

Navigating Conditional Press: Negotiating News in Madura, Indonesia

Surokim¹, Rachmah Ida², Suko Widodo³, Hamed Mohd Adnan⁴

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

¹Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, Universitas Trunodjoyo, Madura, Indonesia

⁴Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Background: Journalists in Indonesia, particularly on Madura Island, experience numerous problems when carrying out their professional duties. Despite the official guarantee of press freedom, journalists struggle with a lot of obstacles stemming from laws, social and cultural norms, political and economic pressures, and accelerating digital development. **Purpose:** This study investigates the challenges faced by the local journalists on Madura and analyzes how these journalists have overcome such challenges and kept their journalistic independence. **Methods:** The study adopts a qualitative approach using thematic synthesis based on in-depth interviews and data from local journalists on Madura Island. The analysis is conducted on 9 cases of journalists working in print, online, television, and digital media. **Results:** Journalism in Madura is characterized by the ongoing negotiation with constraints, and four kinds of challenges that journalists face include: the lack of legal protection for local journalists who face threats when reporting issues that are of high sensitivity; dominant local social and cultural power structures; economic and political dependencies; and rapid changes in digital media that require journalism to adapt in newsroom and in the ways they connect to the audience. **Conclusion:** Local journalism in Madura operates within structural constraints yet remains flexible, with autonomy that must be renegotiated continually. Sustainability in local journalism depends on improving support for local journalists, securing independent media, and developing new competencies. Local journalism must evolve along with current political and social changes and technological advances. **Implications:** Local journalists need certain legal protections, greater media independence, and capacity building to respond to the socio-political, economic, and digital contexts in which they work. The quality of their independence at the local level would then depend on journalists' agency to struggle for spaces of autonomy, given these structural limitations.

Keywords: conditional press; negotiating news; news production; socio-cultural structure; structure-agency

To cite this article (APA Style):

Surokim, Ida, R., Widodo, S., & Adnan, H. M. (2026). Navigating conditional press: Negotiating news in Madura, Indonesia. *Kajian Jurnalisme*, 10(1), 72–86. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v10i1.71189>

Correspondence: Surokim, S.Sos., M.Si., Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga Jl. Airlangga 4-6 Surabaya, Email: surokim-2024@fisip.unair.ac.id

Submitted: 21 June 2026, **Revised:** 28 July 2026, **Accepted:** 31 July 2026, **Published:** 31 July 2026
ISSN: 2549-0559 (Printed), ISSN: 2549-1946 (Online), Website: <http://jurnal.unpad.ac.id/kajian-jurnalisme>
Copyright © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license

INTRODUCTION

Professional journalism is perceived as an independent activity that provides information to the people. The production of news is inevitably embedded in and affected by the social and political environment. In Madura, journalists must be engaged in the process of bargaining with local political elites, religious leaders and community figures to mediate between professional norms and conditions in the local community, where close networks and local power are important factors in access to information, selection and news output. In such a situation, negotiating is not a sign of failure but is part of the role of local journalists in dealing with difficult situations (Cancela & Dubied, 2022; Ida, 2010; Rinaldi et al., 2025; Surokim et al., 2026). This context explains how professional journalists solve dynamic obstacles in the field.

Several authors have stated that the internet and digital media changed the media industry (Alhakim, 2022; Hijriani & Nur, 2024; Simandjuntak, 2024). It is also important to acknowledge the media's place at the local level post-reformation. Firstly, local journalists can provide important checks to ensure the government behaves fairly, whereas national media would either be disinterested or the government's behavior would likely go undetected. Secondly, journalists working at the local level engage with people and situations very different from those at the national level. Therefore, this question boils down to: in theory, when press freedom is guaranteed, can reporters pursue their job without putting themselves, their ability to find information, or their reputation at risk?

This is applicable to media professionals situated outside urban areas who must navigate numerous changes (Masduki, 2023; Steele, 2013; Wijayanto & Masduki, 2024). Previous research on Indonesian journalism has indicated that the lack of local autonomy among local journalists is constrained by political interests, local cultural contexts, and the press as an institution (Mau et al., 2025; Ruswandi, 2026). In addition, the rapid expansion of online media has intensified newsroom pressure and accelerated news production processes, increasing journalists' vulnerability to professional risks (Swaroop, 2024). Despite having learned a lot from these studies, we still do not completely understand how laws, local culture, and the economy affect the way journalists work in metropolitan areas of Indonesian media. This remains an important aspect and requires more information, as mass media in Indonesia continues to be of interest.

However, previous studies have several limitations. They are largely focused on mainstream media, providing limited insight into how local media operate within specific legal and socio-cultural contexts (Hong et al., 2024; Hutagalung, 2024; Ruswandi, 2026; Widodo et al., 2026). Some studies highlight the influence of religion, reputation, and Madurese cultural values on media practices, yet they rarely explain how these factors shape everyday journalistic decisions. Moreover, existing research has paid limited attention to how social authority, economic constraints, public activism, and technological changes influence journalism practices in Madura (Rifai, 2007; Rozaki, 2021).

