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ARTICLE



Negotiating open justice, media logic, and ethics: a communication model for live courtroom journalism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Live broadcasting of court hearings positions journalism within a negotiated space among open justice commitments, media logic, and professional ethics. This study explores how such negotiation unfolds in the daily practice of a national television news outlet's live trial coverage. Using a qualitative descriptive case study, we gathered data through semi-structured interviews with five key informants (producer, assignment editor, programme director, field reporter, and camera operator), limited control room observation during live transmission, and document review of regulatory texts including Indonesia's Broadcasting Behavior Guidelines and Programme Standards (P3SPS), the Journalistic Code of Ethics, and Supreme Court Regulation No. 5/2020. The result show (1) tensions between open justice and courtroom restrictions, mitigated through selective permissions, transmission delays, and self-censorship; (2) the dominance of media logic such as ratings, speed, and visuals balanced through curated imagery and avoidance of speculative commentary; (3) ethics and regulation compliance *via* internal newsroom procedures; and (4) public legal-education strategies through expert commentary and procedural framing. We synthesize "Journalistic Practice in Live Trials," which conceptualizes courtroom broadcasting as a negotiated intersection of open justice, media logic, and professional ethics, carrying implications for governance and professional practice in court reporting.

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Introduction

The live broadcasting of court hearings on television has become a hallmark of contemporary journalism that surfaces a persistent dilemma between the principle of judicial openness (*open justice*) and media logic. On one hand, *open justice* demands transparency and accountability in judicial processes, premised on the assumption that making trials public will enhance trust in the legal system (Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2021; Moore et al., 2021). Live media broadcasting is

widely seen as a concrete enactment of the principle of courts being open to the public, with television functioning as an extension of the courtroom's "public gallery" (Moore et al., 2021). Through live coverage, a broad audience can observe legal proceedings in real time, thereby fulfilling the maxim that "justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done." Advocates further argue that the presence of cameras in courtrooms can strengthen judicial accountability while serving as a vehicle for public legal education (Campbell et al., 2017).

Conceptually, however, open justice cannot be reduced to physical openness or mere visibility. Cunliffe (2012) argues that open justice is a multi-dimensional principle that combines transparency, public scrutiny of judicial reasoning, and the intelligibility of court processes for non-specialist audiences. In mass-mediated societies, this openness is increasingly realized not through direct attendance but through media representation. Moran (2014) terms mass-mediated open justice, where journalistic reporting becomes a primary mechanism through which "the public" encounters courts. Live broadcasting intensifies this mediated openness by offering real-time access, yet it also raises procedural risks: immediate visibility may amplify misinterpretation, emotional contagion, or prejudicial framing, especially when the logic of television demands constant narration and visual novelty (Flower, 2023). Thus, rather than assuming that more visibility automatically produces more legitimacy, open justice in televised trials should be treated as negotiated transparency, shaped by institutional discretion, legal constraints, and journalistic judgment (Cunliffe, 2012; Flower, 2023; Moran, 2014).

On the other hand, media logic propels competition for audiences through ratings and commercial returns. Coverage practices tend to emphasize dramatization, strong visuals, and sensational elements, turning trials into a media "spectacle" (Acciaoli, 1985; Kramer, 2013). The risk of sliding from transparency toward a *media circus* is therefore salient (Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2021). As the British debate illustrates, courtroom broadcasting is often framed as a struggle between enhancing transparency and guarding against excessive sensationalism. The implementation of openness within judicial systems entails multiple dimensions, including the role of television journalists as actors in implementing openness, transparency, and media logic.

To clarify what is meant by "media logic" in this study, we draw on mediatisation scholarship. Mediatisation refers to long-term processes through which media become intertwined with, and increasingly shape, the operation of other institutions (Hjarvard, 2013). Strömbäck (2008) proposes four phases of mediatisation, suggesting that, at advanced stages, institutional practices and public meanings are increasingly conditioned by media formats, production routines, and audience-oriented imperatives. Within this literature, media logic refers to the internal criteria through which media select and package reality, such as immediacy, personalization, dramatization, visual intensity, and competitive speed, often intensified by platform metrics and engagement cultures (Landerer, 2013). Recent evidence from digital news environments shows that engagement dynamics can privilege certain values and forms of content circulation; for instance, high-quality news does not always translate into high engagement, and sharing/liking/commenting may follow distinct logics shaped by platform norms (Shin et al., 2025). In the context of live courtroom broadcasting, these logics may increase pressure

to maintain continuous “newsworthiness” through visuals, emotional cues, and rapid updates, even when legal proceedings demand procedural restraint and neutrality.

In live broadcasts, television journalists are bound by ethical codes and regulatory regimes that constrain legal reporting. Indonesia’s Broadcasting Behavior Guidelines and Programme Standards (P3SPS) and the Journalistic Code of Ethics require the media to uphold the presumption of innocence, protect privacy, and avoid content that may disrupt due process (Lembaran & Republik, 2012; Mardatillah, 2018). The Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) has authority to supervise programming and impose sanctions (Mulyani & Rustamaji, 2023). KPI’s advisory during the Jessica Wongso case (2016) underscored that live coverage of trials falls squarely under regulatory and ethical scrutiny.

Ethics in this study is therefore treated as more than regulatory compliance. Beyond formal rules such as P3SPS, professional ethics functions as a normative and practical “buffer” that helps journalists manage tensions between open justice and media logic. In hybrid media environments, journalists increasingly negotiate platform and audience logics while simultaneously defending professional values such as accuracy, fairness, harm minimization, and accountability (Walters, 2022). Applied to courtroom broadcasting, this means newsroom decisions are not only about what is legally permissible but also about what is ethically defensible, e.g., how to narrate ongoing testimony without implying guilt, how to frame emotionally charged moments without exploitative sensationalism, and when to apply self-restraint through delay mechanisms, selective visuals, or expert contextualization. This ethical mediation is central to understanding how “open justice” is enacted in practice under conditions of live transmission.

