 *“Once the legal counsel protested because we referred to their client as a ‘corruptor.’ In fact,*  
348 *the person was only a defendant. We acknowledged the mistake and corrected it. That was a*  
349 *lesson on caution.”*

350 Such experiences strengthened their professional discipline regarding the use of precise and neutral  
351 terminology.

352 From an idealistic perspective, the TV One journalists expressed pride that their work helps the public  
353 gain a better understanding of the law. Many saw themselves as journalists with an educator idealism.  
354 R5 stated,

355 *“I entered journalism because I wanted to be a watchdog. Covering trials is part of social*  
356 *control so the law remains transparent. There is personal satisfaction when my coverage helps*  
357 *people understand the law and monitor justice.”*  
358

359 This reflects that mediating justice is not only a professional obligation but also a moral commitment,  
360 where journalists perceive their role as contributing to public understanding and oversight of legal  
361 processes. Thus, mediating justice is experienced not only as a technical reporting activity but as a  
362 meaningful and value-driven communicative practice.

363 However, their idealism is not free from real-world constraints. Time pressure and speed often made it  
364 difficult for journalists to achieve ideal-quality reporting. During a trial, reporters must multitask:  
365 listening to courtroom testimony, taking notes, and preparing for live reporting simultaneously. Under  
366 such conditions, R3 admitted having once failed to cross-check a piece of information before  
367 broadcasting due to time pressure.

368 *“There was a moment I mistakenly mentioned the prosecutor’s name, and the presenter*  
369 *corrected me immediately. I was very embarrassed, but it reminded me that accuracy is number*  
370 *one.”*

371 This highlights the challenge of maintaining professionalism under time constraints.

372 Organizational interests also sometimes played a role. When a trial involved a prominent political  
373 figure, editorial attention was heightened. R6 diplomatically noted,

374 *“We are certainly independent, but the editorial team has certain considerations regarding the*  
375 *reporting angle, especially when it concerns a public figure.”*

376 Although not elaborated, this implies that journalists sometimes negotiate between idealism of  
377 independence and the media organization’s agenda-setting dynamics. Nevertheless, journalists  
378 expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their reporting despite external pressures.

379 Another reflection pertains to personal qualities they developed through courtroom journalism.  
380 Covering lengthy trials trained journalists in patience and diligence. R2 noted,

381 *“I used to get bored easily. After covering long trials, I learned to be patient and focused. If*  
382 *you lose concentration even for a moment, you might miss important facts.”*

383 They also gained legal knowledge over time, which enhanced their competence as specialized legal  
384 journalists. Ultimately, the informants agreed that despite ethical dilemmas, time pressure, and industry  
385 demands, they found meaning in their work. *“It is a demanding but noble job,”* said R1, *“We serve as*  
386 *information bridges. As long as we uphold ethics and quality, I believe we contribute positively to*  
387 *society and the justice system.”* These reflections affirm that the idealism of TV One’s courtroom  
388 journalists remains intact, coexisting with the professionalism they continually refine amid practical  
389 challenges.

390 **4 Discussion**

391 The findings of this study enrich our understanding of courtroom journalism as a form of  
392 communication practice in the legal sphere. In general, the experiences of TV One journalists reaffirm  
393 the role of the press as a mediator of justice, namely a medium that brings judicial processes before the  
394 public, thereby expanding the principle of open justice through broadcast channels (Bosland &  
395 Townend, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). This study conceptualizes mediating justice as a  
396 communicative process through which journalists translate, frame, and represent legal proceedings in  
397 ways that shape public understanding of justice. This is in line with international literature that views  
398 court journalism as essential in a democracy because it provides citizens with access to “witness” the  
399 enforcement of the law and to assess whether the process is fair (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021, 2025).  
400 By foregrounding journalists’ lived experiences, this study moves beyond normative debates about  
401 whether trials should be televised and instead examines how justice is communicated and mediated  
402 through everyday journalistic practices.

403  
404 The journalists in this study act as agents of mediating justice by translating legal language and  
405 procedures into formats that can be understood by laypeople. This confirms the position of journalists  
406 as public legal communicators, as argued by Magin and Maurer (2019), who state that court beat  
407 reporting requires specific competencies to bridge the worlds of law and society thereby reinforcing  
408 their role in shaping public understanding of legal processes. (Magin & Maurer, 2019). In this sense,  
409 journalists function as communicative intermediaries who transform institutional legal discourse into  
410 accessible public narratives, thereby shaping how justice is understood and interpreted by audiences.

411 The ability of the informants to translate legal jargon is consistent with practical guidelines on legal  
412 journalism in many countries, where court reporters are expected to understand legal terminology so  
413 that they can explain it accurately to the public. In this way, journalists function as a kind of informal  
414 “teacher” for society on matters of legal literacy. This educational contribution is important, given that  
415 public legal awareness is often low; the mass media can serve as a vehicle for improving legal literacy  
416 (Sevignani, 2022).

417 On the other hand, the findings also highlight the dilemma of education versus dramatization faced by  
418 journalists. The informants experience a pull between their idealism to present trials as they are in an  
419 informative manner and the pragmatism of the industry that demands dramatic elements to make  
420 broadcasts attractive. This tension illustrates the complexity of mediating justice, where journalists  
421 must balance accurate legal communication with the need to present courtroom events in an  
422 understandable and engaging manner. This dilemma parallels the findings of Ravid (2017), who notes  
423 that the television format often pushes for sensational material, thereby reducing the educational  
424 potential of coverage (Ravid, 2017).

425 At this point, the phenomenon can be further interpreted through Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical  
426 perspective, where courtroom proceedings—once mediated through live broadcasting—take on the  
427 characteristics of staged performances for public audiences. Wittchen (2023) further shows that in  
428 sensational crime reporting, journalists face ethical challenges in maintaining objectivity amid pressure  
429 to exploit emotional aspects (Wittchen, 2023). From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments  
430 represent the *performative dimension of mediating justice*, where courtroom events are publicly  
431 represented and interpreted through media narratives.

432  
433 This study finds that TV One journalists try to balance these demands as part of their effort in mediating  
434 justice, ensuring that legal processes remain accurately represented while still accessible to the public.  
435 From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments represent “front-stage” expressions of legal drama,  
436 where emotional displays and courtroom interactions become visible to the public as part of a mediated  
437 performance of justice. This attitude demonstrates internalization of journalistic ethics and aligns with

438 the ideal of objectivity, which continues to be upheld as a foundational norm (Schudson, Michael ;  
439 Anderson, 2009).

440  
441 The journalists are aware of the dangers of falling into sensationalism: the public may gain a distorted  
442 picture of legal processes, and public trust in the judiciary may be negatively affected as  
443 misrepresentation may distort how justice is publicly understood (Ravid, 2017). Ardilla et al. (2020)  
444 also highlight that uncontrolled live broadcasts of trials can violate the presumption of innocence and  
445 affect the evidentiary process in court (Ardilla et al., 2020). This highlights the tension between  
446 visibility and responsibility, where increased public access through media exposure simultaneously  
447 amplifies both transparency and the risk of misrepresentation. Therefore, journalists' efforts to  
448 maintain neutral language and avoid judgment in their reporting deserve appreciation as a form of  
449 professional responsibility. This phenomenon of "keeping distance" from dramatization is consistent  
450 with the concept of strategic ritual to maintain objectivity, where journalists consciously avoid  
451 excessive interpretation and adhere strictly to facts (Wittchen, 2023) .

452 At the same time, this study confirms that dramatic elements are inherently part of trials as media  
453 events. High-profile cases often stir public emotions, and the media functions as a stage on which legal  
454 drama is watched by the masses (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011). From Goffman's perspective, the  
455 courtroom becomes a hybrid space in which institutional authority intersects with performative  
456 visibility. Legal actors perform roles before both immediate courtroom participants and a broader  
457 mediated audience, while journalists function as interpreters who frame this performance into coherent  
458 narratives. Meanwhile, critical processes such as judicial deliberation remain in the "backstage,"  
459 invisible yet central to the production of justice.

460 In this context, journalists are in a difficult position, making it necessary to maintain a balance between  
461 informing and engaging as part of their role in mediating justice: they must report human-interest  
462 aspects (which are often dramatic) but must not descend into cheap infotainment, making it necessary  
463 to maintain a balance between "informing" and "entertaining" in courtroom news (Masduki, 2017).  
464 The findings of this study show that journalists attempt to walk this tightrope reasonably well, for  
465 example through the choice of factual and non-hyperbolic wording when describing dramatic  
466 situations.

467 Such skills are likely honed through experience and ethical awareness that the credibility of legal  
468 reporting must be preserved. In the long term, journalists' choice to prioritize education over sensation  
469 can enhance public trust in both the media and the judiciary. Research indicates that informative  
470 transparency of courts through the media can strengthen public confidence in the legal system  
471 (Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). Conversely, if the media are perceived as overly judgmental or  
472 deliberately polarizing opinion, an erosion of trust may occur (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011).  
473 Therefore, this dilemma must continue to be managed through ethical codes and internal editorial  
474 guidelines. It may be necessary to develop specific guidelines for courtroom journalism, as has been  
475 proposed by the Indonesian Press Council, so that journalists have clear guidance in balancing  
476 educational functions and the demands of dramatization (Manan, 2015).

477  
478 With regard to communication strategies for bridging law and the public, the findings of this study are  
479 concrete and highly applicable. These strategies reflect how mediating justice is operationalized  
480 through communicative practices that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes for public  
481 audiences. Language simplification, provision of context, involving experts, and visualization are  
482 techniques that are well-known in the practice of explanatory journalism (Parisi, 2009). The success of

483 journalists in implementing these strategies is reflected in public appreciation. For instance, TV One's  
484 live trial programs often receive positive feedback for being informative. The strategy of involving  
485 legal experts also aligns with the trend of interdisciplinary collaboration in modern journalism, in  
486 which journalists are not reluctant to bring in experts to enrich and verify information (Ward, 2018).  
487 This helps maintain the accuracy of substantive content, particularly because journalists typically do  
488 not have formal legal education. It also reflects the role of media as a knowledge broker that connects  
489 expert sources with the public (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). From a communication perspective, the effort  
490 to reshape complex terminology into easily understood forms is a manifestation of democratic  
491 communication, a type of communication that is inclusive and accessible to different segments of the  
492 public (Sevignani, 2022)

493 The communication strategies of TV One journalists also demonstrate adaptation to the characteristics  
494 of television as a medium. The use of infographics and visuals is an example of leveraging the strengths  
495 of an audio-visual medium for educational purposes. This is consistent with Dick's (2014) study, which  
496 emphasizes the importance of visual elements in covering legal processes to make them more engaging  
497 for contemporary audiences accustomed to visual information (Dick, 2014). Certainly, not all legal  
498 concepts can be easily visualized, but steps such as creating case timelines or graphics depicting the  
499 structure of a case greatly help audiences grasp the logic and flow of legal processes.

500 This study supports the recommendation that media should be creative in presenting legal information  
501 without compromising accuracy. This approach could be replicated in other types of court reporting;  
502 for example, newspapers and online media can also include supporting infographics. In this way, the  
503 practices of TV One journalists can serve as a small model of how legal communication to the public  
504 can be carried out effectively.

505 In terms of professionalism and idealism, this study reveals the internal dynamics experienced by  
506 journalists. On one hand, they adhere to the core values of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and  
507 verification, especially in sensitive coverage such as trials (Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009). They  
508 realize that mistakes in reporting can have serious consequences for both the credibility of the media  
509 and the judicial process. This resonates with Wittchen's (2023) findings that legal reporters often feel  
510 a heavier ethical burden because their reporting directly intersects with the fates of defendants and  
511 victims (Wittchen, 2023).

512 TV One journalists appear to shoulder this burden seriously, as seen in their reflective accounts of  
513 being consistently careful with their wording and the information they present. Their adherence to  
514 ethical codes, such as not taking sides and using terms like "defendant" instead of "perpetrator,"  
515 reflects their professionalism. This is parallel to studies in other countries, such as Denmark, where  
516 court reporters place great emphasis on writing facts without interpretation to avoid accusations of bias  
517 (Wittchen, 2023).

518 On the other hand, the journalists' idealism as agents of public enlightenment is clearly visible. They  
519 view their work as meaningful in serving the public interest, a form of civic-minded journalism. This  
520 recalls the concept of civic journalism, in which journalists seek to empower citizens with information  
521 needed for democratic participation (Mellado, 2015). Courtroom coverage can be considered part of  
522 civic journalism because it relates to justice and the law, which are pillars of democracy.

523 The informants' idealism, expressed in their sense of "helping to safeguard justice," indicates that their  
524 professional identity leans toward the role of watchdog and educator rather than mere entertainer  
525 (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In role performance studies, watchdog and civic educator roles are part of  
526 normative orientations embraced by journalists in many countries (Mellado, 2015). These findings  
527 confirm that Indonesian journalists, at least in the legal field, also embody these roles.