Journalists face pressure not only from state actors but also from local strongmen (Nahria et al., 2025; Surokim et al., 2026; Ullah & Jan, 2026), such as *blater* (local strongmen/gangsters), *klebun* (village heads), religious leaders, and local elites in Madura. They have a strong social and cultural influence in the Madura. Many journalists reported facing challenges such as being punished for what they published, being asked to remove stories, individuals refusing to let them report on crime, and powerful local figures trying to influence them.

Previous research has underlined that negotiation journalism is an act of responding to political pressure, media ownership, and institutional control, as well as the intervention of social and cultural contexts (Kuang, 2017; Ullah & Jan, 2026). This study reveals that in Madura,

religious authority, kinship relations, and community expectations influence news production. Reflecting Giddens' (1984) idea of the duality of structure, there is always interaction between journalists' agency and the social structures (Rusdi, 2025; Stones, 2005). By examining the threats of journalists and how they deal with these obstacles, this study expands understanding of negotiating journalism as a practice shaped by the relationship between professional choices and local cultural realities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was carried out in Madura, East Java, Indonesia, from November 2025 to May 2026. To gain a thorough understanding, we interviewed nine local reporters with extensive experience facing pressure in the news media production process (See Table 1). We also used two documents as secondary data, compiled from a course taught during the 2025/2026 academic year. All of them consisted of interview reports, transcripts, and summaries of some journalist cases in Madura.

The significant pressure journalists experience is the main focus of this study. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, which involved selecting informants considered to have relevant experience and knowledge of the phenomenon under study. The informant criteria include: (1) being an active journalist in local or regional media; (2) having at least five years of journalistic work experience; (3) having experienced or directly faced pressure from non-state actors (local strongmen) in the reporting or news process; and (4) being willing to be an informant and share experiences openly through in-depth interviews.

The study focuses on news production and journalists' experiences. Given that the source documents contained information, this manuscript employs fictitious names for the journalists and broad descriptions of the media organizations. The credibility of the findings was improved by comparing sources (Swaroop, 2024). To ensure the validity of the research findings, this study applies four trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Enworu, 2023). Credibility is obtained through member checking, which involves reconfirming the interpretation with several informants to ensure it aligns with their experiences. Dependability is maintained through peer debriefing, a discussion among researchers during the analysis process to reduce subjectivity and improve the consistency of interpretation (see Table 2).

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Informant	Media	Locations
1	J1	Online media	Bangkalan
2	J2	printed newspaper	Bangkalan
3	J3	Online media	Bangkalan
4	J4	Local news network	Sampang
5	J5	Local TV journalist	Sampang
6	J6	Printed newspaper	Pamekasan
7	J7	Online media	Pamekasan
8	J8	Printed newspaper	Sumenep
9	J9	Printed newspaper	Sumenep

Source: Primary Research Data, Compiled by the Authors, 2026

Table 2. Journalist Case as Secondary Data

No	Case	Media Type	Coverage Emphasis	Experience	Primary Strain Model
1	J1	Local digital platform	Madura-wide social, political, and policy news coverage	Over 7 years	Collusion proposals and relational influence
2	J2	Local newspaper	Bangkalan administration and regional politics	Years after publication	Harassment and editorial censorship
3	J3	Local digital platform	Sumenep activities, offenses, and organizations	Not specified	Field hindrance, harassment, and bribery rejection
4	J4	Local news network	Bangkalan governance, politics, and crime	Since 2014	Unofficial threats and reliance on editorial SOP
5	J5	Local TV journalist	Bangkalan/Madura conflict and crime coverage	Since 2004	Community pushback and safety-focused story retraction
6	J6	Network digital/print journalist	Bangkalan crime, justice, and local issues	Since 2002	Family disapproval, reputation threat, police-supported protection
7	J7	Regional digital journalist	Bangkalan crime and community politics	5 years	Removal requests and high daily production goals
8	J8	Local print journalist	Bangkalan village administration and overall news	Since 2021	Office pressure and news staff meetings
9	J9	Local newspaper journalist	General reporting throughout Madura	4 years	Gender-based vulnerability and local patriarchal influence

Source: Primary Research Data, Compiled by the Authors, 2026

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media Ecology, Political Economy, and Relational Dependency

The ecology of local Madurese media operates within a complex socio-cultural landscape, where news production practices are influenced not only by the media's professional and economic factors but also by power relations rooted in communal social structures. In the context of Madurese society, *blater* (local strongman/gangster), *klebun* (village heads), religious leaders, and local elites, as non-state and powerful actors, can significantly affect the news production process.