However, conceptualizing journalistic ethics solely through regulatory instruments such as P3SPS risks reducing ethics to compliance. While P3SPS and the Journalistic Code of Ethics provide essential legal and professional boundaries, ethical journalism in courtroom reporting also rests on normative principles articulated in journalism theory. A widely cited framework is The Nine Elements of Journalism proposed by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014), which defines journalism’s core purpose as providing citizens with accurate, independent, and contextualized information necessary for democratic life.

Several elements of this framework are particularly relevant to live courtroom broadcasting. First, the obligation to truth requires journalists to distinguish clearly between verified courtroom facts and interpretive commentary, a crucial safeguard against trial by media. Second, loyalty to citizens, rather than to ratings or institutional power, implies that courtroom coverage should prioritize public understanding over spectacle. Third, the discipline of verification underscores the need to avoid speculation during live transmission, especially when evidentiary processes are still unfolding. Fourth, independence from factional interests reinforces journalists’ responsibility to resist becoming extensions of prosecutorial or defence narratives.

Equally important is the element of proportionality, which cautions against exaggeration and emotional distortion. In the courtroom context, proportionality demands restraint in visual selection, avoidance of sensational close-ups, and careful narration of emotionally charged moments. Finally, the element of conscience legitimizes

newsroom self-restraint—such as delayed transmission, selective muting, or editorial filtering—as ethical judgment rather than censorship.

By integrating Kovach and Rosenstiel's normative framework with regulatory standards such as P3SPS, courtroom journalism ethics can be understood as a dual-layer system: formal regulation establishes minimum legal boundaries, while professional ethical principles guide discretionary judgment in real-time reporting. This layered conception is particularly salient in live broadcasting, where journalists must make instantaneous decisions with potentially irreversible consequences for judicial fairness and public perception.

Comparable debates occur internationally. The United Kingdom has permitted cameras in the Court of Appeal since 2020 under strict limitations (Moran, 2020; Mulcahy, 2011). In the United States, practices vary by state courts, while the Supreme Court continues to prohibit cameras. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand have generally adopted more restrictive approaches to prevent *trial by media* (Abbott & Givens, 2015; Khalil & Harun, 2024; Tapsell, 2018). Indonesia occupies a distinctive position: while the principle of open trials is recognized, broadcasting is tightly regulated, requiring television journalists to negotiate continually with regulators and judicial authorities.

Within the Indonesian context, high-profile proceedings that capture public attention, such as the trial of Jessica Wongso (2016), the corruption trial of Tom Lembong (2025), and cases involving public figures like Nikita Mirzani (2025), demonstrate how media logic shapes the narration of judicial processes (Agustina et al., 2025; Butt, 2021; Yuliarti, 2025). Such coverage exposes the tension between the media's role as an agent of public legal education and industry imperatives to package trials as audience-drawing entertainment (Tapsell, 2018, 2019).

Previous Indonesian studies largely focus on individual cases or on public communication surrounding trials—such as public perceptions of specific cases or media coverage of verdicts (Acciaoli, 1985; Hanych et al., 2023). Research that specifically foregrounds journalists' perspectives and examines the practice of live courtroom broadcasting remains scarce. Conversely, the international literature tends to foreground Western, adversarial systems (Archer, 2011; Bednarek, 2014), rendering less visible the hybrid inquisitorial–adversarial characteristics of Indonesian courts (Butt & Tim, 2018).

In Southeast Asia, scholarship on court communication typically addresses media policy or legal representation in general rather than the dynamics of television newsrooms negotiating trial coverage (Abbott & Givens, 2015; Abdul Latif, 2015; Moore et al., 2021). Yet newsroom decision-making profoundly shapes how trials are packaged and presented to the public, including how journalists balance three central imperatives: the principle of *open justice*, media logic, and professional ethics (Bosland & Townend, 2018; Cunliffe, 2012; Greer & McLaughlin, 2011; Huang, 2021; Lindsey, 2020).

Accordingly, the research gap addressed in this study concerns the limited Indonesian scholarship that explicitly explores the negotiation among *open justice*, media logic, and professional ethics in live trial broadcasting. Much of the international literature remains centered on Western contexts, while Southeast Asian studies seldom examine in depth the role of television newsrooms as actors managing the

tensions among judicial transparency, commercial media imperatives, and ethical compliance. This study seeks to bridge that gap by bringing journalists' perspectives to the fore and by analyzing editorial processes within Indonesian television newsrooms covering court proceedings.

This study examines how television journalists negotiate the demands of *open justice*, media logic, and professional ethics in the live broadcasting of trials. Metro TV is selected as the case due to its characteristics as a 24-h news channel with extensive experience covering major legal cases, and its relative independence compared to entertainment-oriented stations. This case study is expected to offer a representative account of how television journalists balance the ideals of transparency, commercial pressures, and regulatory compliance in practice.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. A qualitative design was chosen because journalists' negotiations under multi-faceted pressures (legal, media, and ethical) are highly contextual and complex, requiring in-depth understanding that surveys cannot adequately capture. This approach was intended to yield a comprehensive account of the practices, challenges, and strategies of television journalists when broadcasting trials live, directly from practitioners' perspectives and in dialogue with relevant theoretical concepts.

A case-study design was adopted, focusing on Metro TV's live broadcasting of court proceedings. Metro TV was selected purposively as a single case study for three reasons. First, as a 24-h news-oriented television channel, Metro TV has extensive experience in live coverage of high-profile legal proceedings, making it an information-rich case for examining courtroom journalism. Second, compared to entertainment-oriented broadcasters, Metro TV positions itself as a public-affairs and news-focused outlet, which places stronger emphasis on journalistic ethics, legal accuracy, and public education. Third, Metro TV has consistently covered nationally significant trials, allowing close observation of how journalists negotiate open justice, regulatory constraints, and audience pressures in real time. These characteristics make Metro TV a theoretically meaningful case rather than a statistically representative one.

The case was investigated through in-depth interviewing and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five members of the Metro TV news team, namely a senior news producer (Informant 1), the assignment editor for legal affairs (Informant 2), a programme director experienced in live production (Informant 3), a field reporter (Informant 4), and a camera operator covering courts (Informant 5). These informants were purposively selected because of their direct involvement in planning and carrying out live trial coverage at Metro TV. Interviews were conducted in August 2025.