528 From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by positioning courtroom journalism as a form of  
529 mediating justice, emphasizing the central role of communicative practices in shaping public  
530 engagement with legal processes. First, it extends work on open justice and courtroom media by  
531 conceptualizing live courtroom journalism as a form of “mediating justice” in which journalists  
532 translate institutional transparency into communicative practices shaped by commercial and ethical  
533 constraints. Second, it enriches role performance and civic journalism research by documenting how  
534 journalists in a Global South context enact hybrid roles, as legal translators, educators, and performers,  
535 while navigating structural pressures such as ratings and editorial agendas. Third, it nuances debates  
536 on “trial by media” by showing that sensationalism is not simply an outcome imposed from above, but  
537 an arena of ongoing negotiation at the level of individual journalists who attempt to “hold the line”  
538 through strategic language choices and professional rituals.

539 Practically, the findings have implications for newsrooms, regulators, and judicial institutions. For  
540 news organizations, the study suggests the need for explicit internal guidelines on courtroom  
541 broadcasting, ongoing training in legal basics for journalists, and editorial support that rewards  
542 accuracy and educational value rather than sensationalism alone. For regulators and press councils, the  
543 findings support initiatives to develop specific ethical codes for courtroom journalism that protect both  
544 the presumption of innocence and the public’s right to information. For courts, the study indicates that  
545 constructive engagement with journalists—through accessible public relations officers, media  
546 briefings, and educational materials, can enhance the quality of coverage without undermining judicial  
547 independence.

548 Contextually, this study adds an important Global South perspective to predominantly Western debates  
549 on court transparency and media. Indonesia’s media system, marked by commercial competition, high  
550 public interest in high-profile trials, and expanding digital access, represents a fertile setting in which  
551 to observe how justice is communication and mediated in practice. The experiences of TV One  
552 journalists demonstrate that even in a competitive television market, journalistic idealism and  
553 professionalism can persist, albeit within negotiated boundaries. Future comparative work could  
554 explore whether similar patterns occur in other countries in the region or among different types of  
555 media, such as online platforms and social media live streams.

556 The lived experiences of journalists also reaffirm that the meaning of a job, such as covering court  
557 proceedings, is shaped by intensive interaction between journalists and their social environment  
558 (courts, newsrooms, and the public). Each journalist interprets their role not only through formal job  
559 descriptions but also through the values they hold and the audience responses they perceive. The  
560 journalists’ deep sense of mission in educating the public suggests that they experience their work as  
561 a public calling. This is consistent with theories of identity and the meaning of work, which state that  
562 workers who see their jobs as meaningful tend to have higher satisfaction and performance. Overall,  
563 the findings demonstrate that mediating justice is a dynamic communicative process shaped by  
564 journalists’ practices, experiences, and professional commitments in translating law into public  
565 understanding.

566 The findings of this study should be situated within the broader Global South context, where the  
567 mediation of justice is shaped by specific socio-legal and media conditions. In Indonesia, the legal  
568 system operates not only through formal procedural frameworks but also through cultural dynamics  
569 that influence courtroom interactions and public perceptions of justice.

570 This context directly affects how journalists mediate justice, as they must navigate not only legal  
571 accuracy but also social expectations and symbolic meanings attached to courtroom proceedings. In  
572 addition, Indonesia’s relatively flexible media regulation allows extensive live broadcasting of trials,

573 creating a unique communicative environment in which legal processes become highly visible to the  
574 public.

575 At the same time, media ownership structures—often linked to political and economic elites—  
576 introduce additional pressures that shape editorial decisions and framing practices. These conditions  
577 complicate the role of journalistic idealism, as journalists must continuously negotiate between  
578 professional values, institutional constraints, and audience engagement in real-time reporting.

579 Furthermore, varying levels of public trust in judicial institutions position journalists as key mediators  
580 of justice, influencing how legal truth is constructed and interpreted in the public sphere. Compared to  
581 more tightly regulated Western contexts, the Indonesian setting illustrates a more open yet complex  
582 form of mediated justice, where information, performance, and public accountability are deeply  
583 intertwined.

584

## 585 5 Conclusion

586 The experiences of TV One journalists in live courtroom broadcasting illustrate how justice is mediated  
587 to the public through communicative practices grounded in professional and ethical considerations.  
588 This study demonstrates that courtroom journalism is not merely a process of reporting legal events,  
589 but a form of *mediated justice* in which journalists actively translate, frame, and perform legal  
590 processes for public audiences. Journalists function as legal communicators who translate judicial  
591 processes into accessible public information while upholding accuracy and factual integrity.

592

593 They face an inherent tension in mediating justice, balancing their educational function with the need  
594 to present courtroom events in engaging and publicly accessible ways. However, through professional  
595 awareness, journalists strive to prioritize educational value without entirely disregarding the human-  
596 interest elements inherent to courtroom events. Various communication strategies are employed—such  
597 as simplifying legal terminology, providing contextual explanations, involving experts, and utilizing  
598 visual elements—to support the process of mediating justice and bridging the gap between legal  
599 language and public understanding. Throughout their work, journalists reflect on the importance of  
600 maintaining professionalism—including neutrality, adherence to ethical codes, and disciplined  
601 verification—while preserving their idealism as media workers committed to serving the public  
602 interest.

603 Live courtroom journalism can be regarded as a concrete manifestation of the press's democratic  
604 function: informing the public while overseeing the judiciary as a form of transparent accountability.  
605 When journalists are able to navigate challenges ethically and creatively, live broadcasts of court  
606 hearings become not only a spectacle but also a source of guidance—mass legal education that  
607 enlightens society while simultaneously encouraging courts to operate with greater openness and  
608 fairness. In this way, the media truly plays the role of a bridge mediating justice in the public sphere.

609 This study contributes to theoretical debates on open justice, role performance, and trial by media by  
610 positioning courtroom journalism as a practice of mediating justice, grounded in journalists' lived  
611 experiences within a Global South context. It demonstrates how legal education, dramaturgy, and  
612 professionalism intersect in everyday newsroom practice. Sustaining this practice requires collective  
613 efforts, such as editorial support, proportionate regulation that does not excessively constrain press  
614 freedom, and improved journalistic capacity in legal reporting.

615 Naturally, this study has limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively small and drawn from  
616 a single television station, thus not fully representing the broader spectrum of courtroom journalism in  
617 Indonesia. Insights from other media organizations or from print and online journalists may differ.  
618 Second, this research focuses on journalists' perspectives, while the views of audiences or judicial  
619 actors regarding live trial broadcasts remain unexplored. Future studies may investigate the impact of  
620 live courtroom broadcasts on public legal understanding or public perceptions of the judiciary, for  
621 example through audience research or experimental designs. Additionally, comparative studies across  
622 different media organizations or national contexts could reveal whether similar strategies and dilemmas  
623 are experienced by journalists elsewhere and could help refine a more general model of mediating  
624 justice through media.

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No	Perihal	Tanggal
8	Bukti konfirmasi submit revisi dan respon kepada Reviewer 2 dan Artikel revisi yang disubmit.	24 April 2026

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## Response to Reviewer 2

**Manuscript ID** : 1823963

**Manuscript Title** : Mediating Justice Through Live Courtroom Broadcast: A Phenomenological Study of Journalist Lived Experiences in Indonesian Television

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the reviewer for the thorough evaluation and constructive feedback. We appreciate the positive assessment of the manuscript's relevance, originality, and methodological clarity. The reviewer's insightful suggestions have significantly helped us strengthen the theoretical depth, contextual clarity, and overall contribution of this study.

We have carefully revised the manuscript in response to all comments. All revisions have been clearly highlighted in the revised manuscript for ease of reference.

No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Revision
1	The manuscript needs a more in-depth contextualization of TV One within Indonesia's media ecosystem and clarification of its representativeness.	Thank you for this important suggestion. We have strengthened the Introduction by adding a more detailed explanation of TV One's position within Indonesia's media ecosystem, including its ownership structure, editorial orientation, and prominence in broadcasting high-profile legal cases. We also clarified why TV One was selected as a case study, emphasizing its consistent role in live courtroom broadcasting and its relevance as a critical case rather than a statistically representative one. Furthermore, we added a brief comparison with other national broadcasters to situate TV One within the broader media landscape.	Introduction section Page 1 Line 31 – 38 (highlighted red)
2	The manuscript should justify why other roles (editors, producers, news directors) were not included in the sample.	We appreciate this insightful comment. We have revised the Methodology section to clarify that this study specifically focuses on journalists directly involved in field reporting and live courtroom coverage, as they experience real-time communicative pressures and ethical decision-making processes. While acknowledging the importance of other newsroom roles, we explain that including them would require a broader research design beyond the scope of this study. This limitation is now explicitly stated, along with suggestions for future research.	Method section page 4 line 161 – 167 (highlighted red)
3	The concept of "journalistic idealism" needs clearer	Thank you for highlighting this conceptual issue. We have now strengthened the theoretical framework by providing a	Introduction page 2 line 71 – 76

No	Reviewer Comment	Author Response	Location of Revision
	definition and conceptual grounding.	clearer definition of “journalistic idealism,” linking it to established literature on journalistic norms, professional values, and public service orientation (e.g., objectivity, independence, and responsibility). We also clarified how this concept is operationalized in the analysis and how it informs the interpretation of findings.	(highlighted red)
4	The “Global South” framework needs to be further developed, particularly regarding local specificities and comparative perspectives.	We greatly appreciate this suggestion. We have expanded the Discussion section to deepen the Global South perspective by incorporating a more nuanced analysis of Indonesia’s legal culture, media regulation, ownership structures, and public trust in the judiciary. We also added comparisons with existing literature on courtroom journalism in other Global South contexts to highlight both similarities and contextual differences. This revision strengthens the manuscript’s contribution to global media studies.	Discussion section 556 – 583 (highlighted red)
5	Clarification is needed regarding the ethical approval from Tidar University while authors are affiliated with other institutions.	Thank you for raising this important point regarding ethical transparency. We have clarified the ethical approval process in the revised manuscript. The ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Tidar University. The application was submitted to this institution due to the absence of formal ethical review mechanisms within the authors’ affiliated institutions. We have now explicitly explained this in the manuscript to ensure full transparency regarding the institutional context and the ethical procedures followed. The ethical review process was conducted in accordance with the standard guidelines of Tidar University’s ethics committee.	Method section, page 5 line 221-223 (highlighted red)

We believe that these revisions have significantly improved the manuscript’s clarity, theoretical rigor, and international relevance. We sincerely thank the reviewer once again for the valuable feedback and hope that the revised manuscript meets the expectations for publication.

Thankyou

Authors.

# 1 Mediating Justice Through Live Courtroom Broadcast: A Phenomenological 2 Study of Journalist Lived Experiences in Indonesian Television

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## 11 Abstract

12 Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public sphere  
13 in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who translate  
14 complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study employs a  
15 phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in covering high-profile trials.  
16 Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and observation of live broadcast  
17 production. The data were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological method based on Colaizzi's  
18 analytical procedure, allowing the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings,  
19 and construction of thematic structures representing journalists' lived experiences. Findings reveal  
20 tensions between the goals of legal education and the dramaturgical demands of live courtroom  
21 broadcasting. The study conceptualizes courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, where  
22 journalists translate legal processes into accessible public knowledge and shape public understanding  
23 of law in the Global South.

## 24 1 Introduction

25 Open court hearings constitute a fundamental principle in modern judicial systems aimed at ensuring  
26 accountability and transparency (Johnston, 2018). In the media era, this principle is increasingly  
27 realized through courtroom coverage by the press, including live broadcasts on television. Since the  
28 mid-2010s, particularly following widely publicized cases such as the 2016 Jessica Kumala Wongso  
29 trial, live courtroom broadcasting has become increasingly prominent in Indonesia. In this context, TV  
30 One has emerged as one of the leading television networks consistently broadcasting high-profile court  
31 proceedings live, positioning itself as a key actor in shaping public access to judicial processes. TV  
32 One operates as a news-oriented commercial television network within Indonesia's competitive media  
33 ecosystem, with a strong emphasis on political and legal coverage. Unlike general entertainment-based  
34 broadcasters, TV One positions itself as a channel that prioritizes real-time news, including live  
35 courtroom proceedings. This study selects TV One as a critical case due to its consistent involvement  
36 in broadcasting high-profile trials. Rather than representing the entire Indonesian media landscape, TV  
37 One is treated as an information-rich case that provides in-depth insight into the communicative  
38 practices of courtroom journalism.

40 This phenomenon of “trial by television” has generated expectations that media can serve as an  
41 instrument for public legal education (Ravid, 2017). The mass media carries an educational function  
42 alongside its informational and entertainment roles, as mandated by the Press Law No. 40/1999.  
43 Courtroom journalism is therefore regarded as a manifestation of that educational function by making  
44 judicial processes more accessible to the public (Ardilla et al., 2020; Johnston, 2018). This study  
45 positions courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, in which journalists act as  
46 communicative bridges translating legal processes into public understanding. However, existing  
47 studies have largely focused on normative debates about courtroom transparency and media effects,  
48 while limited attention has been given to how justice is mediated through everyday journalistic  
49 practices, particularly in live courtroom broadcasting contexts.

50 Journalists covering trials act as legal communicators (Rieke & Stutman, 2022; Widodo, 2024),  
51 translating complex legal language and procedures into information that can be easily understood by  
52 general audiences (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016; Magin & Maurer, 2019). Through live broadcasts,  
53 journalists bridge the highly technical legal world with the public’s need for comprehensible legal  
54 information (Ravid, 2017).