The social position and cultural legitimacy of non-state actors usually demonstrate their powerful influence through various forms of pressure. In some cases, they even resorted to direct intimidation and threats. These conditions affect the independence of journalism and the disparity between professional journalism and non-state actors. In other words, the intervention by non-state and powerful parties drives journalists in Madura into a vulnerable position. The independence of journalism in Madura remains dependent on political ties and relationships with powerful patrons. The obstacles encountered by journalists are not always physical threats; they usually lie in the interdependence that arises within their professional networks.

Journalists, when they report unpleasant truths, operate under challenging constraints. Despite recognizing the necessity of obtaining information from political actors, police officers, government officials, and community leaders who represent privileged segments of

society, journalists cannot disregard the need for ongoing collaboration and future access to them. Any reporting perceived negatively can have severe consequences for future access and harm a reporter's professional reputation and relationships with colleagues. Social acceptance and societal perception complement the legal restrictions on the press; if negative reporting is seen as merely criticizing the powerful, it complicates a journalist's position (Masduki, 2023).

Newsroom journalists report a culture in the media in which speed and output are favored over detailed, and possibly difficult-to-achieve, fact-checking procedures. Many journalists believe that the urgent publication of online articles also reduces chances of thorough checking for factual accuracy (Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets, 2022; Masduki, 2023). Economic interests and the dynamics of newsroom environments additionally influence press practices.

These economic constraints are aggravated by interrelations among media organizations, advertisers, and politicians, in which journalists claim that political patronage and sponsorships influence news agendas. These interactions rarely lead to direct censorship; however, they limit the extent to which they can question powerful corporations or political institutions. Journalists who lack the ability to negotiate can be severely influenced by these constraints (McCHESNEY, 2003; Wijayanto & Masduki, 2024). Various reasons for choosing a journalism career can be divided into "because motives" (past reasons) and "in order to motives" (future intentions). These motivations and their impact on journalists' work, quantity, and quality are often analyzed (Alfarisi & Gumilar, 2019; Powers, 2025; Weaver, 2025).

In essence, two principal forms of power influence the functioning of local journalism in Madura: firstly, that of individuals who hold a position of authority such as politicians, police, community and religious leaders who have substantial power in the society and, secondly, power that refers to the control over resources, in which job vacancies, advertising revenues, and career security are significant in structuring journalists' practices. To get an overview of local journalism in Madura, and after considering the structuration theory of power as discussed, these two perspectives have to examine power in relation to them.

Pressure and Conditional Press Freedom

The legal and institutional mechanisms that existed to support journalistic freedom remain insufficiently enforceable for journalists working in Madura. While there were elements within the Indonesian Press Law providing legal protection for journalistic rights, as in the 1999 and 2012 press laws, journalists remained largely at the mercy of local authorities, the local context, and their ability to negotiate effectively with authorities to work within societal expectations. That said, press freedom in Madura was not absent, but it was neither fully secure. The current political landscape presented journalists with a maze of legal uncertainties, socio-political hierarchies, local politics, and economics.

Freedom of the press and freedom of journalistic pursuit largely depend on journalists' competence in establishing relationships with local leaders as well as local expectations. This research contributes to understanding existing practices regarding press freedom issues related to legal uncertainties and risks in journalism. This study also expands on earlier findings that journalists operate in a constantly perceived environment of being sued, concerns about online security, and threats from powerful individuals or institutions.

"I was approached with a whisper, then the perpetrator made a slight threat. At that time, the perpetrator used a sickle for intimidation." (J2). Informant 2 also described more verbal pressure, through personal communication: "A verbal threat over the phone that they would send several people." These experiences show that threats against journalists remain real, even as their forms become increasingly diverse.

“The threat of a boycott is not only in words, but a disconnection of information access. If we are considered hostile, it will be difficult for us to get data, and we can even be socially ostracized.” J9 also emphasized that the resolution of various pressures is almost always done through social networks and mediation: “Local officials and community leaders helped me with mediation to find a peaceful agreement.” These findings indicate that communal pressure operates through long-standing social-relationship mechanisms rooted in local culture, so its effects are often stronger than administrative pressure from the state (See Table 3).

The Madura context confirms that the local community and the powerful in society are instrumental in restricting the freedom of journalists and that the reason for journalists to be quiet often did not reflect a lack of dedication or courage but rather an understanding of professional values versus external threats as a means to be more responsible and ethical, while remaining vigilant. By dealing cautiously, journalists are performing a professional obligation while avoiding potential threats posed by their reporting. The need to exercise restraint suggests they had difficulty doing their job well (See Table 4).