Interview protocols explored experiences, viewpoints, and newsroom procedures during live coverage, including real-time decision-making in the control room, coordination between reporters and camera operators on site, ethical considerations and regulatory compliance, and content presentation strategies (reporter narration, use of legal experts on-air, and visual packaging). A flexible interview guide was used to elicit rich narratives. Key quotations from informants are presented verbatim

in the findings to preserve practitioners' voices, with participants' permission for academic use.

Data collection conducted chronologically in three stages. First, a preliminary review of regulatory and ethical documents was undertaken to establish the institutional context of courtroom broadcasting and to inform the interview guide. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with newsroom actors directly involved in live trial coverage. Third, limited participant observation was carried out to capture real-time editorial dynamics during live broadcasting. This staged approach enabled the researchers to connect institutional frameworks, professional perspectives, and situated practices in a coherent analytical sequence.

In addition to interviews, the study undertook limited participant observation in Metro TV's control room during a live court broadcast to understand split-second decision dynamics (e.g., whether to go live or delay, camera angle choices). Relevant regulatory documents were reviewed for context, including the 2012 Broadcasting Behavior Guidelines and Programme Standards issued by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, the Press Council's Journalistic Code of Ethics, and Supreme Court circulars on courtroom coverage (e.g., Supreme Court Regulation/PERMA No. 5 of 2020 on courtroom protocols Mahkamah Agung, 2020). A literature review (2015–2025) in communication and law journals complemented the analysis and enabled comparison with analogous phenomena elsewhere.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research team identified key themes that emerged across accounts, including: “transparency versus judicial restrictions,” “media competition and ratings,” “editorial decision-making during live transmission,” “ethics and regulatory implementation (self-censorship),” and “public-education strategies (role of expert commentators and procedural framing).” Credibility was enhanced through source triangulation (e.g., comparing multiple informants' perspectives on the same issue) and brief member checking with participants to validate the researchers' interpretations. All participants provided written informed consent and were anonymized (Informants 1–5). Observation was conducted with the newsroom's permission and without recording confidential content. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Results

Tensions between courtroom openness and judicial restrictions

The first set of findings reveals a persistent tension between the ideal of *open justice* and judicial concerns about the effects of broadcast media. According to the informants, live coverage used to be relatively permissive as long as hearings were declared open to the public.

“In previous years it was really open; as long as the hearing was open, everything could be broadcast,” noted Informant 1.

The situation changed in the early 2020s when the judiciary began to apply tighter restrictions. Informant 1 explained that the Supreme Court, through Supreme Court

Regulation No. 5 of 2020 (PERMA 5/2020), requires journalists to obtain explicit permission from the presiding judge to record or broadcast proceedings. In their words,

“Now, even open hearings are in many ways ‘closed’,”

Pointing to new rules that reduce camera access in courtrooms. As an example, following a change of public relations officers at the Central Jakarta District Court in 2023, the media were no longer permitted to go live as freely as before.

“The judge said, if you go live, witness A will hear witness B, witness C... they worry the testimony will be influenced,” Informant 1

This indicates judicial anxiety about the “*you are on camera*” effect, whereby witnesses or parties alter their behavior because they are aware of being broadcast—an issue also discussed in other jurisdictions such as South Africa (Mokoena & Koen, 2022).

Under the new authorization regime, Metro TV’s team often has to negotiate with court officials. As Informant 4 recounted, reporters must seek the presiding judge’s permission in accordance with PERMA 5/2020. Frequently, only certain segments are cleared for broadcast (e.g., the reading of the prosecution’s demand or the verdict), while live coverage of fact witnesses is prohibited to protect the integrity of testimony. Informant 1 explained:

“During hearings now, the parties (e.g., lawyers or defendants) are basically not allowed to speak to the media. Interviews are rare. Essentially, only after judgment may they speak,”

Regarding restrictions on interviewing litigants while proceedings are ongoing. This aligns with ethical norms that discourage *trial by press*: the media should not “try the case” outside the courtroom. Metro TV’s staff recognize the obligation to comply:

“We follow the rules. If a segment is prohibited from going live, we won’t air it,” stated Informant 2.

Although they sometimes regret that audiences may miss salient moments, they acknowledge the importance of obeying judicial directions to ensure a fair trial.

Policy shifts have also been shaped by earlier controversies. The informants recalled the Antasari Azhar case (2009), when broadcasting explicit testimony about the defendant’s private life prompted public criticism. At that time the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) contemplated an outright ban on broadcasting trials in revisions to the P3SPS guidelines, although this was ultimately abandoned because it was seen as contrary to the public’s right to information. The debate served as a wake-up call: the Press Council reminded stakeholders that, insofar as hearings are open, a blanket ban on live broadcasts would conflict with the principle of openness (Article 13 of the Judiciary Law). The solution, therefore, was regulation rather than prohibition, so that broadcasts do not disrupt due process (Lembaran & Republik, 2012; Mardatillah, 2018). Metro TV now explicitly recognizes its boundaries: it does not air content the court instructs to be off-air; it masks the identities

of victims of sexual violence; and it does not broadcast juvenile proceedings. *“If it’s a child case or a sexual offense, we definitely do not go live. That’s the rule and we comply,”* said Informant 4.

Even so, the newsroom continues to experience the pull between transparency and restriction. *“We walk a middle line,”* Informant 2 remarked, *“we don’t want to be accused of obstructing justice, but we also don’t want to violate a judge’s order.”* Compromises are common, such as using a short delay to filter out spontaneous sensitive content or airing visuals without audio during certain segments to avoid disseminating unverified claims. These practices of self-censorship illustrate how Metro TV journalists attempt to bridge *open justice* and professional ethics, sometimes at the expense of speed or completeness.

Ratings pressure and competition: media logic in trial coverage

The second set of findings highlights intense competition among television channels for high-profile trials, making media logic a dominant force in editorial strategy. Metro TV competes primarily with Kompas TV, TV One, and CNN Indonesia to be the fastest and most comprehensive.

“Take a corruption trial—if Kompas TV goes live 30s earlier, it matters,” said Informant 1.