55 However, concerns arise that the process of mediating justice through live broadcasting may shift from  
56 educational communication toward dramatized representation, potentially affecting how justice is  
57 understood by the public (Fox et al., 2001; Ravid, 2017). Court coverage risks presenting legal events  
58 as dramatic spectacles, highlighting courtroom confrontations, emotional expressions of defendants  
59 and witnesses, and speculative commentary, all of which can enhance the dramatic tone of the  
60 broadcast (Ravid, 2017). The dilemma between educational value and dramatization has sparked  
61 debate among both media practitioners and academic scholars. Studies suggest that the media often  
62 selects sensational criminal cases for live broadcast to increase audience appeal, potentially creating  
63 an unbalanced portrayal that undermines the legal educational function. As a result, televised trials  
64 may disrupt the presumption of innocence and influence public opinion before a verdict is reached  
65 (Habsari, 2017; Manan, 2015).

66 In addition to these concerns, courtroom communication can also be understood as a performative  
67 process. From a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), social interactions are structured as  
68 performances in which actors present themselves before an audience within specific settings. This  
69 perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how courtroom actors and journalists construct  
70 and communicate representations of justice in live broadcast contexts. In this study, journalistic  
71 idealism refers to a normative orientation in which journalists perceive their professional role as serving  
72 the public interest through truth-telling, public education, and accountability. This idealism is grounded  
73 in core journalistic values such as objectivity, independence, and social responsibility (Hanitzsch &  
74 Vos, 2017; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). This idealism plays a central role in shaping how journalists  
75 mediate justice in live courtroom broadcasting, influencing how legal processes are interpreted and  
76 communicated to the public

77  
78 The widely publicized 2016 “cyanide coffee” case involving Jessica Kumala Wongso, for instance,  
79 was broadcast intensively and triggered trial by media, shaping public opinion even before the court’s  
80 decision (Suryawati, 2017). This example highlights growing criticisms that the dramatization of court  
81 proceedings by the media may erode substantive justice (Ravid, 2017).

82 For journalists engaged in covering live courtroom proceedings, maintaining a balance between  
83 educational goals and entertainment elements becomes a distinct challenge. They are required to  
84 provide accurate information about legal processes, such as the reading of indictments and the  
85 presentation of evidence or legal arguments, while ensuring the broadcast remains engaging enough to  
86 retain audience attention. Consequently, journalists develop specific communication strategies to

87 bridge legal language with public understanding. These strategies include using simplified vocabulary  
88 or lay equivalents for legal terminology, offering contextual explanations about courtroom procedures,  
89 and featuring expert legal commentators as supporting communicators who help unpack technical legal  
90 concepts (Bryan & Kromphardt, 2016). Through such strategies, journalists aim to maintain the  
91 accuracy of legal substance without compromising the audience's ability to understand the information  
92 being conveyed (Stern, 2014). In addition, interactions with court public relations officers are utilized  
93 to obtain correct information about the proceedings, ensuring that the information broadcast remains  
94 accurate and compliant with legal norms (Ardilla et al., 2020). From the perspective of professionalism  
95 and idealism, courtroom journalism demands a high level of ethical commitment. Journalists must  
96 adhere to professional codes of ethics, including accuracy, balance, and respect for the presumption of  
97 innocence, even under pressure from rating expectations and sensational demands (Hanitzsch & Vos,  
98 2018; Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009).

99 Idealistic journalists view courtroom reporting as a noble mission to enlighten the public about legal  
100 processes and reinforce public accountability (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021). They believe that  
101 transparent and informative trial coverage allows the media to contribute to judicial oversight and  
102 public access to justice (Johnston, 2018; Wittchen, 2023). Yet such idealism is often tested by practical  
103 realities, including limited airtime, the pressure to produce "dramatic moments," and legal risks such  
104 as allegations of contempt of court or defamation when coverage is deemed excessive (Ardilla et al.,  
105 2020; Habsari, 2017; Huang, 2021). It is therefore important to understand how journalists reflect on  
106 their professionalism and idealism when broadcasting trials live, including the values they uphold and  
107 negotiate when idealism intersects with the pragmatism of the media industry.

108 Conceptually, this study is informed by three interrelated bodies of scholarship: (1) the principle of  
109 open justice and the mediatization of courts, which frame courtroom journalism as a channel through  
110 which judicial transparency is extended into the public sphere; (2) role performance and civic  
111 journalism perspectives, which emphasize journalists' normative functions as watchdogs, educators,  
112 and mediators of public interest; and (3) research on media events and "trial by media," which  
113 highlights the dramaturgical and affective dimensions of televised legal proceedings. While prior  
114 studies have examined televised trials and courtroom reporting in various jurisdictions, much of the  
115 literature focuses on legal implications, audience effects, or content analysis, with comparatively less  
116 attention to the lived experiences of journalists, especially in Global South contexts.

117 Based on the above background, this study asks: How do TV One journalists experience live courtroom  
118 broadcasting as a means of legal education and a form of mediating justice? Specifically, it addresses  
119 the following research questions:

120 RQ1: How do TV One journalists understand and enact their roles as legal communicators in  
121 live courtroom broadcasts?

122 RQ2: How do they experience and negotiate the tension between educational goals and  
123 dramatization imperatives?

124 RQ3: What communication strategies do they employ to bridge legal language and lay  
125 audiences?

126 RQ4: How do they reflect on professionalism and journalistic idealism in the practice of live  
127 broadcasting?

128 This study is significant because in Indonesia there is limited in-depth research on courtroom  
129 journalism, even though the phenomenon is increasingly relevant alongside the expansion of judicial  
130 transparency in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the  
131 subjective experiences of journalists, thereby offering new perspectives on courtroom journalism as a

132 form of public communication in the legal domain and contributing empirical insight from a Global  
133 South media system to broader debates on media, law, and democracy.

## 134 2 Method

135 This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore the lived  
136 experiences of television journalists involved in broadcasting court proceedings live. The study aims  
137 to capture how journalists experience and interpret their role in mediating justice through  
138 communicative practices. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is suitable for  
139 understanding the meaning of informants' subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon  
140 (Sturgess, 2018).

141 TV One was chosen as a critical case due to its consistent and intensive involvement in broadcasting  
142 high-profile courtroom proceedings in Indonesia. This study adopts a critical case sampling strategy,  
143 where TV One is selected not as a representative of all Indonesian media, but as an information-rich  
144 case that provides deep insight into live courtroom journalism practices. Compared to other national  
145 broadcasters, TV One demonstrates a stronger editorial commitment to continuous live trial coverage,  
146 making it particularly relevant for examining real-time legal communication processes. Therefore, the  
147 selection of TV One is based on its depth of engagement with courtroom broadcasting rather than its  
148 representativeness of the broader media landscape.

### 149 2.1 Informants and Data Collection Procedures

150 The research informants consisted of six TV One journalists with a minimum of five years of  
151 experience covering major court proceedings live. Informants were selected purposively based on the  
152 following criteria: prior involvement as field reporters or studio presenters in live broadcasts of high-  
153 profile trials such as corruption cases or nationally significant criminal cases, and willingness to reflect  
154 on their professional experiences. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, in  
155 which a relatively small number of participants is considered adequate to achieve depth and richness  
156 of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness. Most informants served as field reporters  
157 covering trials at court locations, while several also worked as studio presenters during live broadcasts.  
158 Before the interviews, all informants agreed to participate with a guarantee of confidentiality. For the  
159 purposes of this study, informants' identities were anonymized using labels R1 through R6. This study  
160 focuses specifically on journalists as primary informants because they are directly involved in real-  
161 time processes of translating, framing, and communicating courtroom events to the public. While  
162 editors, producers, and news directors play important roles in shaping newsroom output, their  
163 involvement operates at a different organizational level and would require a broader analytical scope.  
164 Therefore, their exclusion is intentional and aligned with the phenomenological focus of this study on  
165 lived experience. This limitation is acknowledged, and future research is recommended to include other  
166 newsroom actors in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of courtroom journalism  
167 practices.

168 Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via synchronous online  
169 interaction using the Zoom platform, allowing direct engagement, probing, and clarification of  
170 participants' lived experiences. This real-time interaction ensured that the interviews retained the  
171 characteristics of direct qualitative inquiry despite being conducted in a mediated environment. The  
172 interviews focused on four themes: the role of journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between  
173 education and dramatization in reporting, strategies used to bridge legal language for public  
174 understanding, and personal reflections on idealism and professionalism during live trial coverage.  
175 Interview questions were designed to elicit concrete examples, emotional responses, and perspectives  
176 related to each theme. Examples include "Can you describe an experience where you had to explain a  
177 difficult legal term during a live broadcast?" or "What internal conflict have you experienced between

178 *presenting the trial as it is versus pressure to make the broadcast engaging?”* All interviews were  
179 audio-recorded with informants’ consent and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

180 In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to enrich contextual understanding.  
181 The researcher accompanied the TV One team during coverage of a nationally significant corruption  
182 trial broadcast live in early 2025. The researcher observed journalists’ working dynamics in the  
183 courtroom and in the media center, their interactions with sources such as prosecutors, defense lawyers,  
184 and court public relations officers, and the coordination processes with the studio during broadcasts.  
185 Field notes from these observations contributed to a deeper understanding of the situation and the time  
186 pressures faced by journalists, enabling more contextual interpretation of interview data.

187 The researcher occupied a position as an informed outsider: familiar with media and legal  
188 communication issues through academic work but not part of TV One’s newsroom. This positionality  
189 required reflexivity in order to avoid imposing normative assumptions about “how the media should  
190 behave” and to remain open to journalists’ own sense-making. Throughout the research process, the  
191 researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor potential biases and their influence on data  
192 interpretation.

## 193 **2.2 Data Analysis**

194 After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews and analyzed them using a  
195 descriptive phenomenological technique based on the simplified steps of Colaizzi (Neubauer et al.,  
196 2019). *First*, the researcher repeatedly read the entire set of transcripts to gain a comprehensive  
197 understanding. *Second*, the researcher identified statements most relevant to the four research foci.  
198 *Third*, thematic formulations were generated from these statements by interpreting them within the  
199 context of each informant’s experience. *Fourth*, the emerging themes were grouped into categories that  
200 reflected shared aspects of experience.

201 At this stage, the researcher identified four major themes consistent with the initial focus of the study,  
202 namely, journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization, strategies  
203 for bridging legal concepts with public understanding, and professionalism versus journalistic idealism.  
204 Each theme was supported by subthemes or illustrative examples from the informants. Fifth, the  
205 researcher developed an essential description of the phenomenon based on these themes, representing  
206 the collective experiences of TV One journalists in practicing live courtroom journalism. Sixth,  
207 validation was carried out through informal member checking, where the researcher presented a  
208 summary of findings to several informants to ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. The  
209 informants confirmed the relevance of the findings to their experiences and offered minor input which  
210 was incorporated accordingly.

211 Throughout the analysis, the researcher applied bracketing by suspending personal biases and  
212 assumptions to prevent them from influencing interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019; Sturgess, 2018).  
213 For instance, the researcher set aside normative assumptions such as “the media should not be  
214 sensational” to remain open to journalists’ perspectives. This step was important to maintain the purity  
215 of phenomenological description. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data  
216 among informants and linking them with observational findings, thereby strengthening the credibility  
217 of the results. In addition, peer debriefing with two communication scholars was conducted to discuss  
218 the emerging themes and their interpretation, ensuring consistency between data and analysis.

## 219 **2.3 Credibility and Ethics**

220  
221 This study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Tidar University. The application  
222 was submitted to this institution due to the absence of formal ethical review mechanisms within the  
223 authors’ affiliated institution. Ethically, this study obtained permission from TV One’s editorial

224 management to interview its journalists and to observe live broadcast production routines. Informants  
225 were free to decline answering sensitive questions and could withdraw from the interview at any  
226 time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all informants and by omitting any  
227 details that could lead to personal identification. The study followed general ethical principles in  
228 qualitative research, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and minimization of harm.

### 229 **3 Finding**

#### 230 **3.1 Journalists as Legal Communicators for the Public**

231 The informants acknowledged their central role as conveyors of legal information from the courtroom  
232 to the wider public. They recognized that many viewers are unfamiliar with legal terminology and  
233 procedures, thus journalists act as “translators” who convert legal language into public language. A  
234 field reporter (R1) explained,

235 *“During the hearing, the judge may use terms like ‘the objection is rejected because the*  
236 *indictment is considered precise.’ I have to explain on-air that an ‘objection’ is a kind of protest*  
237 *note submitted by the defendant’s legal counsel, and that if it is rejected, the trial continues to*  
238 *the main case.”* This statement illustrates the journalist’s effort to simplify legal jargon without  
239 reducing the substantive meaning.

240 All journalists admitted preparing materials before broadcasting by reviewing publicly available case  
241 information, consulting legal experts, and analyzing trial-related materials from accessible media and  
242 official sources. This preparation enabled them to understand the legal issues that arise during the trial  
243 and communicate them effectively to audiences in simplified language.