Table 3. Form of Communal Pressure on Local Journalists

Communal Actors	Forms of Pressure	Impact on Journalists
Blater	Direct intimidation, physical threats	Increased fear in reporting
Village head	Requests for retraction of news, restriction of access to information	Reduced access to sources
Religious leaders	Moral pressure and social legitimacy	Encouraging self-censorship
Political elite	Intervention in news content	Decreased editorial independence
Business people/ contractors	Threats of advertising cessation	Economic pressure on the media
Community groups	Boycotts and social exclusion	Hindering reporting activities

Source: Primary Research Data, Compiled by the Authors, 2026

Table 4. Analytical Dimensions of Conditional Press Freedom in Madura

No	Analytical Aspect	Evidence from Discussions	Interpretative Significance
1	Formal Legal Pressures	Journalists expressed fear of being reported under the UU ITE or accused of defamation. Several reporters delayed publication and emphasized the practice of “cover both sides” to reduce legal vulnerability.	Legal regulations function not only as formal protections but also as mechanisms that indirectly discipline journalistic practices and encourage self-censorship.
2	Informal Socio-Political Dangers	Informants talked about instances of being verbally threatened, facing intimidation with a celurit, being influenced by local powerful figures, and receiving warnings concerning their families after reporting on sensitive topics	Power relationships outside of formal regulations often create more immediate and intense risks than official laws, affecting the daily feelings of safety among journalists
3	Gentle Survival Strategies	Reporters toned down their headlines, changed their wording, delayed publishing stories, or left out certain details to prevent raising tensions with influential people	Survival relies on flexible communication techniques that emphasize negotiation and minimizing risks instead of direct confrontations

(continued on next page)

Table 4 (continued)

4	Relational Survival Strategies	Journalists looked for help from editors, colleagues, police officers, or competing local leaders to ensure their safety during conflicts.	Social connections and alliances function as unofficial protective measures in situations where formal protections are lacking
5	Protective Resistance	Some reporters collaborated by sharing sensitive stories together, sent their articles to larger media outlets, or kept records of intimidation efforts as proof.	Resilience arises through teamwork practices that share risks and enhance bargaining strength against local influences.

Source: Primary Research Data, Compiled by the Authors, 2026

Adaptive Survival Strategies of Journalists

A Journalist who cannot tell a whole story can verify with as many diverse and valid sources as possible and, if in doubt, can confirm with an editor before publishing to safeguard their personal, legal, and financial well-being. Verifying the news means examining primary documents and sources to ensure the story is accurate and to earn readers' trust in the news report.

Journalists often manage potential tensions by choosing and presenting their words in news reports. Instead of sensational titles or expressive sentences, the journalists try to state the facts and clarify issues impartially. This confirms that they fulfill their role in delivering information to society. During the process, they need to consider the social conditions and the impact of the news they produce.

Journalists have one further possibility. They take refuge in journalistic self-constraint through selective reporting or limiting their reports. They can refrain from reporting on a particular story altogether, or report it only at specific points or on specific days. This may occur because of certain risks involved or a lack of support from such institutions. This looks like censorship, but it can be justified as a pragmatic necessity to maintain the reputation in the face of immense societal pressure. In several cases, it seems better to sacrifice certain journalistic principles than to be completely repressed. In this sense, it should not be called cowardliness but rather pragmatism and knowledge of the restraints imposed on journalists.

Journalists face a complex challenge that involves these dynamics as well as societal dynamics. For many journalists in Madura, working conditions have often been described as volatile and uncertainty. For the journalists, it is a dilemma. One informant stated that being a journalist is like walking on eggshells. This captures well the constraints and representation of journalistic in Madura.

These circumstances make it difficult for local journalists to cover stories without putting themselves at risk. For example, these are what some local journalists expressed as having experienced: subtle but violent. "We were verbally threatened, or we received frightening phone calls, even being threatened to use primitive weapons like a *celurit* (sickle). There were negotiations where we had no real options, as our choice was between an envelope, which means we accepted a bribe, and our death," explained J8. The life of journalists is never worth risking to get any stories in Madura. No story is worth the reporter's life. So, local media workers feel vulnerable.

These findings suggest that threats against journalists are a symptom of more serious structural problems within media organizations and reflect attempts by local powers to control journalists and the information they transmit to maintain their positions. The structure of the workplace makes their conditions very tough. To improve their safety, one must go beyond a

general discourse of government-sanctioned and crime-induced violations and consider opaque structures and unclear legal systems that affect their lives and professional experiences. The threats they face need to be understood in a broad context that affects their lives and safety, as well as their working conditions and the flow of information in society at large.

Negotiated Journalism as a Framework for Layered Survival Strategies

When journalists are under pressure, they do not abandon their duties but instead survive by using various strategies. They can implement strategies such as reporting methods, report postponement, and a focus on neutrality and justice. The fundamental of the struggle is related to individual survival. For the sake of survival, journalists are careful with their wording and themes, but this does not mean they stop reporting. They protect themselves by managing risk with a delicate approach to their reporting. Despite facing enormous pressure, they continue to find ways to keep doing their work.

To maintain continuity, they rely on strategic choices and support networks that extend beyond the traditional newsroom's structures. These support networks include the journalist community, society and institutions, but were challenged by economic needs (Arini et al., 2023). Krisdinanto (2024) underlines that journalists must continuously balance professional ethics, organizational demands, and the realities of survival in a commercially driven media environment. In fact, diverse tactics are urged for their own safety, including working in groups, delivering work to their employers, and informing the proper officials when dangers arise. However, these acts are calculated and planned, so they should minimize the risks. Most journalists have no desire to risk putting themselves through a struggle just for attention.