Informant 1 describing how even fractional delays can prompt audience switching. Each broadcast is assessed using daily ratings and audience share:

“For the Tom Lembong hearings, the rating is X, the share is Y—everything is visible,” they added.

As a result, hearings that are dramatic or involve prominent figures tend to receive more airtime because they are projected to draw higher ratings (Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2021). This aligns with findings that sensationalism is often treated as a shortcut to audience attention (Hendriks Vettehen & Kleemans, 2018).

The pressure for speed (the scoop) can conflict with accuracy.

“If we don’t air it now, viewers may switch to another channel... even when some details aren’t yet confirmed,” admitted Informant 3.

To mitigate risk, the newsroom enforces a principle of accuracy with minimal speculation: they air what is happening inside the courtroom (facts) and hold back interpretive commentary that could steer public opinion.

“We broadcast the process, but we do not judge. Let the public assess,” emphasized Informant 2.

Producers ensure the presenter’s narration remains neutral, referring to the *“defendant”* or using initials, in line with the presumption of innocence, thus avoiding the pitfalls of *trial by media*.

At the same time, elements of drama and conflict are used carefully to sustain attention.

“Television relies on visuals; the newsroom inevitably looks for pictures” said Informant 3.

When hearings are monotonous (e.g., a lengthy reading of documents), producers direct cutaways to a defendant's expression, audience reactions, or distinctive details in the courtroom. Informant 5 cited the 2025 Tom Lembong trial: the team deliberately captured an older female supporter who attended daily with a poster.

"Judges and prosecutors can look very serious—maybe boring for viewers. But we saw a supporter bringing a poster every day—so we shot that and inserted the footage."

Such human-interest visuals are then used as highlights or in recap packages to add emotional texture, an unmistakable expression of media logic through personalization and emotionalization.

Historical experience has also shaped technical practice. During coverage of the Bali Bombings trials (2002–2003), the court allowed only a few static CCTV feeds. Given the limited quality and angles, camera operators captured additional off-air material—e.g., close-ups of a downcast defendant or family members in tears—for delayed news packages.

"We couldn't air it live, but the cameraman recorded it for the package," said Informant 3.

This demonstrates recontextualization to produce stories that are both informative and compelling without violating live-broadcast restrictions. Nevertheless, the boundary between informative journalism and legal infotainment must be guarded. As Moore et al. (2021) argue, courtroom cameras necessarily select, introducing mediation, and even a potential *deception of transparency* that newsrooms must acknowledge and manage.

In competitive contexts, technical innovation is common. The team has used split-screen to show two major hearings occurring simultaneously (one on the main channel, one on a digital channel) to deter audience switching. They also leverage social media: during recesses, reporters post live updates on X/Twitter or Instagram to maintain engagement. This reflects multiplatform media logic, information must arrive quickly and consistently across channels. The challenge is to maintain consistency and accuracy across platforms. As one editor cautioned informally,

"It's fine to update quickly, but avoid opinion. Stick to the facts."

This indicates an enduring ethical awareness even amid intense competitive pressure.

Compliance with the journalistic code of ethics and P3SPS regulations

Metro TV's team affirmed that live courtroom coverage is guided by Indonesia's Journalistic Code of Ethics and the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission's programme standards (P3SPS). Interviews revealed several internal mechanisms to ensure compliance.

First, a pre-hearing editorial meeting is held to flag sensitive issues—whether facial blurring is required (e.g., for child witnesses), whether there is a risk of contempt of court, and related matters. As Informant 3 put it:

"We check which P3SPS provisions prohibit certain content from appearing on screen."

P3SPS forbids, among other things, the broadcast of excessive violence, the disclosure of identifying information about victims of sexual crimes, and indecent material. Before going on air, Metro TV activates a 5–10s delay, so that any prohibited content (e.g., profanity or sudden disorder in the courtroom) can be muted or cut. The team also avoids showing the faces of protected victims or witnesses, masking identities as required. Recalling the Jessica Wongso case (2016), Informant 5 noted:

“We never held a close-up on the victim’s husband for too long, out of respect for privacy.”

This aligns with KPI’s 2016 advisory urging outlets to protect privacy and avoid speculation.

Second, Metro TV applies an internal court-reporting etiquette distilled from Press Council and KPI guidance. Reporters are not permitted to intervene in hearings (no mid-hearing questions; reporting occurs after adjournment). They also refrain from airing adversarial statements by prosecutors or lawyers delivered outside court that attack the opposing party (to avoid sub judice effects and potential contempt).

“We only publish what is spoken in the courtroom—facts,” said Informant 2.

Aware that in some jurisdictions the media can be sanctioned for amplifying out-of-court “wars of words,” editors prescreen doorstep quotes after hearings to avoid statements that could mislead audiences about the case.

Third, the station routinely provides on-air disclaimers and contextualization. Presenters remind viewers that defendants are presumed innocent until proven otherwise. Background information is delivered in a balanced manner to prevent premature conclusions. For highly emotive cases (e.g., child sexual abuse), Metro TV often brings in a court spokesperson or legal expert as a neutral explainer rather than letting unmoderated debate drive the narrative. This is consistent with expert guidance that stresses accuracy and neutrality to safeguard public trust in the justice system. Although there is no single statutory “playbook” for courtroom coverage, prior commentary underscores that a balance between press freedom and judicial interests must be maintained through ethical compliance, something our field data suggest Metro TV actively internalizes.

Fourth, on technical regulation, Metro TV adjusts content classification for courtroom broadcasts. Given that hearings may include graphic or explicit details, live coverage is typically labeled Category D (Adults), i.e., intended for viewers aged 18 and over. The classification icon appears on screen throughout as a form of accountability. Editorial staff also try to avoid scheduling particularly graphic segments (e.g., autopsy descriptions in homicide cases) during likely children’s viewing hours. As Informant 2 noted,

“If a hearing contains disturbing material, we use delay and provide audience warnings about sensitive content,” as a precaution against P3SPS violations.