244 Informants also felt responsible for maintaining the accuracy of legal information. They tried to provide  
245 context for each development in the trial, such as explaining the function of each stage of the process  
246 (indictment reading, witness examination, prosecution, defense plea) in a structured manner. A studio  
247 presenter (R3) stated:

248 *“I consider the viewers as laypeople who need a complete picture. So in every segment, I*  
249 *summarize: today the court agenda is the examination of a forensic expert witness, aiming to*  
250 *establish the cause of the victim’s death.”*

251 This approach helps viewers understand the logic and flow of the trial rather than seeing only  
252 fragmented events. The journalists agreed that by explaining legal background and technical terms, the  
253 public can follow the proceedings with greater clarity. This aligns with their ideal that the media must  
254 contribute to improving public legal literacy. A senior reporter (R2) expressed a similar view:

255 *“If ordinary people understand what an indictment is, or the difference between factual*  
256 *witnesses and expert witnesses, it means our work succeeded in mediating legal language for*  
257 *the people.”*

258 These findings affirm that courtroom journalists act as mediators of justice, translating legal processes  
259 into accessible public narratives that shape how justice is understood by audiences. This indicates that  
260 mediating justice operates through communicative translation, where journalists actively reconstruct  
261 legal meaning for public consumption

#### 262 **3.2 The Dilemma Between Education and Dramatization in Live Broadcasts**

263 This theme strongly emerged from all informants’ experiences. They faced a two-directional pressure:  
264 on one hand, ideally, courtroom broadcasts should be treated as purely informative and educational  
265 news coverage; on the other hand, the live television format demands dramatic elements to attract

266 viewers. Field reporters R1 and R4 revealed that production teams often instructed them to highlight  
267 emotional or confrontational moments in the courtroom.

268 *“A producer once said, ‘if there’s tension between the judge and the lawyer, report it*  
269 *immediately, that’s a good moment!’,”* R4 explained.

270 As a result, reporters often found themselves in a dilemma. When trials proceed monotonously (such  
271 as long document readings), there is a temptation to embellish reports with opinions or speculation to  
272 avoid boring the audience. However, journalists also understood that excessive dramatization could  
273 obscure legal substance and unfairly influence public opinion. R2 admitted having been reprimanded  
274 by an editor for unintentionally dramatizing a defendant’s reaction:

275 *“I once said ‘Defendant X looked panicked and repeatedly wiped sweat...’. The editor was*  
276 *angry because we are not infotainment. Since then, I’ve been more careful, only reporting facts*  
277 *without dramatic additions.”*

278 Nevertheless, some informants acknowledged that dramaturgy cannot be entirely avoided. Certain  
279 courtroom situations are inherently dramatic, such as the victim’s family weeping hysterically or heated  
280 debates between defense lawyers and prosecutors. These moments naturally become the focus of  
281 camera attention. The dilemma lies in editorial decisions regarding how far journalists should exploit  
282 such emotions. R3 explained:

283 *“I have to choose words carefully: if a witness cries, I report the fact ‘the witness cried while*  
284 *recalling the events,’ without exaggerating it with sensational wording.”*

285 This reflects an effort to maintain balance. Journalists still report dramatic elements because they are  
286 part of the event, but refrain from excessive sensationalism.

287 Several journalists also acknowledged the presence of rating pressure. The success of a live courtroom  
288 program is partly judged by audience ratings, which implicitly encourages production teams to look  
289 for dramatic angles. Field journalists often found themselves at a crossroads between adhering to  
290 journalistic ideals that emphasize information and education or following commercial pressures for  
291 sensationalism.

292 *“Honestly, as a journalist I want to educate the public. But sometimes the boss asks for an*  
293 *angle with a ‘wow factor’. This is our inner struggle in every major trial,”* said R6.

294  
295 Overall, this dilemma *reflects the core tension in mediating justice*, where journalists must balance  
296 the responsibility of conveying accurate legal information with the need to present courtroom events  
297 in a publicly engaging manner.

### 298 **3.3 Strategies for Bridging Legal Language with Public Understanding**

299 The study identified several communication strategies that journalists use to ensure that trial  
300 information is easily understood by the general audience.

301 *The first* strategy is simplification of legal terminology. As mentioned previously, journalists replace  
302 legal terms with everyday equivalents or provide brief on-air definitions. For example, “interlocutory  
303 decision” is explained as “a temporary decision issued in the middle of the trial,” or “criminal  
304 execution” is described by reporters as “the implementation of punishment for a convicted person.”

305 *The second* strategy is contextual elaboration. Journalists not only report what happens in the  
306 courtroom but also provide background information about the case and its legal relevance. This  
307 resembles a news feature style, in which reporters insert historical context or case chronology during  
308 breaks in the trial. R1 gave an example: during a corruption trial, “*While waiting for the judges to*

309 *deliberate, I reminded viewers: this case began with a sting operation last year involving an official*  
310 *from Ministry X, causing a state financial loss of....”* This strategy helps viewers understand the  
311 context of each stage of the trial.

312 *The third* strategy is the use of expert sources. In several broadcasts, TV One invited legal scholars or  
313 experts as analysts in the studio. Journalists moderated discussions with these experts to clarify  
314 technical aspects. For instance, when there was debate over the legal articles in the indictment, the  
315 presenter would ask, *“What does this article mean, and why do the prosecutor and defense interpret it*  
316 *differently?”* The expert’s explanation helped clarify matters for viewers. R3 stated that experts were  
317 very helpful:

318 *“My language has limitations. With an expert present, technical terms like ‘elements of an*  
319 *offense’ can be explained thoroughly without fear of error.”*

320 Expert presence also enhances credibility and analytical depth.

321 *The fourth* strategy involves visualization and graphics. The production team prepares supporting  
322 visuals such as infographics showing trial procedures, diagrams of relationships among actors in the  
323 case, or highlighted points of the indictment. Journalists use these visuals while explaining the case,  
324 giving audiences a visual reference. Research observation noted that, during complex trials, TV One  
325 displayed a timeline of the case on the screen while reporters explained each stage accordingly. This  
326 technique helps viewers understand lengthy legal processes.

327 Fifth, journalists maintain a communicative tone and language style. They avoid rigid or overly formal  
328 reporting and instead adopt a conversational tone, as if explaining to a friend. R2 noted:

329 *“I always imagine explaining things to my mother at home. So I choose simple words, use a*  
330 *friendly tone, and avoid sounding preachy.”*

331 This humanistic approach makes viewers feel included in a conversation rather than lectured, thereby  
332 increasing their understanding. These strategies demonstrate how mediating justice is practically  
333 enacted through communicative techniques that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes  
334 for public audiences. Through these strategies, journalists do not merely report events but actively  
335 shape the public’s comprehension of legal processes.  
336

#### 337 3.4 **Reflections on Professionalism and Journalistic Idealism in Live Broadcasts**

338 The informants reflected on the values they uphold and the conflicts they experience between idealism  
339 and practical demands. Generally, all journalists emphasized their commitment to objectivity and  
340 accuracy. They understood that the fate of a defendant is at stake in the courtroom, so reporting must  
341 not be biased or prejudicial.

342 *“We are not judges, so we must remain balanced. I always insert the phrase ‘allegedly’ to*  
343 *remind viewers that no verdict has been issued,”* said R4.

344 This shows adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence. Several journalists admitted having  
345 been contacted by defense lawyers or court public relations officers when objections arose concerning  
346 their reports. R2 recounted:

347 *“Once the legal counsel protested because we referred to their client as a ‘corruptor.’ In fact,*  
348 *the person was only a defendant. We acknowledged the mistake and corrected it. That was a*  
349 *lesson on caution.”*

350 Such experiences strengthened their professional discipline regarding the use of precise and neutral  
351 terminology.

352 From an idealistic perspective, the TV One journalists expressed pride that their work helps the public  
353 gain a better understanding of the law. Many saw themselves as journalists with an educator idealism.  
354 R5 stated,

355 *“I entered journalism because I wanted to be a watchdog. Covering trials is part of social*  
356 *control so the law remains transparent. There is personal satisfaction when my coverage helps*  
357 *people understand the law and monitor justice.”*  
358

359 This reflects that mediating justice is not only a professional obligation but also a moral commitment,  
360 where journalists perceive their role as contributing to public understanding and oversight of legal  
361 processes. Thus, mediating justice is experienced not only as a technical reporting activity but as a  
362 meaningful and value-driven communicative practice.

363 However, their idealism is not free from real-world constraints. Time pressure and speed often made it  
364 difficult for journalists to achieve ideal-quality reporting. During a trial, reporters must multitask:  
365 listening to courtroom testimony, taking notes, and preparing for live reporting simultaneously. Under  
366 such conditions, R3 admitted having once failed to cross-check a piece of information before  
367 broadcasting due to time pressure.

368 *“There was a moment I mistakenly mentioned the prosecutor’s name, and the presenter*  
369 *corrected me immediately. I was very embarrassed, but it reminded me that accuracy is number*  
370 *one.”*

371 This highlights the challenge of maintaining professionalism under time constraints.

372 Organizational interests also sometimes played a role. When a trial involved a prominent political  
373 figure, editorial attention was heightened. R6 diplomatically noted,

374 *“We are certainly independent, but the editorial team has certain considerations regarding the*  
375 *reporting angle, especially when it concerns a public figure.”*

376 Although not elaborated, this implies that journalists sometimes negotiate between idealism of  
377 independence and the media organization’s agenda-setting dynamics. Nevertheless, journalists  
378 expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their reporting despite external pressures.

379 Another reflection pertains to personal qualities they developed through courtroom journalism.  
380 Covering lengthy trials trained journalists in patience and diligence. R2 noted,

381 *“I used to get bored easily. After covering long trials, I learned to be patient and focused. If*  
382 *you lose concentration even for a moment, you might miss important facts.”*

383 They also gained legal knowledge over time, which enhanced their competence as specialized legal  
384 journalists. Ultimately, the informants agreed that despite ethical dilemmas, time pressure, and industry  
385 demands, they found meaning in their work. *“It is a demanding but noble job,”* said R1, *“We serve as*  
386 *information bridges. As long as we uphold ethics and quality, I believe we contribute positively to*  
387 *society and the justice system.”* These reflections affirm that the idealism of TV One’s courtroom  
388 journalists remains intact, coexisting with the professionalism they continually refine amid practical  
389 challenges.

390 **4 Discussion**

391 The findings of this study enrich our understanding of courtroom journalism as a form of  
392 communication practice in the legal sphere. In general, the experiences of TV One journalists reaffirm  
393 the role of the press as a mediator of justice, namely a medium that brings judicial processes before the  
394 public, thereby expanding the principle of open justice through broadcast channels (Bosland &  
395 Townend, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). This study conceptualizes mediating justice as a  
396 communicative process through which journalists translate, frame, and represent legal proceedings in  
397 ways that shape public understanding of justice. This is in line with international literature that views  
398 court journalism as essential in a democracy because it provides citizens with access to “witness” the  
399 enforcement of the law and to assess whether the process is fair (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021, 2025).  
400 By foregrounding journalists’ lived experiences, this study moves beyond normative debates about  
401 whether trials should be televised and instead examines how justice is communicated and mediated  
402 through everyday journalistic practices.

403  
404 The journalists in this study act as agents of mediating justice by translating legal language and  
405 procedures into formats that can be understood by laypeople. This confirms the position of journalists  
406 as public legal communicators, as argued by Magin and Maurer (2019), who state that court beat  
407 reporting requires specific competencies to bridge the worlds of law and society thereby reinforcing  
408 their role in shaping public understanding of legal processes. (Magin & Maurer, 2019). In this sense,  
409 journalists function as communicative intermediaries who transform institutional legal discourse into  
410 accessible public narratives, thereby shaping how justice is understood and interpreted by audiences.

411 The ability of the informants to translate legal jargon is consistent with practical guidelines on legal  
412 journalism in many countries, where court reporters are expected to understand legal terminology so  
413 that they can explain it accurately to the public. In this way, journalists function as a kind of informal  
414 “teacher” for society on matters of legal literacy. This educational contribution is important, given that  
415 public legal awareness is often low; the mass media can serve as a vehicle for improving legal literacy  
416 (Sevignani, 2022).

417 On the other hand, the findings also highlight the dilemma of education versus dramatization faced by  
418 journalists. The informants experience a pull between their idealism to present trials as they are in an  
419 informative manner and the pragmatism of the industry that demands dramatic elements to make  
420 broadcasts attractive. This tension illustrates the complexity of mediating justice, where journalists  
421 must balance accurate legal communication with the need to present courtroom events in an  
422 understandable and engaging manner. This dilemma parallels the findings of Ravid (2017), who notes  
423 that the television format often pushes for sensational material, thereby reducing the educational  
424 potential of coverage (Ravid, 2017).

425 At this point, the phenomenon can be further interpreted through Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical  
426 perspective, where courtroom proceedings—once mediated through live broadcasting—take on the  
427 characteristics of staged performances for public audiences. Wittchen (2023) further shows that in  
428 sensational crime reporting, journalists face ethical challenges in maintaining objectivity amid pressure  
429 to exploit emotional aspects (Wittchen, 2023). From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments  
430 represent the *performative dimension of mediating justice*, where courtroom events are publicly  
431 represented and interpreted through media narratives.