These observations indicate that the way journalists survive in any given circumstance depends not on surrender or resistance but on the adaptation learned through communication and interaction. It is important to remember that careful mediated communication or the selective use of information does not deny facts. The art of manipulating circumstances through negotiation ultimately defines negotiation journalism.

Negotiating Sphere

Journalistic reporting and production processes may undergo all forms of pressure, yet the community press does not simply stop the entire process. Instead, journalists develop numerous mechanisms to adapt to such constraints, so that journalistic functions can continue to be performed without further compromising personal safety and livelihoods. These mechanisms have been referred to as Negotiations Journalism, an adaptive, responsive mechanism that would bring journalists to actual editorial independence through compromise on stylistic niceties rather than on accuracy.

As conveyed by J1, "Negotiation journalism is understood as an effort by journalists to continue carrying out their social control function flexibly and contextually." In line with this, J3 emphasized that "Negotiation is a way to stay alive and continue to work. In places where local powers are highly dominant, negotiation is a shield to avoid being antagonized, intimidated, and having access blocked." These statements indicate that negotiation is treated as a survival strategy, not as a form of surrender to the pressure of local actors.

The findings of the research also illustrate that negotiation procedures are the most useful way for newsrooms to reduce escalating tensions and lessen conflict over the publication of news. Use of milder, more diplomatic language (euphemisms), postponement until conditions are suitable, leaving space to clarify the situation, and individual approaches towards the groups involved, as people whom the news may hurt, are used most frequently. Informant J4 stated, "Delaying broadcast can happen, such as waiting for the results of police or prosecutor

investigations in a case.” Informant J5 also explained that when facing objections from sources, “I offer the right of reply to the source if they object to the news I have written.” In this case, negotiation is more directed towards managing time, procedures, and communication rather than altering facts obtained in the field.

In the cultural context of Madura, negotiation practices are also influenced by social norms that emphasize respect for interpersonal relationships. Some informants explained the importance of polite approaches through direct communication, deliberation, or the tradition of *amit* (seeking permission) before entering certain social spaces. J6 asserted, “Holding meetings (face-to-face) to provide explanations for existing issues, and it is important to do so in a low tone.” Meanwhile, J7 explained that local culture demands journalists to “understand the local culture, language, and feelings of the community. We must be fluid, go with the flow, but not be swept away.” These practices are not intended to seek approval of the news content but to maintain social relationships so that access to information remains open and the reporting process can continue.

Furthermore, these data show that the journalistic process in Madura also reflect of *eyanggep lanyala* value, that good journalism needs to preserve the dignity of others. It can be seen that the journalists tried to write neutrally and in a balanced way about a sensitive story while adhering to journalistic standards and facts. Thus, negotiation in journalism occurs not only through social relationships but also through the construction of language and news narratives as forms of cultural adaptation (see Table 5).

The research results suggested that freedom of the press in Madura differs greatly from the usual understanding of liberal freedom of the press. In the context of Madura, press freedom is neither absolute freedom nor a result of repression; rather, it represents a “flexible space of negotiation” where journalists frequently have to adjust the content and approach of their work in relation to the legal, cultural, and politico-economic contexts in which they work. In such understanding, press freedom in Madura is not seen as an absolute phenomenon that either exists or does not exist as suggested in some Western analyses of press freedom, but it is defined and constructed through the daily routines of journalists.

These professionals have to engage with contradictory roles continuously; on the one hand, informing the public, on the other hand, ensuring the sustainability of their businesses and their good reputation within a culturally codified community. Thus, the initiatives aiming to protect press freedom in such a locality must consider not only legal but also cultural and socio-politico-economic issues that affect professional work.

In their daily work, journalists negotiate with local influences such as religious authority, kinship ties, and community expectations, which provide social resources for producing and publishing news in meaningful ways (Reese, 2001; Wahl-Jorgensen & Boelle, 2024; Yudha & Hendriyani, 2024). This perspective highlights that negotiating journalism in Madura is a

Table 5. Forms of Negotiation Journalism

No	Negotiation Strategies	Objective
1	Use of euphemisms	Reduce conflict escalation
2	Postponement of publication	Wait for a more conducive situation
3	Additional clarification	Maintain information balance
4	Personal communication	Maintain social relationships

Source: Primary Research Data, Compiled by the Authors, 2026

dynamic process where journalists continuously adjust, reproduce, and occasionally reshape local social relations while seeking to maintain their professional values.

A range of journalism agencies was found across the interviews. The two major orientations are morally responsible negotiators and tactical Resisters. Journalists involved in tactical negotiation maintain journalistic professionalism simultaneously. 1) Practical Survivors: Reporters who emphasize their personal and professional safety as the threat level rises. 2) Tactical Resisters: Reporters who emphasize their safety and well-being as the threat level increases.