Overall, these practices indicate robust compliance with ethical and regulatory boundaries despite competitive pressures and public expectations. No recent instances of serious breaches (e.g., labeling a defendant a “perpetrator” before verdict or airing

prohibited content) were reported. This stance accords with long-standing reminders from senior jurists that the press should understand the judiciary's function while remaining independent, and that courts should likewise respect journalists' independence in the public interest. In Metro TV's case, ethical safeguards are complemented by routine coordination with court public-relations officers prior to broadcasts to clarify applicable rules. Although courts can be strict at times, this cooperative approach helps minimize friction.

Control-room dynamics: editorial decision-making on the fly

Observation of Metro TV's control room during a live hearing revealed rapid-fire decision-making by producers. The atmosphere was described by participants as *"tense but controlled."* Producers sit before a wall of multi-camera monitors alongside the video switcher and breaking-news coordinator, maintaining constant headset communication with reporters at the courthouse. Second-by-second decisions must be made, for example, which camera to take live at a given moment, whether to cut to studio commentary, or whether to return to regular programming if the court unexpectedly recesses. Four recurring editorial patterns were identified:

1. **Selecting camera angles.**
When permitted, Metro TV deploys more than one camera in the courtroom (or relies on a pooled feed): a wide shot of the bench, a close-up of the defendant, and a mobile unit for audience reactions. Producers choose the feed with the highest visual value. If the prosecutor is reading a lengthy brief (a static visual), the switcher may be instructed, *"Cam 3, take the defendant's face,"* to capture expressive moments; if the expression is flat, *"Cam 2, audience,"* to show, for example, a victim's family reaction. The goal is to sustain attention without losing the core judicial moment; thus, the feed is returned to the judge for key segments (e.g., verdict).
2. **Handling the unexpected.**
If a disturbance erupts—e.g., a defendant outburst or spectators shouting—producers immediately confer. *"Stand by to mute audio,"* an editor may order, while deciding whether the incident merits brief coverage. Typically, a few seconds of the disturbance are shown as part of the hearing's reality, without audio to avoid broadcasting profanity. The studio presenter is then cued to frame the incident (e.g., *"There was a brief disruption in the courtroom because..."*). For instance, during a corruption case, the control room showed a few seconds of a family member's sobs at sentencing, then cut back to the bench and suppressed the audio to avoid emotional exploitation. Editors logged the clip for possible, proportionate use in later packages.
3. **Reporter-camera operator coordination.**
Tight field coordination is crucial. Before hearings, reporters brief camera operators on priority moments (e.g., *"Please capture the defendant's expression when the demand is read,"* or *"Take the exhibit if displayed"*). During live coverage, the reporter remains in the media area with an earpiece linked to the control room. If the producer needs a particular shot, the request is relayed via the reporter to the camera operator—sometimes through non-verbal signals because speaking is prohibited in court. A shared gesture system (e.g., two raised fingers toward the gallery meaning *"audience shot now"*) enables smooth synchronous movement despite physical separation, ensuring that no salient moment is missed and visuals match the on-air narrative.

4. Studio–expert collaboration.

For lengthy hearings, a studio presenter moderates the flow and often works with an in-studio legal expert. Experts are briefed not to comment on evidentiary merits (to avoid *sub judice*) but to explain legal terminology and procedure for lay audiences. One expert (a former judge) once clarified at length the difference between *amnesty* and *abolition* in a political case, which the team acknowledged helped viewers grasp context. As Informant 3 admitted, “*Even we (journalists) learned what amnesty really meant when the expert explained it on air—so having a competent expert is essential.*” Producers decide in real time when the expert should speak, typically during recesses or when technical statutory provisions arise—thus adding educational value without disrupting judicial flow.

Taken together, the control room functions as a site of micro-negotiation between the demand to deliver engaging television and the obligation to maintain accuracy and propriety. Editorial choices must weigh journalistic, legal, and ethical consequences simultaneously. Briefly showing a disruption may be compelling (media logic) but could harm the court’s decorum (ethics/law); the compromise is limited visuals with immediate contextualization. These patterns reflect a gatekeeping practice adapted to a real-time, multiplatform environment while adhering to professional standards.

Public education strategies: expert use and visual/narrative framing

The final set of findings underscores Metro TV’s intent to position live courtroom coverage as a vehicle for public legal education, visible along two dimensions: the use of experts and the adoption of educational framing.

1. Expert commentators.

For significant cases, Metro TV routinely involves legal experts (academics, senior advocates, former judges or prosecutors). The aim is educational, not sensational. As the research team’s synthesis echoed participants’ accounts, the newsroom strategy is to have experts translate legal jargon and procedure into accessible language (e.g., explaining *exception pleas*, distinctions between *demands* and *charges*, or the meaning of a *life sentence*). This helps audiences learn, not merely watch. As Informant 1 framed it, “*We feel a moral duty to serve as an educator for the public—especially lay viewers—so they can learn how Indonesian law works.*” Prior studies suggest that courtroom broadcasting, when used as a teaching tool, can elevate public legal literacy; Metro TV’s practices are consistent with that rationale. Internally, the approach is encapsulated in the newsroom’s recurring “news you can use” ethos.

The newsroom also perceives reciprocal benefits. Informant 3 recalled that during Constitutional Court hearings on the KPK inquiry, an expert clarified the concept of *amicus curiae*, enlightening both the audience and the newsroom. Although this study does not quantify audience outcomes, prior research indicates that observing respectful judicial interactions can increase public trust; in Metro TV’s context, expert explanations are expected to bolster both knowledge and confidence in the fairness and transparency of legal processes.

2. Educational visual and narrative framing.

Beyond experts, scripts for post-hearing packages emphasize procedural elements for learning. Rather than merely stating, “*The defendant was sentenced to X years,*” packages add, “*The sentence accords with Article Y, which provides a maximum of Z years,*” thereby explaining how punishments are determined. Visuals are not

limited to emotional shots (tears or anger) but also include substantive moments—the judge reading the dispositive part of the verdict, counsel conferring—offering a fuller picture of the process. The newsroom also prepares infographics to recap milestones (e.g., the path from indictment to verdict) for major cases, recognizing that many viewers may be following a court case in depth for the first time. This reflects an effort to promote substantive transparency, not mere voyeurism.