432  
433 This study finds that TV One journalists try to balance these demands as part of their effort in mediating  
434 justice, ensuring that legal processes remain accurately represented while still accessible to the public.  
435 From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments represent “front-stage” expressions of legal drama,  
436 where emotional displays and courtroom interactions become visible to the public as part of a mediated  
437 performance of justice. This attitude demonstrates internalization of journalistic ethics and aligns with

438 the ideal of objectivity, which continues to be upheld as a foundational norm (Schudson, Michael ;  
439 Anderson, 2009).

440  
441 The journalists are aware of the dangers of falling into sensationalism: the public may gain a distorted  
442 picture of legal processes, and public trust in the judiciary may be negatively affected as  
443 misrepresentation may distort how justice is publicly understood (Ravid, 2017). Ardilla et al. (2020)  
444 also highlight that uncontrolled live broadcasts of trials can violate the presumption of innocence and  
445 affect the evidentiary process in court (Ardilla et al., 2020). This highlights the tension between  
446 visibility and responsibility, where increased public access through media exposure simultaneously  
447 amplifies both transparency and the risk of misrepresentation. Therefore, journalists' efforts to  
448 maintain neutral language and avoid judgment in their reporting deserve appreciation as a form of  
449 professional responsibility. This phenomenon of "keeping distance" from dramatization is consistent  
450 with the concept of strategic ritual to maintain objectivity, where journalists consciously avoid  
451 excessive interpretation and adhere strictly to facts (Wittchen, 2023) .

452 At the same time, this study confirms that dramatic elements are inherently part of trials as media  
453 events. High-profile cases often stir public emotions, and the media functions as a stage on which legal  
454 drama is watched by the masses (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011). From Goffman's perspective, the  
455 courtroom becomes a hybrid space in which institutional authority intersects with performative  
456 visibility. Legal actors perform roles before both immediate courtroom participants and a broader  
457 mediated audience, while journalists function as interpreters who frame this performance into coherent  
458 narratives. Meanwhile, critical processes such as judicial deliberation remain in the "backstage,"  
459 invisible yet central to the production of justice.

460 In this context, journalists are in a difficult position, making it necessary to maintain a balance between  
461 informing and engaging as part of their role in mediating justice: they must report human-interest  
462 aspects (which are often dramatic) but must not descend into cheap infotainment, making it necessary  
463 to maintain a balance between "informing" and "entertaining" in courtroom news (Masduki, 2017).  
464 The findings of this study show that journalists attempt to walk this tightrope reasonably well, for  
465 example through the choice of factual and non-hyperbolic wording when describing dramatic  
466 situations.

467 Such skills are likely honed through experience and ethical awareness that the credibility of legal  
468 reporting must be preserved. In the long term, journalists' choice to prioritize education over sensation  
469 can enhance public trust in both the media and the judiciary. Research indicates that informative  
470 transparency of courts through the media can strengthen public confidence in the legal system  
471 (Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). Conversely, if the media are perceived as overly judgmental or  
472 deliberately polarizing opinion, an erosion of trust may occur (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011).  
473 Therefore, this dilemma must continue to be managed through ethical codes and internal editorial  
474 guidelines. It may be necessary to develop specific guidelines for courtroom journalism, as has been  
475 proposed by the Indonesian Press Council, so that journalists have clear guidance in balancing  
476 educational functions and the demands of dramatization (Manan, 2015).

477  
478 With regard to communication strategies for bridging law and the public, the findings of this study are  
479 concrete and highly applicable. These strategies reflect how mediating justice is operationalized  
480 through communicative practices that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes for public  
481 audiences. Language simplification, provision of context, involving experts, and visualization are  
482 techniques that are well-known in the practice of explanatory journalism (Parisi, 2009). The success of

483 journalists in implementing these strategies is reflected in public appreciation. For instance, TV One's  
484 live trial programs often receive positive feedback for being informative. The strategy of involving  
485 legal experts also aligns with the trend of interdisciplinary collaboration in modern journalism, in  
486 which journalists are not reluctant to bring in experts to enrich and verify information (Ward, 2018).  
487 This helps maintain the accuracy of substantive content, particularly because journalists typically do  
488 not have formal legal education. It also reflects the role of media as a knowledge broker that connects  
489 expert sources with the public (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). From a communication perspective, the effort  
490 to reshape complex terminology into easily understood forms is a manifestation of democratic  
491 communication, a type of communication that is inclusive and accessible to different segments of the  
492 public (Sevignani, 2022)

493 The communication strategies of TV One journalists also demonstrate adaptation to the characteristics  
494 of television as a medium. The use of infographics and visuals is an example of leveraging the strengths  
495 of an audio-visual medium for educational purposes. This is consistent with Dick's (2014) study, which  
496 emphasizes the importance of visual elements in covering legal processes to make them more engaging  
497 for contemporary audiences accustomed to visual information (Dick, 2014). Certainly, not all legal  
498 concepts can be easily visualized, but steps such as creating case timelines or graphics depicting the  
499 structure of a case greatly help audiences grasp the logic and flow of legal processes.

500 This study supports the recommendation that media should be creative in presenting legal information  
501 without compromising accuracy. This approach could be replicated in other types of court reporting;  
502 for example, newspapers and online media can also include supporting infographics. In this way, the  
503 practices of TV One journalists can serve as a small model of how legal communication to the public  
504 can be carried out effectively.

505 In terms of professionalism and idealism, this study reveals the internal dynamics experienced by  
506 journalists. On one hand, they adhere to the core values of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and  
507 verification, especially in sensitive coverage such as trials (Schudson, Michael ; Anderson, 2009). They  
508 realize that mistakes in reporting can have serious consequences for both the credibility of the media  
509 and the judicial process. This resonates with Wittchen's (2023) findings that legal reporters often feel  
510 a heavier ethical burden because their reporting directly intersects with the fates of defendants and  
511 victims (Wittchen, 2023).

512 TV One journalists appear to shoulder this burden seriously, as seen in their reflective accounts of  
513 being consistently careful with their wording and the information they present. Their adherence to  
514 ethical codes, such as not taking sides and using terms like "defendant" instead of "perpetrator,"  
515 reflects their professionalism. This is parallel to studies in other countries, such as Denmark, where  
516 court reporters place great emphasis on writing facts without interpretation to avoid accusations of bias  
517 (Wittchen, 2023).

518 On the other hand, the journalists' idealism as agents of public enlightenment is clearly visible. They  
519 view their work as meaningful in serving the public interest, a form of civic-minded journalism. This  
520 recalls the concept of civic journalism, in which journalists seek to empower citizens with information  
521 needed for democratic participation (Mellado, 2015). Courtroom coverage can be considered part of  
522 civic journalism because it relates to justice and the law, which are pillars of democracy.

523 The informants' idealism, expressed in their sense of "helping to safeguard justice," indicates that their  
524 professional identity leans toward the role of watchdog and educator rather than mere entertainer  
525 (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). In role performance studies, watchdog and civic educator roles are part of  
526 normative orientations embraced by journalists in many countries (Mellado, 2015). These findings  
527 confirm that Indonesian journalists, at least in the legal field, also embody these roles.

528 From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by positioning courtroom journalism as a form of  
529 mediating justice, emphasizing the central role of communicative practices in shaping public  
530 engagement with legal processes. First, it extends work on open justice and courtroom media by  
531 conceptualizing live courtroom journalism as a form of “mediating justice” in which journalists  
532 translate institutional transparency into communicative practices shaped by commercial and ethical  
533 constraints. Second, it enriches role performance and civic journalism research by documenting how  
534 journalists in a Global South context enact hybrid roles, as legal translators, educators, and performers,  
535 while navigating structural pressures such as ratings and editorial agendas. Third, it nuances debates  
536 on “trial by media” by showing that sensationalism is not simply an outcome imposed from above, but  
537 an arena of ongoing negotiation at the level of individual journalists who attempt to “hold the line”  
538 through strategic language choices and professional rituals.

539 Practically, the findings have implications for newsrooms, regulators, and judicial institutions. For  
540 news organizations, the study suggests the need for explicit internal guidelines on courtroom  
541 broadcasting, ongoing training in legal basics for journalists, and editorial support that rewards  
542 accuracy and educational value rather than sensationalism alone. For regulators and press councils, the  
543 findings support initiatives to develop specific ethical codes for courtroom journalism that protect both  
544 the presumption of innocence and the public’s right to information. For courts, the study indicates that  
545 constructive engagement with journalists—through accessible public relations officers, media  
546 briefings, and educational materials, can enhance the quality of coverage without undermining judicial  
547 independence.

548 Contextually, this study adds an important Global South perspective to predominantly Western debates  
549 on court transparency and media. Indonesia’s media system, marked by commercial competition, high  
550 public interest in high-profile trials, and expanding digital access, represents a fertile setting in which  
551 to observe how justice is communication and mediated in practice. The experiences of TV One  
552 journalists demonstrate that even in a competitive television market, journalistic idealism and  
553 professionalism can persist, albeit within negotiated boundaries. Future comparative work could  
554 explore whether similar patterns occur in other countries in the region or among different types of  
555 media, such as online platforms and social media live streams.

556 The lived experiences of journalists also reaffirm that the meaning of a job, such as covering court  
557 proceedings, is shaped by intensive interaction between journalists and their social environment  
558 (courts, newsrooms, and the public). Each journalist interprets their role not only through formal job  
559 descriptions but also through the values they hold and the audience responses they perceive. The  
560 journalists’ deep sense of mission in educating the public suggests that they experience their work as  
561 a public calling. This is consistent with theories of identity and the meaning of work, which state that  
562 workers who see their jobs as meaningful tend to have higher satisfaction and performance. Overall,  
563 the findings demonstrate that mediating justice is a dynamic communicative process shaped by  
564 journalists’ practices, experiences, and professional commitments in translating law into public  
565 understanding.

566 The findings of this study should be situated within the broader Global South context, where the  
567 mediation of justice is shaped by specific socio-legal and media conditions. In Indonesia, the legal  
568 system operates not only through formal procedural frameworks but also through cultural dynamics  
569 that influence courtroom interactions and public perceptions of justice.

570 This context directly affects how journalists mediate justice, as they must navigate not only legal  
571 accuracy but also social expectations and symbolic meanings attached to courtroom proceedings. In  
572 addition, Indonesia’s relatively flexible media regulation allows extensive live broadcasting of trials,

573 creating a unique communicative environment in which legal processes become highly visible to the  
574 public.

575 At the same time, media ownership structures—often linked to political and economic elites—  
576 introduce additional pressures that shape editorial decisions and framing practices. These conditions  
577 complicate the role of journalistic idealism, as journalists must continuously negotiate between  
578 professional values, institutional constraints, and audience engagement in real-time reporting.

579 Furthermore, varying levels of public trust in judicial institutions position journalists as key mediators  
580 of justice, influencing how legal truth is constructed and interpreted in the public sphere. Compared to  
581 more tightly regulated Western contexts, the Indonesian setting illustrates a more open yet complex  
582 form of mediated justice, where information, performance, and public accountability are deeply  
583 intertwined.

584

## 585 5 Conclusion

586 The experiences of TV One journalists in live courtroom broadcasting illustrate how justice is mediated  
587 to the public through communicative practices grounded in professional and ethical considerations.  
588 This study demonstrates that courtroom journalism is not merely a process of reporting legal events,  
589 but a form of *mediated justice* in which journalists actively translate, frame, and perform legal  
590 processes for public audiences. Journalists function as legal communicators who translate judicial  
591 processes into accessible public information while upholding accuracy and factual integrity.

592

593 They face an inherent tension in mediating justice, balancing their educational function with the need  
594 to present courtroom events in engaging and publicly accessible ways. However, through professional  
595 awareness, journalists strive to prioritize educational value without entirely disregarding the human-  
596 interest elements inherent to courtroom events. Various communication strategies are employed—such  
597 as simplifying legal terminology, providing contextual explanations, involving experts, and utilizing  
598 visual elements—to support the process of mediating justice and bridging the gap between legal  
599 language and public understanding. Throughout their work, journalists reflect on the importance of  
600 maintaining professionalism—including neutrality, adherence to ethical codes, and disciplined  
601 verification—while preserving their idealism as media workers committed to serving the public  
602 interest.

603 Live courtroom journalism can be regarded as a concrete manifestation of the press's democratic  
604 function: informing the public while overseeing the judiciary as a form of transparent accountability.  
605 When journalists are able to navigate challenges ethically and creatively, live broadcasts of court  
606 hearings become not only a spectacle but also a source of guidance—mass legal education that  
607 enlightens society while simultaneously encouraging courts to operate with greater openness and  
608 fairness. In this way, the media truly plays the role of a bridge mediating justice in the public sphere.

609 This study contributes to theoretical debates on open justice, role performance, and trial by media by  
610 positioning courtroom journalism as a practice of mediating justice, grounded in journalists' lived  
611 experiences within a Global South context. It demonstrates how legal education, dramaturgy, and  
612 professionalism intersect in everyday newsroom practice. Sustaining this practice requires collective  
613 efforts, such as editorial support, proportionate regulation that does not excessively constrain press  
614 freedom, and improved journalistic capacity in legal reporting.