Those journalists who attempt to practice investigative journalism in Madura tend to go beyond confrontation, instead employing negotiation, thoughtful relationship management, and communal action to navigate the environment in which they operate. With reference to Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, these actions demonstrate that journalists are constructed by the forces of social structure, including local culture, religion and authority, as well as familial and community ties and the expectations within these contexts. At the same time, they reconstruct social structures by exercising personal freedom as journalists. In such a context, negotiation in Madura Journalism illustrates the dual existence of structure, in which journalists negotiate between occupational values and the surrounding structure of everyday communication.

The Power Impact of *Blater* and *Kiai* as a Local Strong Man

Existing socio-political dynamics dictate the working processes and practices of Madurese journalists. Discussions among them have revealed that *Kiai* and *Blater* are two actors of power who have had great influence on journalistic practices in Madura. While the former are religious authority figures, *Kiai* refers to figures who are popular and well-known and exert social power in their region to the extent that they overshadow public officeholders and make politicians dependent on them (Topan & Hakim, 2023). This type of system resembles a clientelist/patronage arrangement in which these actors manage groups of individuals.

According to a journalist (J6): "The *kiai* and the *blater* are stronger than government official posts." This phenomenon is consistent with research by Holilah et al. (2025) and Topan and Hakim (2023), as well as with *Blater's* dominance and pervasive influence within the Madurese social fabric. In this relationship of social power, these figures serve as intermediaries among state institutions and rural communities to mobilize and govern local conflict, allocation and political patronage. It follows that in Madura, purely political reporting on administration and governmental affairs is rarely seen, as journalists are likely to become deeply involved in these politics, thus putting their professional reputations at risk.

Journalist (J3) mentions a method of "cordial journalism," also known as "friendly reporting," that tailors journalistic practices to culture. Rather than following the journalistic standard that all views must be accounted for, this form becomes a cultural tool, a method of cultural negotiation. These writers who adhere to "friendly journalism" do not solely ask for opinions from those implicated in sensitive issues. Rather, they make gestures culturally appropriate, such as performing acts of respect, such as sowing, so that the featured may feel reassured and safe, knowing that the public and, in turn, themselves, will not feel exposed and mortified.

This type of approach would require that journalists take into account both their ethical obligations and their cultural duties as individual members of a culture and as representatives of journalistic standards. Friendly journalism promotes understanding and trust between journalists and the people they serve.

Different Perspectives on Journalism: While many approaches focus on how we in Western societies practice journalism, there is a wide range of other perspectives. It is a growing

field of research into how journalists actually behave in a global setting and whether the notion of press freedom is universal.

Taylor (2020) has explored how principles we uphold here in Western society do not hold up elsewhere, and how, in certain societies. There is a notion of a certain amount of bias on behalf of a journalist as a means to both preserve national and international relations, to be legally protected and respect the culture itself, and perhaps as a professional guideline to protect the people they are reporting on, and to promote peace and understanding in the context of areas in which journalists are not dominant cultural presences. By observing how journalists adapt to their communities, we also learn about novel ways of pursuing journalism.

Legal and Socio-Cultural Constraints on Journalism

From the data collected, it is apparent that reporters in Madura are not very concerned about getting into legal trouble or being quickly punished for their actions. Instead, they view legal systems more as an obstacle. It becomes clear that the legal system has a direct and sustained impact on journalists' daily routines.

Many reporters in Madura are concerned about their potential to be accused of defamation, ITE Law violation, or being interrogated and intimidated by the police through several tactics. Always, with or without going through a courtroom, this is the major problem that troubles journalists at night, influencing what stories they write and what they say or write in them. They would reflect very thoroughly on every phrase they use, the nuances and tone, because someone might seek the reporter out and take action through the Law.

"Whenever we cover actions from government or powerful figures, it will take longer for stories to be published, with extra editorial reviews for fear of being retaliated," explains J1. It is also common for opponents, rather than filing legal cases against reporters, to seek informal retribution. Such informal intimidation and retribution can include anonymous threats, suspicious calls to reporters and their newsrooms, disguised warnings, or denial of access to sources, with no intention of formalizing the matter through the legal system. The pressure to engage in such activity inevitably forces journalists to tone down their reporting for fear of their safety and well-being. This can chill the investigation into sensitive stories, curtail accountability for powerful actors, and limit the public's ability to make informed decisions.

These observations point to more subtle ways in which legal pressures shape journalistic behavior. Prior studies have examined how defamation laws and the ITE Law are used against journalists (Alhakim, 2022), but data from Madura indicate that the mere threat of legal action is sufficient to influence journalistic practices, even before any formal action is taken. This discovery has led Madura journalists to emphasize the importance of diligent fact-checking, consulting editors, and careful language as critical professional practices and as precautions against potential consequences.