Another element of framing is showing the judiciary's human face. When a judge offers guidance to a minor offender at the close of a petty-theft case, for instance, Metro TV may air the exchange in full due to its moral and educational value. This choice departs from a conflict-seeking bias and can help shape a positive institutional image consistent with open-justice goals—signalling that the media are not solely chasing negative sensationalism.

A persistent challenge, however, is that not all viewers register the educational framing; some still watch courtroom broadcasts as entertainment akin to reality television. As participants acknowledged when prompted, no audience impact survey is currently available, though the newsroom hopes that informative presentation leads viewers to understand as well as watch. Prior studies report mixed outcomes: courtroom broadcasting can cultivate legal consciousness yet also invite misperceptions if audiences primarily seek sensation. Ultimately, the effectiveness of media-based legal education depends on presentation quality and active audience engagement. In Metro TV's case, intent and strategy are evident, but measurable outcomes warrant further research.

In sum, these findings portray how a major Indonesian news broadcaster navigates daily among the ideals of legal transparency, the realities of media-industry pressures, and ethical-regulatory constraints. The ensuing discussion connects these empirical patterns to the study's conceptual framework and to relevant prior scholarship.

Discussion

Negotiating open justice and media logic: between transparency and sensationalism

The Metro TV case study confirms that the negotiation between *open justice* and media logic lies at the heart of live courtroom broadcasting. This finding is consistent with global scholarship. Garcia-Blanco and Bennett (2021) note that debates on filming trials oscillate between two poles: the desire to increase judicial transparency and concerns about a “media circus” marked by sensationalism. In the United Kingdom, proposals to relax bans on cameras in higher courts were advanced in the name of transparency and public trust, yet resisted due to concerns about potential over-dramatization (Garcia-Blanco & Bennett, 2021).

Consistent with the conceptualization of *open justice* advanced in the Introduction, the findings indicate that transparency in courtroom broadcasting is best understood as negotiated transparency rather than absolute openness (Cunliffe, 2012). Metro TV's experience illustrates Moran's (2014) notion of *mass-mediated open justice*, where access to judicial processes is mediated through journalistic selection and institutional permission. The requirement for judicial authorization under PERMA No. 5/2020 exemplifies how Indonesian courts operationalize open justice through controlled access, balancing public visibility with procedural protection.

In Metro TV's context, journalists seek to broadcast in service of transparency and the public's right to know, while simultaneously contending with audience imperatives that favor dramatic elements. This tension surfaces in editorial choices, highlighting a supporter carrying flowers during the Tom Lembong hearings to add color (an entertainment element) while still prioritizing substantive legal process (an informational element).

From the perspective of media-logic theory (Altheide, 2016; Flower, 2025; Flower & Ahlefeldt, 2021), media organizations operate with internal criteria for news value, dramatization, personalization, conflict, and striking visuals. By contrast, the legal institution's logic emphasizes calm, order, and objectivity. The collision of these logics is evident in our findings: judges worry that witnesses may "perform" for the camera (media logic spurring performance), while journalists are frustrated when live coverage is curtailed, reducing transparency and perceived newsworthiness. Mediatization of justice posits that legal institutions increasingly adapt to media logic to secure public attention (Drucker, 1989; Huang, 2021; Johnston, 2001; Lev-On, 2025).

However, aligning with Landerer's (2013) argument that media logic operates in plural and negotiated forms, the findings suggest that media logic does not fully determine courtroom journalism practices. Metro TV journalists actively moderate media logic through professional judgment, selectively deploying visualization and human-interest framing while maintaining legal substance. This supports the view that mediatization involves mutual adaptation rather than unilateral domination of legal processes by media imperatives.

In the present case, however, Indonesian courts appear to resist mediatization to protect procedural integrity. The Supreme Court's PERMA 5/2020 operationalizes this resistance within the courtroom. Consequently, broadcasters such as Metro TV adjust by, for example, not airing certain witness segments. Viewed through institutional negotiation, there is mutual adaptation: courts grant limited access (conditional permissions), and media filter content—each preserving its domain (courts safeguarding *fair trial*; media sustaining an informational function).

Notably, Metro TV aims to be more than a passive conduit; it positions itself as a proactive actor that leverages transparency for public education. This aligns with advocacy-oriented *open justice* (Johnston, 2018), wherein media not only open visual access but also deepen public understanding. Metro TV deliberately adds explanatory narration, invites legal experts, and highlights the judiciary's human face choices that constitute "value-added" journalism beyond raw live feeds. Such moves exemplify socially responsible journalism.

Beyond compliance with P3SPS, these practices resonate with broader normative principles articulated in The Nine Elements of Journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Elements such as loyalty to citizens, the discipline of verification, proportionality, and professional conscience are reflected in Metro TV's avoidance of prejudicial language, careful visual framing, and reliance on expert explanation. Ethical judgment thus functions as a reflexive professional practice guiding real-time editorial decisions in live courtroom reporting.

Echoing Lodhi (2025) and Agrawal (2021), advocate a balanced approach to prevent sensationalism from undermining fairness and public trust, the Metro TV

case demonstrates a continuous negotiation between engagement and responsibility. While elements of dramatization persist under ratings pressure, newsroom practices—such as pre-hearing briefings, delay mechanisms, and editorial filtering—reflect embedded ethical judgment rather than reactive compliance. This negotiation becomes more complex in the digital ecosystem, where livestreamed trials on platforms such as YouTube expand access but also generate fragmented narratives and unmoderated commentary. In this context, professional ethics functions as a stabilizing force, ensuring that heightened visibility does not erode procedural fairness, a tension similarly observed in digital courtroom broadcasting research in South Africa (Mokoena & Koen, 2022).

Ethics as a mediating framework beyond regulation

From a media-ethics vantage point, Metro TV's practice illustrates responsible journalism that walks the line between a *duty to inform* and *do no harm*. Indonesia's Journalistic Code of Ethics compels balance, accuracy, and non-prejudicial language. Our findings indicate relative compliance: neutral anchoring, avoidance of de-contextualized clips that could mislead, and respect for judicial instructions. In Indonesia, mainstream outlets appear cautious. The combination of external regulation and internal ethics helps temper media logic.