615 Naturally, this study has limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively small and drawn from  
616 a single television station, thus not fully representing the broader spectrum of courtroom journalism in  
617 Indonesia. Insights from other media organizations or from print and online journalists may differ.  
618 Second, this research focuses on journalists' perspectives, while the views of audiences or judicial  
619 actors regarding live trial broadcasts remain unexplored. Future studies may investigate the impact of  
620 live courtroom broadcasts on public legal understanding or public perceptions of the judiciary, for  
621 example through audience research or experimental designs. Additionally, comparative studies across  
622 different media organizations or national contexts could reveal whether similar strategies and dilemmas  
623 are experienced by journalists elsewhere and could help refine a more general model of mediating  
624 justice through media.

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# Mediating justice through live courtroom broadcast: a phenomenological study of journalist lived experiences in Indonesian television

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Live courtroom broadcasts have extended the principle of open justice into the mediated public sphere in Indonesia. Journalists from TV One function as communicative intermediaries who translate complex legal proceedings into accessible narratives for wider audiences. This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore journalists' lived experiences in covering high-profile trials. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with six journalists and observation of live broadcast production. The data were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological method based on Colaizzi's analytical procedure, allowing the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and construction of thematic structures representing journalists' lived experiences. Findings reveal tensions between the goals of legal education and the dramaturgical demands of live courtroom broadcasting. The study conceptualizes courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, where journalists translate legal processes into accessible public knowledge and shape public understanding of law in the Global South.

KEYWORDS

courtroom journalism, Indonesia, legal communication, live courtroom broadcast, mediating justice

## 1 Introduction

Open court hearings constitute a fundamental principle in modern judicial systems aimed at ensuring accountability and transparency (Johnston, 2018). In the media era, this principle is increasingly realized through courtroom coverage by the press, including live broadcasts on television. Since the mid-2010s, particularly following widely publicized cases such as the 2016 Jessica Kumala Wongso trial, live courtroom broadcasting has become increasingly prominent in Indonesia. In this context, TV One has emerged as one of the leading television networks consistently broadcasting high-profile court proceedings live, positioning itself as a key actor in shaping public access to judicial processes. TV One operates as a news-oriented commercial television network within Indonesia's competitive media ecosystem, with a strong emphasis on political and legal coverage. Unlike general entertainment-based broadcasters, TV One positions itself as a channel that prioritizes real-time news, including live courtroom

proceedings. This study selects TV One as a critical case due to its consistent involvement in broadcasting high-profile trials. Rather than representing the entire Indonesian media landscape, TV One is treated as an information-rich case that provides in-depth insight into the communicative practices of courtroom journalism.

This phenomenon of “trial by television” has generated expectations that media can serve as an instrument for public legal education (Ravid, 2017). The mass media carries an educational function alongside its informational and entertainment roles, as mandated by the Press Law No. 40/1999. Courtroom journalism is therefore regarded as a manifestation of that educational function by making judicial processes more accessible to the public (Ardilla et al., 2020; Johnston, 2018). This study positions courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, in which journalists act as communicative bridges translating legal processes into public understanding. However, existing studies have largely focused on normative debates about courtroom transparency and media effects, while limited attention has been given to how justice is mediated through everyday journalistic practices, particularly in live courtroom broadcasting contexts.

Journalists covering trials act as legal communicators (Rieke and Stutman, 2022; Widodo, 2024), translating complex legal language and procedures into information that can be easily understood by general audiences (Bryan and Kromphardt, 2016; Magin and Maurer, 2019). Through live broadcasts, journalists bridge the highly technical legal world with the public’s need for comprehensible legal information (Ravid, 2017).

However, concerns arise that the process of mediating justice through live broadcasting may shift from educational communication toward dramatized representation, potentially affecting how justice is understood by the public (Fox et al., 2001; Ravid, 2017). Court coverage risks presenting legal events as dramatic spectacles, highlighting courtroom confrontations, emotional expressions of defendants and witnesses, and speculative commentary, all of which can enhance the dramatic tone of the broadcast (Ravid, 2017). The dilemma between educational value and dramatization has sparked debate among both media practitioners and academic scholars. Studies suggest that the media often selects sensational criminal cases for live broadcast to increase audience appeal, potentially creating an unbalanced portrayal that undermines the legal educational function. As a result, televised trials may disrupt the presumption of innocence and influence public opinion before a verdict is reached (Habsari, 2017; Manan, 2015).

In addition to these concerns, courtroom communication can also be understood as a performative process. From a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1959), social interactions are structured as performances in which actors present themselves before an audience within specific settings. This perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how courtroom actors and journalists construct and communicate representations of justice in live broadcast contexts. In this study, journalistic idealism refers to a normative orientation in which journalists perceive their professional role as serving the public interest through truth-telling, public education, and accountability. This idealism is grounded in core journalistic values such as objectivity, independence, and social

responsibility (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017; Schudson and Anderson, 2009). This idealism plays a central role in shaping how journalists mediate justice in live courtroom broadcasting, influencing how legal processes are interpreted and communicated to the public.

The widely publicized 2016 “cyanide coffee” case involving Jessica Kumala Wongso, for instance, was broadcast intensively and triggered trial by media, shaping public opinion even before the court’s decision (Suryawati, 2017). This example highlights growing criticisms that the dramatization of court proceedings by the media may erode substantive justice (Ravid, 2017).

For journalists engaged in covering live courtroom proceedings, maintaining a balance between educational goals and entertainment elements becomes a distinct challenge. They are required to provide accurate information about legal processes, such as the reading of indictments and the presentation of evidence or legal arguments, while ensuring the broadcast remains engaging enough to retain audience attention. Consequently, journalists develop specific communication strategies to bridge legal language with public understanding. These strategies include using simplified vocabulary or lay equivalents for legal terminology, offering contextual explanations about courtroom procedures, and featuring expert legal commentators as supporting communicators who help unpack technical legal concepts (Bryan and Kromphardt, 2016). Through such strategies, journalists aim to maintain the accuracy of legal substance without compromising the audience’s ability to understand the information being conveyed (Stern, 2014). In addition, interactions with court public relations officers are utilized to obtain correct information about the proceedings, ensuring that the information broadcast remains accurate and compliant with legal norms (Ardilla et al., 2020). From the perspective of professionalism and idealism, courtroom journalism demands a high level of ethical commitment. Journalists must adhere to professional codes of ethics, including accuracy, balance, and respect for the presumption of innocence, even under pressure from rating expectations and sensational demands (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018; Schudson and Anderson, 2009).

Idealistic journalists view courtroom reporting as a noble mission to enlighten the public about legal processes and reinforce public accountability (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021). They believe that transparent and informative trial coverage allows the media to contribute to judicial oversight and public access to justice (Johnston, 2018; Wittchen, 2023). Yet such idealism is often tested by practical realities, including limited airtime, the pressure to produce “dramatic moments,” and legal risks such as allegations of contempt of court or defamation when coverage is deemed excessive (Ardilla et al., 2020; Habsari, 2017; Huang, 2021). It is therefore important to understand how journalists reflect on their professionalism and idealism when broadcasting trials live, including the values they uphold and negotiate when idealism intersects with the pragmatism of the media industry.

Conceptually, this study is informed by three interrelated bodies of scholarship: (1) the principle of open justice and the mediatization of courts, which frame courtroom journalism as a channel through which judicial transparency is extended into the public sphere; (2) role performance and civic journalism perspectives, which emphasize journalists’ normative functions as watchdogs, educators, and mediators of public interest; and (3)

research on media events and “trial by media,” which highlights the dramaturgical and affective dimensions of televised legal proceedings. While prior studies have examined televised trials and courtroom reporting in various jurisdictions, much of the literature focuses on legal implications, audience effects, or content analysis, with comparatively less attention to the lived experiences of journalists, especially in Global South contexts.

Based on the above background, this study asks: How do TV One journalists experience live courtroom broadcasting as a means of legal education and a form of mediating justice? Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do TV One journalists understand and enact their roles as legal communicators in live courtroom broadcasts?

RQ2: How do they experience and negotiate the tension between educational goals and dramatization imperatives?

RQ3: What communication strategies do they employ to bridge legal language and lay audiences?

RQ4: How do they reflect on professionalism and journalistic idealism in the practice of live broadcasting?

This study is significant because in Indonesia there is limited in-depth research on courtroom journalism, even though the phenomenon is increasingly relevant alongside the expansion of judicial transparency in the digital era. Using a phenomenological approach, this research explores the subjective experiences of journalists, thereby offering new perspectives on courtroom journalism as a form of public communication in the legal domain and contributing empirical insight from a Global South media system to broader debates on media, law, and democracy.

## 2 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of television journalists involved in broadcasting court proceedings live. The study aims to capture how journalists experience and interpret their role in mediating justice through communicative practices. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the meaning of informants’ subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon (Sturges, 2018).

TV One was chosen as a critical case due to its consistent and intensive involvement in broadcasting high-profile courtroom proceedings in Indonesia. This study adopts a critical case sampling strategy, where TV One is selected not as a representative of all Indonesian media, but as an information-rich case that provides deep insight into live courtroom journalism practices. Compared to other national broadcasters, TV One demonstrates a stronger editorial commitment to continuous live trial coverage, making it particularly relevant for examining real-time legal communication processes. Therefore, the selection of TV One is based on its depth of engagement with courtroom broadcasting rather than its representativeness of the broader media landscape.

### 2.1 Informants and data collection procedures

The research informants consisted of six TV One journalists with a minimum of five years of experience covering major

court proceedings live. Informants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: prior involvement as field reporters or studio presenters in live broadcasts of high-profile trials such as corruption cases or nationally significant criminal cases, and willingness to reflect on their professional experiences. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, in which a relatively small number of participants is considered adequate to achieve depth and richness of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness. Most informants served as field reporters covering trials at court locations, while several also worked as studio presenters during live broadcasts. Before the interviews, all informants agreed to participate with a guarantee of confidentiality. For the purposes of this study, informants’ identities were anonymized using labels R1 through R6. This study focuses specifically on journalists as primary informants because they are directly involved in real-time processes of translating, framing, and communicating courtroom events to the public. While editors, producers, and news directors play important roles in shaping newsroom output, their involvement operates at a different organizational level and would require a broader analytical scope. Therefore, their exclusion is intentional and aligned with the phenomenological focus of this study on lived experience. This limitation is acknowledged, and future research is recommended to include other newsroom actors in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of courtroom journalism practices.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via synchronous online interaction using the Zoom platform, allowing direct engagement, probing, and clarification of participants’ lived experiences. This real-time interaction ensured that the interviews retained the characteristics of direct qualitative inquiry despite being conducted in a mediated environment. The interviews focused on four themes: the role of journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization in reporting, strategies used to bridge legal language for public understanding, and personal reflections on idealism and professionalism during live trial coverage. Interview questions were designed to elicit concrete examples, emotional responses, and perspectives related to each theme. Examples include “*Can you describe an experience where you had to explain a difficult legal term during a live broadcast?*” or “*What internal conflict have you experienced between presenting the trial as it is versus pressure to make the broadcast engaging?*” All interviews were audio-recorded with informants’ consent and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to enrich contextual understanding. The researcher accompanied the TV One team during coverage of a nationally significant corruption trial broadcast live in early 2025. The researcher observed journalists’ working dynamics in the courtroom and in the media center, their interactions with sources such as prosecutors, defense lawyers, and court public relations officers, and the coordination processes with the studio during broadcasts. Field notes from these observations contributed to a deeper understanding of the situation and the time pressures faced by journalists, enabling more contextual interpretation of interview data.

The researcher occupied a position as an informed outsider: familiar with media and legal communication issues through academic work but not part of TV One's newsroom. This positionality required reflexivity in order to avoid imposing normative assumptions about "how the media should behave" and to remain open to journalists' own sense-making. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor potential biases and their influence on data interpretation.

## 2.2 Data analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed all interviews and analyzed them using a descriptive phenomenological technique based on the simplified steps of Colaizzi (Neubauer et al., 2019). *First*, the researcher repeatedly read the entire set of transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding. *Second*, the researcher identified statements most relevant to the four research foci. *Third*, thematic formulations were generated from these statements by interpreting them within the context of each informant's experience. *Fourth*, the emerging themes were grouped into categories that reflected shared aspects of experience.

At this stage, the researcher identified four major themes consistent with the initial focus of the study, namely, journalists as legal communicators, dilemmas between education and dramatization, strategies for bridging legal concepts with public understanding, and professionalism vs. journalistic idealism. Each theme was supported by subthemes or illustrative examples from the informants. Fifth, the researcher developed an essential description of the phenomenon based on these themes, representing the collective experiences of TV One journalists in practicing live courtroom journalism. Sixth, validation was carried out through informal member checking, where the researcher presented a summary of findings to several informants to ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation. The informants confirmed the relevance of the findings to their experiences and offered minor input which was incorporated accordingly.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher applied bracketing by suspending personal biases and assumptions to prevent them from influencing interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019; Sturgess, 2018). For instance, the researcher set aside normative assumptions such as "the media should not be sensational" to remain open to journalists' perspectives. This step was important to maintain the purity of phenomenological description. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data among informants and linking them with observational findings, thereby strengthening the credibility of the results. In addition, peer debriefing with two communication scholars was conducted to discuss the emerging themes and their interpretation, ensuring consistency between data and analysis.