In Madura, the norms of good journalism are shaped less by formal legal decisions and more by journalists' anticipation of social and institutional consequences. This phenomenon can be understood through Giddens' (1984) concept of structuration, in which social practices are continuously reproduced and transformed through the interaction between agents and the internalized rules, resources, and perceived risks that guide their actions.

Journalistic practice in Madura will thus be significantly influenced by an internal code that takes account of what is considered appropriate by the local community, the standard of social prestige and honor that may affect whether a given claim will be entertained and, thus, reported by the journalists, and to what extent journalists will tolerate and allow public criticism of their reports and their authors.

CONCLUSION

This research examines the complexities of local news distribution in Madura, Indonesia. In Madura, informal leaders, *Blater* and *Kiai*, have significant influence on the news environment, often more than the government does officially. They use established networks to exert their influence, shaping media practices and creating systemic barriers to the independence of media professionals, who are subject to both internal and external pressures. The participation of religious figures and the internal dynamics of news organizations complicate journalistic practices in Madura. This has led journalists in the region to develop adaptive strategies or journalistic negotiations, including rigorous fact-checking, consulting with colleagues and editorial staff on sensitive issues, carefully considering the potential consequences of published information, and, in some cases, intentionally withholding some reports from publication. Consequently, media organizations and press councils should establish specific protocols and ethical guidelines tailored for negotiating with those informal power holders. Furthermore, continuous training on conflict-sensitive journalism is essential to equip journalists with the resilience required to maintain professional standards amid such cultural and structural pressures.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank the nine Madurese journalists who shared their experiences for this study. We also thank the regional chapters of PWI, AJI, and IJTI for their guidance on duty-of-care protocols.

Author contributions: Conceptualization and Introduction, S. and H.M.A.; Literature review, S. and R.I.; Methodology & collecting data, S. and R.I.; Data Analysis, S., R.I., and S.W.; Writing and review, S., R.I., S.W., and H.M.A.

AI declaration: The authors hereby declare that they utilize DeepL and Grammarly to translate and proofread this manuscript.

Ethical clearance: This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines for social science investigations. Prior to the interview, informed consent was secured from each participant. To safeguard the confidentiality and business interests of the informants and their organizations, all identities have been anonymized using codes ranging from J1 to J9.

Data availability statement: The information backing the conclusions of this research, which includes interview transcripts, observation notes, and a corpus, can be obtained from the corresponding author upon a reasonable request. This is contingent upon adherence to the confidentiality agreements established with the informants.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding: The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Alfarisi, L., & Gumilar, G. (2019). Konstruksi realitas wartawan kantor berita radio atas kesejahteraan jurnalis. *Kajian Jurnalisme*, 2(1), 44–60. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v2i1.21073>
- Alhakim, A. (2022). Urgensi perlindungan hukum terhadap jurnalis dari risiko kriminalisasi UU informasi dan transaksi elektronik di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pembangunan Hukum Indonesia*, 4(1), 89–106. <https://doi.org/10.14710/jphi.v4i1.89-106>
- Arini, N. I., Kristianto, F., & Supardi, S. (2023). Video profil Desa Pucang sebagai sarana promosi usaha mikro kecil dan menengah serta peningkatan ekonomi masyarakat.

- Sewagati*, 7(3), 457–466. <https://doi.org/10.12962/j26139960.v7i3.561>
- Cancela, P., & Dubied, A. (2022). Stay strong, get perspective, or give up: Role negotiation in small-scale investigative journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 23(9), 1056–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2022.2067585>
- Enworo, O. C. (2023). Application of Guba and Lincoln's parallel criteria to assess trustworthiness of qualitative research on indigenous social protection systems. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 23(4), 372–384. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-08-2022-0116>
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.
- Hijriani, H., & Nur, M. N. A. (2024). Kebebasan pers, tanggung jawab dan etika jurnalistik dalam lingkungan media online yang kompetitif. *Jurnal Pembangunan Hukum Indonesia*, 6(2), 301–314. <https://doi.org/10.14710/jphi.v6i2.301-314>
- Himma-Kadakas, M., & Ojamets, I. (2022). Debunking false information: Investigating journalists' fact-checking skills. *Digital Journalism*, 10(5), 866–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2043173>
- Holilah, H., Marijan, K., & Mardiyanta, A. (2025). Kiai and Blater in Madura's local politics: Islamic authority and the limits of democratization in post-reform Bangkalan. *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 20(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2025.20.1.1-27>
- Hong, G., Cho, H. E., Kim, J., & Shin, J. (2024). What is the role of national media environments in shaping the impact of CSR on a firm's performance? *Multinational Business Review*, 32(4), 540–565. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MBR-12-2022-0212>
- Hutagalung, M. (2024). Framing public perception: A narrative review of media's influence in the digital era. *Communica: Journal of Communication*, 2(1), 44–57. <https://doi.org/10.61978/communica.v2i1.653>
- Ida, R. (2010). Reorganisation of media power in post-authoritarian Indonesia: Ownership, power and influence of local media entrepreneurs. In *In Politics and the Media in Twenty-First Century Indonesia: Decade of Democracy* (pp. 13–25). Taylor and Francis.
- Krisdinanto, N. (2024). Metajournalistic discourse on the commercialization of news: Resistance toward journalistic autonomy. *Kajian Jurnalisme*, 7(2), 98–111. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v7i2.48238>
- Kuang, X. (2017). Negotiating the boundaries of news reporting: Journalists' strategies to access and report political information in China. *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 33(62), 17. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v33i62.22508>
- Masduki, M. (2023). Organisasi jurnalis dan kebebasan pers di Yogyakarta. *Jurnal ILMU KOMUNIKASI*, 20(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v20i1.5227>
- Mau, M., Amal, M. I., Kartika, M. M. P., & Sonni, A. F. (2025). Archipelagic journalism: Media distribution strategies in Indonesia's island communities. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1682498>
- McCHESNEY, R. W. (2003). The problem of journalism: A political economic contribution to an explanation of the crisis in contemporary US journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 4(3), 299–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146167003006492>
- Nahria, N., Siahaan, C., & Nurfauziah, I. (2025). Journalists' interpretation of press freedom in Papua as a conflict-prone region. *Kajian Jurnalisme*, 9(1), 47–58. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v9i1.63590>
- Powers, M. (2025). Why pursue a career in journalism? Towards a renewed sociology of journalists. *Journalism Studies*, 26(8), 980–993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2489576>