A critical question remains, How effective are these educational efforts? Do viewers truly learn legal context, or do they primarily consume "courtroom drama"? (Widodo, 2022, 2024). Xu and Liu (2020) suggest that when presented well—for instance, showcasing respectful judicial interactions—public trust can increase. This implies a likely affective gain (trust), but cognitive gains (legal literacy) were not measured in this study. This matters because the essence of *open justice* is not merely seeing justice, but understanding how justice is done. Mokoena and Koen (2022) emphasize media-based teaching tools to address legal literacy deficits. Metro TV already moves in this direction, but further enhancements are possible. In this way, media would not only report judicial events but also serve as partners in public legal education.

This interpretation aligns with The Nine Elements of Journalism, which conceptualize journalism as a civic practice grounded in loyalty to citizens, verification, independence, proportionality, and responsibility. In live courtroom coverage, these principles materialize in Metro TV's avoidance of speculative commentary, use of neutral legal language, contextual explanation of procedures, and restraint in visual framing. Such practices reflect what Kovach and Rosenstiel describe as a discipline of verification rather than an orientation toward speed or emotional amplification. Importantly, ethical restraint observed in the newsroom is not driven primarily by fear of sanctions. Informants emphasized professional credibility, public trust, and institutional legitimacy as central motivations. This finding supports McQuail's (2013) responsibility theory and Ward's (2018) argument that journalism ethics are increasingly reflexive and situational. Ethics thus emerges as an internalized newsroom culture that mediates between the normative demand for openness and the commercial pressures of media logic.

The role of regulation and ethics: balancing press freedom and judicial integrity

The Metro TV case underscores the importance of regulatory and professional-ethical frameworks in governing courtroom reporting. Field evidence indicates that press freedom in judicial contexts is not absolute; it is bounded to ensure fair trial. This aligns with the harm-limitation principle in media ethics: freedom is paired with the responsibility to avoid prejudicing justice. In many jurisdictions this is codified through contempt of court rules. Indonesia has no omnibus *Contempt of Court Act*, yet the Supreme Court has issued internal instruments (e.g., PERMA 5/2020) that perform a similar function by structuring courtroom coverage. Civil-society groups have criticized the requirement of judicial permission as potentially curtailing statutory access rights. This reveals a policy tug-of-war: *open justice* as a legal principle versus court management as a practical necessity.

Metro TV complies with these rules. In the short term, compliance preserves working relations and prevents conflict; in the longer term, shared understanding between media and courts is needed. Media aim to fulfill a watchdog and civic-education role, while courts aim to protect procedural purity. A moderate solution would be a joint guideline negotiated by the Press Council, KPI, and the Supreme Court. As suggested by Bagir Manan (2015), explicit standards would offer clear technical guidance—maximum number and placement of cameras, permissible content, and so forth. Many countries maintain court-broadcasting guidelines; in the United States, states regulate courtroom cameras in detail (federal courts remain largely restrictive), while in the UK only appellate proceedings are televised under tight conditions (e.g., judges on camera). Indonesia needs a context-sensitive model: neither overly restrictive, contrary to the Constitutional Court's stance that hearings are open unless explicitly closed, nor *laissez-faire*. Beyond institutional and ethical negotiations, these dynamics are further intensified within digitally mediated news environments.

Interlinking media logic, ethics, and live courtroom journalism in the digital news ecosystem

While open justice, media logic, and professional ethics can be analytically separated, the findings of this study indicate that in practice they operate as an interconnected system within live courtroom journalism. This study reflects that this interconnection is not merely operational but fundamentally normative, shaping how justice is mediated, interpreted, and experienced in the public sphere. Media logic shapes how trials are made visible through immediacy, visual selection, narrative framing, and audience-oriented presentation. However, these production imperatives are not applied in isolation. Ethical judgment functions as an internal regulator that determines how far media logic may extend without compromising fairness. In this configuration, media logic drives immediacy and visibility, ethics constrains and calibrates representation, and courtroom norms continuously mediate both in real time.

In live courtroom broadcasting, media logic encourages dramatization, personalization, and emotional intensity to maintain audience engagement. Yet professional

ethics intervenes by filtering visual choices, moderating commentary, and reinforcing the presumption of innocence. Rather than standing in opposition, media logic and ethics operate in constant negotiation. This interaction produces what may be described as responsible mediated visibility, where engagement is balanced with restraint.

This interdependence becomes more complex in the contemporary digital news ecosystem. Unlike conventional linear television broadcasting, courtroom coverage now circulates within algorithm-driven environments. This transformation is not incremental but structural, fundamentally reshaping the conditions under which live courtroom journalism operates. Whereas conventional live television primarily concentrated ethical risk within the broadcast window, platformised circulation expands the risk temporally and spatially, through clipping, re-uploading, and comment-driven reinterpretation that may outlast the trial and escape newsroom control.

Engagement metrics such as views, shares, and watch time increasingly shape editorial awareness. In this context, free-market media logic is no longer driven solely by ratings competition but is structurally embedded within platform algorithms and engagement-based metrics. Algorithmic amplification can privilege emotionally charged or visually dramatic courtroom moments, potentially intensifying selective emphasis. Real-time online commentary may also shape public perception before judicial processes conclude. Consequently, ethical responsibility extends beyond live transmission to the anticipated digital circulation and reinterpretation of courtroom content. This indicates that ethical responsibility is no longer temporally bounded but becomes extended, distributed, and anticipatory.

Therefore, digital transformation does not simply expand open justice; it reshapes the conditions under which media logic and ethics interact. The Metro TV case suggests that internalized newsroom ethics functions as a stabilizing mechanism, ensuring that algorithmically intensified media logic does not undermine procedural fairness. In digitally mediated environments, ethics does not stand outside media logic; it actively structures how transparency remains accountable and sustainable.

Taken together, the Metro TV case suggests that media logic, ethics, and live courtroom practice operate less as separate domains than as a single decision ecology. Media logic pushes toward immediacy, visual intensity, and audience retention, especially when live feeds must remain “continuously newsworthy.” Yet the courtroom setting imposes procedural constraints (permission regimes, sub judice sensitivities, and witness protection), forcing journalists to translate engagement demands into calibrated visibility rather than unfiltered exposure.