## 2.3 Credibility and ethics

This study obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Tidar University. The application was submitted

to this institution due to the absence of formal ethical review mechanisms within the authors' affiliated institution. Ethically, this study obtained permission from TV One's editorial management to interview its journalists and to observe live broadcast production routines. Informants were free to decline answering sensitive questions and could withdraw from the interview at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all informants and by omitting any details that could lead to personal identification. The study followed general ethical principles in qualitative research, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and minimization of harm.

## 3 Finding

### 3.1 Journalists as legal communicators for the public

The informants acknowledged their central role as conveyors of legal information from the courtroom to the wider public. They recognized that many viewers are unfamiliar with legal terminology and procedures, thus journalists act as "translators" who convert legal language into public language. A field reporter (R1) explained,

"During the hearing, the judge may use terms like 'the objection is rejected because the indictment is considered precise.' I have to explain on-air that an 'objection' is a kind of protest note submitted by the defendant's legal counsel, and that if it is rejected, the trial continues to the main case." This statement illustrates the journalist's effort to simplify legal jargon without reducing the substantive meaning.

All journalists admitted preparing materials before broadcasting by reviewing publicly available case information, consulting legal experts, and analyzing trial-related materials from accessible media and official sources. This preparation enabled them to understand the legal issues that arise during the trial and communicate them effectively to audiences in simplified language.

Informants also felt responsible for maintaining the accuracy of legal information. They tried to provide context for each development in the trial, such as explaining the function of each stage of the process (indictment reading, witness examination, prosecution, defense plea) in a structured manner. A studio presenter (R3) stated:

"I consider the viewers as laypeople who need a complete picture. So in every segment, I summarize: today the court agenda is the examination of a forensic expert witness, aiming to establish the cause of the victim's death."

This approach helps viewers understand the logic and flow of the trial rather than seeing only fragmented events. The journalists agreed that by explaining legal background and technical terms, the public can follow the proceedings with greater clarity. This aligns with their ideal that the media must contribute to

improving public legal literacy. A senior reporter (R2) expressed a similar view:

“If ordinary people understand what an indictment is, or the difference between factual witnesses and expert witnesses, it means our work succeeded in mediating legal language for the people.”

These findings affirm *that courtroom journalists act as mediators of justice*, translating legal processes into accessible public narratives that shape how justice is understood by audiences. This indicates that mediating justice operates through communicative translation, where journalists actively reconstruct legal meaning for public consumption.

### 3.2 The dilemma between education and dramatization in live broadcasts

This theme strongly emerged from all informants' experiences. They faced a two-directional pressure: on one hand, ideally, courtroom broadcasts should be treated as purely informative and educational news coverage; on the other hand, the live television format demands dramatic elements to attract viewers. Field reporters R1 and R4 revealed that production teams often instructed them to highlight emotional or confrontational moments in the courtroom.

“A producer once said, ‘if there’s tension between the judge and the lawyer, report it immediately, that’s a good moment!’,” R4 explained.

As a result, reporters often found themselves in a dilemma. When trials proceed monotonously (such as long document readings), there is a temptation to embellish reports with opinions or speculation to avoid boring the audience. However, journalists also understood that excessive dramatization could obscure legal substance and unfairly influence public opinion. R2 admitted having been reprimanded by an editor for unintentionally dramatizing a defendant's reaction:

“I once said ‘Defendant X looked panicked and repeatedly wiped sweat...’. The editor was angry because we are not infotainment. Since then, I’ve been more careful, only reporting facts without dramatic additions.”

Nevertheless, some informants acknowledged that dramaturgy cannot be entirely avoided. Certain courtroom situations are inherently dramatic, such as the victim's family weeping hysterically or heated debates between defense lawyers and prosecutors. These moments naturally become the focus of camera attention. The dilemma lies in editorial decisions regarding how far journalists should exploit such emotions. R3 explained:

“I have to choose words carefully: if a witness cries, I report the fact ‘the witness cried while recalling the events,’ without exaggerating it with sensational wording.”

This reflects an effort to maintain balance. Journalists still report dramatic elements because they are part of the event, but refrain from excessive sensationalism.

Several journalists also acknowledged the presence of rating pressure. The success of a live courtroom program is partly judged by audience ratings, which implicitly encourages production teams to look for dramatic angles. Field journalists often found themselves at a crossroads between adhering to journalistic ideals that emphasize information and education or following commercial pressures for sensationalism.

“Honestly, as a journalist I want to educate the public. But sometimes the boss asks for an angle with a ‘wow factor’. This is our inner struggle in every major trial,” said R6.

Overall, this dilemma *reflects the core tension in mediating justice*, where journalists must balance the responsibility of conveying accurate legal information with the need to present courtroom events in a publicly engaging manner.

### 3.3 Strategies for bridging legal language with public understanding

The study identified several communication strategies that journalists use to ensure that trial information is easily understood by the general audience.

*The first* strategy is simplification of legal terminology. As mentioned previously, journalists replace legal terms with everyday equivalents or provide brief on-air definitions. For example, “interlocutory decision” is explained as “a temporary decision issued in the middle of the trial,” or “criminal execution” is described by reporters as “the implementation of punishment for a convicted person.”

*The second* strategy is contextual elaboration. Journalists not only report what happens in the courtroom but also provide background information about the case and its legal relevance. This resembles a news feature style, in which reporters insert historical context or case chronology during breaks in the trial. R1 gave an example: during a corruption trial, “*While waiting for the judges to deliberate, I reminded viewers: this case began with a sting operation last year involving an official from Ministry X, causing a state financial loss of...*” This strategy helps viewers understand the context of each stage of the trial.

*The third* strategy is the use of expert sources. In several broadcasts, TV One invited legal scholars or experts as analysts in the studio. Journalists moderated discussions with these experts to clarify technical aspects. For instance, when there was debate over the legal articles in the indictment, the presenter would ask, “*What does this article mean, and why do the prosecutor and defense interpret it differently?*” The expert's explanation helped clarify matters for viewers. R3 stated that experts were very helpful:

“My language has limitations. With an expert present, technical terms like ‘elements of an offense’ can be explained thoroughly without fear of error.”

Expert presence also enhances credibility and analytical depth.

The fourth strategy involves visualization and graphics. The production team prepares supporting visuals such as infographics showing trial procedures, diagrams of relationships among actors in the case, or highlighted points of the indictment. Journalists use these visuals while explaining the case, giving audiences a visual reference. Research observation noted that, during complex trials, TV One displayed a timeline of the case on the screen while reporters explained each stage accordingly. This technique helps viewers understand lengthy legal processes.

Fifth, journalists maintain a communicative tone and language style. They avoid rigid or overly formal reporting and instead adopt a conversational tone, as if explaining to a friend. R2 noted:

“I always imagine explaining things to my mother at home. So I choose simple words, use a friendly tone, and avoid sounding preachy.”

This humanistic approach makes viewers feel included in a conversation rather than lectured, thereby increasing their understanding. These strategies demonstrate how mediating justice is practically enacted through communicative techniques that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes for public audiences. Through these strategies, journalists do not merely report events but actively shape the public’s comprehension of legal processes.

### 3.4 Reflections on professionalism and journalistic idealism in live broadcasts

The informants reflected on the values they uphold and the conflicts they experience between idealism and practical demands. Generally, all journalists emphasized their commitment to objectivity and accuracy. They understood that the fate of a defendant is at stake in the courtroom, so reporting must not be biased or prejudicial.

“We are not judges, so we must remain balanced. I always insert the phrase ‘allegedly’ to remind viewers that no verdict has been issued,” said R4.

This shows adherence to the principle of presumption of innocence. Several journalists admitted having been contacted by defense lawyers or court public relations officers when objections arose concerning their reports. R2 recounted:

“Once the legal counsel protested because we referred to their client as a ‘corruptor.’ In fact, the person was only a defendant. We acknowledged the mistake and corrected it. That was a lesson on caution.”

Such experiences strengthened their professional discipline regarding the use of precise and neutral terminology.

From an idealistic perspective, the TV One journalists expressed pride that their work helps the public gain a better

understanding of the law. Many saw themselves as journalists with an educator idealism. R5 stated,

“I entered journalism because I wanted to be a watchdog. Covering trials is part of social control so the law remains transparent. There is personal satisfaction when my coverage helps people understand the law and monitor justice.”

This reflects that mediating justice is not only a professional obligation but also a moral commitment, where journalists perceive their role as contributing to public understanding and oversight of legal processes. Thus, mediating justice is experienced not only as a technical reporting activity but as a meaningful and value-driven communicative practice.

However, their idealism is not free from real-world constraints. Time pressure and speed often made it difficult for journalists to achieve ideal-quality reporting. During a trial, reporters must multitask: listening to courtroom testimony, taking notes, and preparing for live reporting simultaneously. Under such conditions, R3 admitted having once failed to cross-check a piece of information before broadcasting due to time pressure.

“There was a moment I mistakenly mentioned the prosecutor’s name, and the presenter corrected me immediately. I was very embarrassed, but it reminded me that accuracy is number one.”

This highlights the challenge of maintaining professionalism under time constraints.

Organizational interests also sometimes played a role. When a trial involved a prominent political figure, editorial attention was heightened. R6 diplomatically noted,

“We are certainly independent, but the editorial team has certain considerations regarding the reporting angle, especially when it concerns a public figure.”

Although not elaborated, this implies that journalists sometimes negotiate between idealism of independence and the media organization’s agenda-setting dynamics. Nevertheless, journalists expressed their determination to preserve the integrity of their reporting despite external pressures.

Another reflection pertains to personal qualities they developed through courtroom journalism. Covering lengthy trials trained journalists in patience and diligence. R2 noted,

“I used to get bored easily. After covering long trials, I learned to be patient and focused. If you lose concentration even for a moment, you might miss important facts.”

They also gained legal knowledge over time, which enhanced their competence as specialized legal journalists. Ultimately, the informants agreed that despite ethical dilemmas, time pressure, and industry demands, they found meaning in their work. “It is a demanding but noble job,” said R1, “We serve as information bridges. As long as we uphold ethics and quality, I believe we

contribute positively to society and the justice system.” These reflections affirm that the idealism of TV One’s courtroom journalists remains intact, coexisting with the professionalism they continually refine amid practical challenges.

## 4 Discussion

The findings of this study enrich our understanding of courtroom journalism as a form of communication practice in the legal sphere. In general, the experiences of TV One journalists reaffirm the role of the press as a mediator of justice, namely a medium that brings judicial processes before the public, thereby expanding the principle of open justice through broadcast channels (Bosland and Townend, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). This study conceptualizes mediating justice as a communicative process through which journalists translate, frame, and represent legal proceedings in ways that shape public understanding of justice. This is in line with international literature that views court journalism as essential in a democracy because it provides citizens with access to “witness” the enforcement of the law and to assess whether the process is fair (Johnston, 2018; Jones, 2021, 2025). By foregrounding journalists’ lived experiences, this study moves beyond normative debates about whether trials should be televised and instead examines how justice is communicated and mediated through everyday journalistic practices.

The journalists in this study act as agents of mediating justice by translating legal language and procedures into formats that can be understood by laypeople. This confirms the position of journalists as public legal communicators, as argued by Magin and Maurer (2019), who state that court beat reporting requires specific competencies to bridge the worlds of law and society thereby reinforcing their role in shaping public understanding of legal processes (Magin and Maurer, 2019). In this sense, journalists function as communicative intermediaries who transform institutional legal discourse into accessible public narratives, thereby shaping how justice is understood and interpreted by audiences.

The ability of the informants to translate legal jargon is consistent with practical guidelines on legal journalism in many countries, where court reporters are expected to understand legal terminology so that they can explain it accurately to the public. In this way, journalists function as a kind of informal “teacher” for society on matters of legal literacy. This educational contribution is important, given that public legal awareness is often low; the mass media can serve as a vehicle for improving legal literacy (Sevignani, 2022).

On the other hand, the findings also highlight the dilemma of education vs. dramatization faced by journalists. The informants experience a pull between their idealism to present trials as they are in an informative manner and the pragmatism of the industry that demands dramatic elements to make broadcasts attractive. This tension illustrates the complexity of mediating justice, where journalists must balance accurate legal communication with the need to present courtroom events in an understandable and engaging manner. This dilemma parallels the findings of Ravid (2017), who notes that the television

format often pushes for sensational material, thereby reducing the educational potential of coverage (Ravid, 2017).

At this point, the phenomenon can be further interpreted through Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective, where courtroom proceedings—once mediated through live broadcasting—take on the characteristics of staged performances for public audiences. Wittchen (2023) further shows that in sensational crime reporting, journalists face ethical challenges in maintaining objectivity amid pressure to exploit emotional aspects (Wittchen, 2023). From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments represent the *performative dimension of mediating justice*, where courtroom events are publicly represented and interpreted through media narratives.

This study finds that TV One journalists try to balance these demands as part of their effort in mediating justice, ensuring that legal processes remain accurately represented while still accessible to the public. From a dramaturgical perspective, these moments represent “front-stage” expressions of legal drama, where emotional displays and courtroom interactions become visible to the public as part of a mediated performance of justice. This attitude demonstrates internalization of journalistic ethics and aligns with the ideal of objectivity, which continues to be upheld as a foundational norm (Schudson and Anderson, 2009).