- Reese, S. D. (2001). Understanding the global journalist: A hierarchy-of-influences approach. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 173–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118394>
- Rifai, M. A. (2007). *Manusia Madura: Pembawaan, perilaku, etos kerja, penampilan, dan pandangan hidupnya seperti dicitrakan*. Pilar Media.
- Rinaldi, R., Lestari, Y., & Arifuddin, M. T. (2025). Between idealism and survival: Negotiating professional journalism in local media organizations. *Jurnal Ranah Komunikasi (JRK)*, 9(2), 136–146. <https://doi.org/10.25077/rk.9.2.136-146.2025>
- Rozaki, A. (2021). *Menabur karisma, menuai kuasa: Kiprah kiai dan blater sebagai rezim kembar di Madura* [UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta]. <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/57622/>
- Rusdi, F. (2025). The duality of structure: Examining Suara.com’s adaptive strategies in a volatile media landscape. *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 23(10), 704–718. <https://doi.org/10.52152/hnkjfv97>
- Ruswandi, A. (2026). The failure of local press freedom in the era of decentralization in Indonesia. *Media Asia*, 53(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2025.2481551>
- Simandjuntak. (2024). A snapshot of violence and criminalization against journalists in Indonesia: Enhancing the safety of journalists. *Indonesian Journal of Criminal Law Studies*, 9(1), 1–30. <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/ijcls/article/view/48789>
- Steele, J. (2013). “Trial by the press” An examination of journalism, ethics, and Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(3), 342–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161213484588>
- Stones, R. (2005). Giddens, Anthony. In *Encyclopedia of social theory*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952552.n120>
- Surokim, S., Ida, R., & Widodo, S. (2026). Understanding negotiating journalism: Survival tactics, non-state pressure, and resistance of local media in Madura, Indonesia. *Simulacra*, 9(1), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v9i1.34406>
- Swaroop, T. S. (2024). The challenges and role of modern journalism in digital media enterprises. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(7), 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i7.2024.1921>
- Taylor, K. B. (2020). The passing of western civilization. *Futures*, 122, 102582. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2020.102582>
- Topan, A., & Hakim, A. (2023). The role of local religious figures (Kiai) in strengthening political participation in post-new order Madura 1998-2019. *NAHNU: Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama and Contemporary Islamic Studies*, 1(1), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.63875/nahnu.v1i1.22>
- Ullah, R., & Jan, F. (2026). The emotional toll of conflict reporting: Institutional, cultural, and audience pressures in Pakistani journalism. *Journalism and Media*, 7(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia7010041>
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K., & Boelle, J. (2024). Vernacular journalism: Local news and everyday life. *Journalism*, 25(8), 1603–1619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231209707>
- Weaver, D. H. (2025). Journalism educators as sociologists: A response to why pursue a career in journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 26(8), 1000–1004. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2489575>
- Widodo, A., Nurhaliza, W. O. S., & Hidayanto, S. (2026). Negotiating open justice, media logic, and ethics: a communication model for live courtroom journalism in Indonesia. *Media Asia*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2026.2684934>

- Wijayanto, & Masduki. (2024). "Polite Watchdog": Kompas and Watchdog journalism in post-authoritarian Indonesia. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29(3), 628–645. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231196155>
- Yudha, R. P., & Hendriyani, H. (2024). Social media managers' and journalists' role in maintaining local wisdom in a mediatized rural area. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 14(2), 92–112. <https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v14i2.5328>