Professional ethics becomes the hinge that connects the two: it authorizes real-time editorial restraint (delay, selective shots, and disciplined narration) while protecting the presumption of innocence and minimizing harm. In the digital news ecosystem, this interlink intensifies because free-market pressures are no longer expressed mainly through ratings but through platform metrics and algorithmic amplification, where short, emotionally charged courtroom fragments can circulate detached from procedural context. This shift extends ethical responsibility beyond the moment of live transmission to anticipatory judgment about downstream circulation and interpretive risks.

Journalistic practice in live trials: a three-domain negotiation model

In sum, the negotiation among *open justice*, media logic, and professional ethics resembles three overlapping Venn circles in the practice of live courtroom journalism. Their intersection is the ideal of courtroom television journalism: transparent, informative, and responsible. Realizing this ideal is difficult (constant push and pull is inevitable) but the present study shows it is attainable. With a commitment to democratic values and ethics, media can bridge the public’s right to know with the judiciary’s duty to safeguard fairness. Ultimately, live courtroom broadcasting is not only about seeing justice but also understanding and feeling that justice is done; good journalism ensures the public attains both. Metro TV’s experience suggests that, with good faith and professional standards, a tripartite negotiation among *open justice*, media, and ethics can yield constructive outcomes: an informed (even educated) public, protected legal process, and sustainable audiences. There is always room for improvement, but this experience offers an initial model for responsible transparency in courtroom broadcasting. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model referenced above.

Figure 1 synthesizes Metro TV journalists’ communication experiences during live courtroom coverage. It visualizes live trial journalism as a at the intersection of three interacting domains: Open Justice, Media Logic, and Professional Ethics. The overlapping circles signify that courtroom broadcasting is neither a purely legal exercise nor a purely media-driven activity, but a communicative arena in which journalists continuously manage tensions between normative ideals, industry imperatives, and professional responsibility.



Figure 1. Journalistic practice in live trials: a three-domain negotiation model.
Source: Research Result, 2025

The first domain, Open Justice (Transparency and Accountability), represents journalism's role as a public guardian of judicial openness. In practice, Metro TV's courtroom broadcasts are not intended to transform trials into spectacles, but to extend the courtroom's public character to a wider audience. This aligns with the principle that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done, reinforcing public trust through visible legal process.

The second domain, Media Logic (Commercialisation and Audience Appeal), acknowledges that television journalism operates within a competitive market. Editorial decisions, such as emphasizing emotional moments, personalizing courtroom actors, or selecting compelling visuals, reflect strategies to secure audience attention. These practices do not automatically negate transparency; rather, they shape how legal processes are made visible and intelligible to mass audiences, provided that legal substance is not eclipsed by dramatization.

The third domain, Ethics (Professional Responsibility), foregrounds normative constraints and values. Ethical practice is expressed through adherence to the presumption of innocence, respect for judicial authority, avoidance of prejudicial framing, and proportional visuals. The inclusion of legal expert an ethical commitment to verification, explanation, and public understanding.

At the intersection of the three domains lies Journalistic Practice in Live Trials—the space where live courtroom reporting is enacted through compromise, reflexivity, and situational judgment. This intersection represents what the study terms “engaging transparency”: a form of mediated openness that balances public visibility with accuracy, accountability, and ethical restraint. The model highlights that live courtroom broadcasting is not merely technical transmission, but a communicative practice shaped by negotiation among openness, media logic, and professional ethics.

Conclusion

This study examined the ongoing negotiation between open justice, media logic, and journalistic ethics in live courtroom broadcasting. The Metro TV case demonstrates that courtroom visibility is not a neutral extension of judicial openness but a communicative practice shaped by the interaction of legal norms, commercial imperatives, and professional responsibility. In mediated settings, open justice cannot be equated with visibility alone; transparency becomes meaningful only when supported by ethical framing, contextual explanation, and respect for procedural integrity. Journalism therefore operates as an interpretive institution that translates legal processes into publicly intelligible narratives rather than merely transmitting courtroom events.

The findings confirm that media logic-driven by speed, ratings, and visual appeal inevitably influences live trial reporting. However, media logic does not inherently produce sensationalism or trial by media. When mediated by professional ethics grounded in verification, proportionality, neutrality, and the presumption of innocence, audience engagement can coexist with the normative demands of judicial integrity. Ethics thus functions not as an external constraint but as an internalized newsroom framework that structures editorial judgment.

The proposed Three-Domain Negotiation Model conceptualizes live courtroom journalism as the intersection of open justice, media logic, and ethics. By foregrounding journalists' perspectives within a non-Western context, the study extends scholarship on mediated justice beyond Western-centric debates and offers a framework for analyzing courtroom broadcasting in hybrid media systems.

Practical implications and recommendations

The findings underscore the importance of clearer and more coordinated governance of courtroom broadcasting. Greater alignment among judicial authorities, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), and the Press Council would reduce regulatory ambiguity while reinforcing fair trial safeguards. At the newsroom level, embedding structured ethical briefings, delay mechanisms, and expert contextualization into routine production processes can strengthen responsible reporting and prevent commercial pressures from undermining judicial integrity.

Future research should examine whether the negotiation patterns identified in this study extend beyond Metro TV to other broadcasters and digital platforms. Audience-centered studies are also necessary to assess the impact of live courtroom broadcasting on legal literacy, public trust, and perceptions of fairness. In addition, longitudinal research could explore how platform-based streaming and algorithmic visibility reshape journalistic norms, judicial communication strategies, and regulatory responses in digitally mediated justice environments.

Live courtroom broadcasting should be understood neither as an uncomplicated expansion of transparency. Rather, it constitutes a negotiated communicative arena in which journalism mediates between openness, market pressures, and judicial integrity. Responsible courtroom transparency remains attainable when professional ethics actively structures the interaction between media logic and open justice.

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Ethics statement

This minimal-risk, non-interventional study complied with national research ethics guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki. No sensitive personal data were collected, and all participants provided informed consent.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) disclosure

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5) to assist with language editing and improving clarity of expression. The use of this tool was limited to text

refinement and idea structuring, and all content was subsequently reviewed and verified by the authors to ensure accuracy and integrity.

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