The journalists are aware of the dangers of falling into sensationalism: the public may gain a distorted picture of legal processes, and public trust in the judiciary may be negatively affected as misrepresentation may distort how justice is publicly understood (Ravid, 2017). Ardilla et al. (2020) also highlight that uncontrolled live broadcasts of trials can violate the presumption of innocence and affect the evidentiary process in court (Ardilla et al., 2020). This highlights the tension between visibility and responsibility, where increased public access through media exposure simultaneously amplifies both transparency and the risk of misrepresentation. Therefore, journalists’ efforts to maintain neutral language and avoid judgment in their reporting deserve appreciation as a form of professional responsibility. This phenomenon of “keeping distance” from dramatization is consistent with the concept of strategic ritual to maintain objectivity, where journalists consciously avoid excessive interpretation and adhere strictly to facts (Wittchen, 2023).

At the same time, this study confirms that dramatic elements are inherently part of trials as media events. High-profile cases often stir public emotions, and the media functions as a stage on which legal drama is watched by the masses (Greer and McLaughlin, 2011). From Goffman’s perspective, the courtroom becomes a hybrid space in which institutional authority intersects with performative visibility. Legal actors perform roles before both immediate courtroom participants and a broader mediated audience, while journalists function as interpreters who frame this performance into coherent narratives. Meanwhile, critical processes such as judicial deliberation remain in the “backstage,” invisible yet central to the production of justice.

In this context, journalists are in a difficult position, making it necessary to maintain a balance between informing and engaging as part of their role in mediating justice: they must report human-interest aspects (which are often dramatic) but must not descend into cheap infotainment, making it necessary to maintain a balance between “informing” and “entertaining” in courtroom

news (Masduki, 2017). The findings of this study show that journalists attempt to walk this tightrope reasonably well, for example through the choice of factual and non-hyperbolic wording when describing dramatic situations.

Such skills are likely honed through experience and ethical awareness that the credibility of legal reporting must be preserved. In the long term, journalists' choice to prioritize education over sensation can enhance public trust in both the media and the judiciary. Research indicates that informative transparency of courts through the media can strengthen public confidence in the legal system (Johnston, 2018; Papandrea, 2012). Conversely, if the media are perceived as overly judgmental or deliberately polarizing opinion, an erosion of trust may occur (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011). Therefore, this dilemma must continue to be managed through ethical codes and internal editorial guidelines. It may be necessary to develop specific guidelines for courtroom journalism, as has been proposed by the Indonesian Press Council, so that journalists have clear guidance in balancing educational functions and the demands of dramatization (Manan, 2015).

With regard to communication strategies for bridging law and the public, the findings of this study are concrete and highly applicable. These strategies reflect how mediating justice is operationalized through communicative practices that simplify, contextualize, and interpret legal processes for public audiences. Language simplification, provision of context, involving experts, and visualization are techniques that are well-known in the practice of explanatory journalism (Parisi, 2009). The success of journalists in implementing these strategies is reflected in public appreciation. For instance, TV One's live trial programs often receive positive feedback for being informative. The strategy of involving legal experts also aligns with the trend of interdisciplinary collaboration in modern journalism, in which journalists are not reluctant to bring in experts to enrich and verify information (Ward, 2018). This helps maintain the accuracy of substantive content, particularly because journalists typically do not have formal legal education. It also reflects the role of media as a knowledge broker that connects expert sources with the public (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018). From a communication perspective, the effort to reshape complex terminology into easily understood forms is a manifestation of democratic communication, a type of communication that is inclusive and accessible to different segments of the public (Sevignani, 2022).

The communication strategies of TV One journalists also demonstrate adaptation to the characteristics of television as a medium. The use of infographics and visuals is an example of leveraging the strengths of an audio-visual medium for educational purposes. This is consistent with Dick's (2014) study, which emphasizes the importance of visual elements in covering legal processes to make them more engaging for contemporary audiences accustomed to visual information (Dick, 2014). Certainly, not all legal concepts can be easily visualized, but steps such as creating case timelines or graphics depicting the structure of a case greatly help audiences grasp the logic and flow of legal processes.

This study supports the recommendation that media should be creative in presenting legal information without compromising accuracy. This approach could be replicated in other types of court reporting; for example, newspapers and online media can

also include supporting infographics. In this way, the practices of TV One journalists can serve as a small model of how legal communication to the public can be carried out effectively.

In terms of professionalism and idealism, this study reveals the internal dynamics experienced by journalists. On one hand, they adhere to the core values of journalism: accuracy, impartiality, and verification, especially in sensitive coverage such as trials (Schudson and Anderson, 2009). They realize that mistakes in reporting can have serious consequences for both the credibility of the media and the judicial process. This resonates with Wittchen's (2023) findings that legal reporters often feel a heavier ethical burden because their reporting directly intersects with the fates of defendants and victims (Wittchen, 2023).

TV One journalists appear to shoulder this burden seriously, as seen in their reflective accounts of being consistently careful with their wording and the information they present. Their adherence to ethical codes, such as not taking sides and using terms like "defendant" instead of "perpetrator," reflects their professionalism. This is parallel to studies in other countries, such as Denmark, where court reporters place great emphasis on writing facts without interpretation to avoid accusations of bias (Wittchen, 2023).

On the other hand, the journalists' idealism as agents of public enlightenment is clearly visible. They view their work as meaningful in serving the public interest, a form of civic-minded journalism. This recalls the concept of civic journalism, in which journalists seek to empower citizens with information needed for democratic participation (Mellado, 2015). Courtroom coverage can be considered part of civic journalism because it relates to justice and the law, which are pillars of democracy.

The informants' idealism, expressed in their sense of "helping to safeguard justice," indicates that their professional identity leans toward the role of watchdog and educator rather than mere entertainer (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). In role performance studies, watchdog and civic educator roles are part of normative orientations embraced by journalists in many countries (Mellado, 2015). These findings confirm that Indonesian journalists, at least in the legal field, also embody these roles.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by positioning courtroom journalism as a form of mediating justice, emphasizing the central role of communicative practices in shaping public engagement with legal processes. First, it extends work on open justice and courtroom media by conceptualizing live courtroom journalism as a form of "mediating justice" in which journalists translate institutional transparency into communicative practices shaped by commercial and ethical constraints. Second, it enriches role performance and civic journalism research by documenting how journalists in a Global South context enact hybrid roles, as legal translators, educators, and performers, while navigating structural pressures such as ratings and editorial agendas. Third, it nuances debates on "trial by media" by showing that sensationalism is not simply an outcome imposed from above, but an arena of ongoing negotiation at the level of individual journalists who attempt to "hold the line" through strategic language choices and professional rituals.

Practically, the findings have implications for newsrooms, regulators, and judicial institutions. For news organizations, the study suggests the need for explicit internal guidelines on

courtroom broadcasting, ongoing training in legal basics for journalists, and editorial support that rewards accuracy and educational value rather than sensationalism alone. For regulators and press councils, the findings support initiatives to develop specific ethical codes for courtroom journalism that protect both the presumption of innocence and the public's right to information. For courts, the study indicates that constructive engagement with journalists—through accessible public relations officers, media briefings, and educational materials, can enhance the quality of coverage without undermining judicial independence.

Contextually, this study adds an important Global South perspective to predominantly Western debates on court transparency and media. Indonesia's media system, marked by commercial competition, high public interest in high-profile trials, and expanding digital access, represents a fertile setting in which to observe how justice is communication and mediated in practice. The experiences of TV One journalists demonstrate that even in a competitive television market, journalistic idealism and professionalism can persist, albeit within negotiated boundaries. Future comparative work could explore whether similar patterns occur in other countries in the region or among different types of media, such as online platforms and social media live streams.

The lived experiences of journalists also reaffirm that the meaning of a job, such as covering court proceedings, is shaped by intensive interaction between journalists and their social environment (courts, newsrooms, and the public). Each journalist interprets their role not only through formal job descriptions but also through the values they hold and the audience responses they perceive. The journalists' deep sense of mission in educating the public suggests that they experience their work as a public calling. This is consistent with theories of identity and the meaning of work, which state that workers who see their jobs as meaningful tend to have higher satisfaction and performance. Overall, the findings demonstrate that mediating justice is a dynamic communicative process shaped by journalists' practices, experiences, and professional commitments in translating law into public understanding.

The findings of this study should be situated within the broader Global South context, where the mediation of justice is shaped by specific socio-legal and media conditions. In Indonesia, the legal system operates not only through formal procedural frameworks but also through cultural dynamics that influence courtroom interactions and public perceptions of justice.

This context directly affects how journalists mediate justice, as they must navigate not only legal accuracy but also social expectations and symbolic meanings attached to courtroom proceedings. In addition, Indonesia's relatively flexible media regulation allows extensive live broadcasting of trials, creating a unique communicative environment in which legal processes become highly visible to the public.

At the same time, media ownership structures—often linked to political and economic elites—introduce additional pressures that shape editorial decisions and framing practices. These conditions complicate the role of journalistic idealism, as journalists must continuously negotiate between professional values, institutional constraints, and audience engagement in real-time reporting.

Furthermore, varying levels of public trust in judicial institutions position journalists as key mediators of justice, influencing how legal truth is constructed and interpreted in the public sphere. Compared to more tightly regulated Western contexts, the Indonesian setting illustrates a more open yet complex form of mediated justice, where information, performance, and public accountability are deeply intertwined.

## 5 Conclusion

The experiences of TV One journalists in live courtroom broadcasting illustrate how justice is mediated to the public through communicative practices grounded in professional and ethical considerations. This study demonstrates that courtroom journalism is not merely a process of reporting legal events, but a form of *mediated justice* in which journalists actively translate, frame, and perform legal processes for public audiences. Journalists function as legal communicators who translate judicial processes into accessible public information while upholding accuracy and factual integrity.

They face an inherent tension in mediating justice, balancing their educational function with the need to present courtroom events in engaging and publicly accessible ways. However, through professional awareness, journalists strive to prioritize educational value without entirely disregarding the human-interest elements inherent to courtroom events. Various communication strategies are employed—such as simplifying legal terminology, providing contextual explanations, involving experts, and utilizing visual elements—to support the process of mediating justice and bridging the gap between legal language and public understanding. Throughout their work, journalists reflect on the importance of maintaining professionalism—including neutrality, adherence to ethical codes, and disciplined verification—while preserving their idealism as media workers committed to serving the public interest.

Live courtroom journalism can be regarded as a concrete manifestation of the press's democratic function: informing the public while overseeing the judiciary as a form of transparent accountability. When journalists are able to navigate challenges ethically and creatively, live broadcasts of court hearings become not only a spectacle but also a source of guidance—mass legal education that enlightens society while simultaneously encouraging courts to operate with greater openness and fairness. In this way, the media truly plays the role of a bridge mediating justice in the public sphere.

This study contributes to theoretical debates on open justice, role performance, and trial by media by positioning courtroom journalism as a practice of mediating justice, grounded in journalists' lived experiences within a Global South context. It demonstrates how legal education, dramaturgy, and professionalism intersect in everyday newsroom practice. Sustaining this practice requires collective efforts, such as editorial support, proportionate regulation that does not excessively constrain press freedom, and improved journalistic capacity in legal reporting.

Naturally, this study has limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively small and drawn from a single television station, thus not fully representing the broader spectrum of

courtroom journalism in Indonesia. Insights from other media organizations or from print and online journalists may differ. Second, this research focuses on journalists' perspectives, while the views of audiences or judicial actors regarding live trial broadcasts remain unexplored. Future studies may investigate the impact of live courtroom broadcasts on public legal understanding or public perceptions of the judiciary, for example through audience research or experimental designs. Additionally, comparative studies across different media organizations or national contexts could reveal whether similar strategies and dilemmas are experienced by journalists elsewhere and could help refine a more general model of mediating justice through media.

## Q12 Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Q13 Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Ethics Committee of Tidar University. Ethical Approval No.B/1134/UN57.L1/PT.01.04.2025. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Q14 Author contributions

AW: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. WN: Data curation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Resources, Project administration. SH: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Data curation. RW: Formal analysis, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft.

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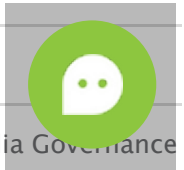
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[CiteScore](#) [CiteScore rank & trend](#) [Scopus content coverage](#)

CiteScore 2024 

$$3.0 = \frac{3,126 \text{ Citations 2021 - 2024}}{1,040 \text{ Documents 2021 - 2024}}$$

Calculated on 05 May, 2025

CiteScoreTracker 2025 

$$2.8 = \frac{3,107 \text{ Citations to date}}{1,105 \text{ Documents to date}}$$

Last updated on 05 April, 2026 • Updated monthly

## CiteScore rank 2024

Category	Rank	Percentile
Social Sciences		
Social Sciences (miscellaneous)	#175/674	74th
Social Sciences		
Communication	#153/535	71st

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# Frontiers in Communication

Switzerland | Universities and research institutions | Media Ranking

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Switzerland



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Social Sciences  
(miscellaneous)

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