



FEMINISM MOVEMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF PATRIARCHY IN INDONESIAN MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of the feminist movement in confronting patriarchal challenges within Indonesia's mass media. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving five key informants active in both media and feminist advocacy. The findings indicate that feminist representation in mainstream media remains limited and often biased. Feminist narratives are frequently simplified or distorted, reinforcing stereotypes that align with patriarchal norms. Feminist activists continue to encounter significant barriers, including restricted access to mainstream platforms, editorial limitations, and digital harassment. Despite these obstacles, social media has become an important alternative space for advancing gender equality discourse and amplifying women's voices. The study emphasizes the urgent need for critical communication strategies, the empowerment of alternative media, and the enhancement of digital literacy to challenge patriarchal dominance. Ultimately, this research underscores the ethical responsibility of the media to construct fair, inclusive, and consistent narratives that support feminist movements and promote gender justice in Indonesia.

Keywords: Feminism; Patriarchy; Mass Media; Gender Representation; Digital Media.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas dinamika gerakan feminisme dalam menghadapi tantangan patriarki di media massa Indonesia. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi terhadap lima narasumber yang terlibat dalam isu media dan feminisme. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa representasi feminisme dalam media masih terbatas dan cenderung bias. Media kerap menyederhanakan narasi feminis serta memperkuat stereotipe negatif yang berpihak pada nilai-nilai patriarkal. Aktivistis feminis menghadapi tantangan besar, mulai dari keterbatasan akses media arus utama hingga tekanan redaksional dan serangan digital. Namun, media sosial membuka ruang baru yang memungkinkan perluasan wacana kesetaraan gender. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya strategi komunikasi yang kritis, penguatan media alternatif, dan literasi digital untuk melawan dominasi patriarki. Media memiliki tanggung jawab etis untuk menghadirkan narasi yang adil, inklusif, dan berkelanjutan dalam mendukung gerakan feminisme di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Feminisme; Patriarki; Media Massa; Representasi Gender; Media Digital.

INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement in Indonesia has undergone a long journey that has not always been easy.¹ Since the early days of the women's movement, initiated by figures such as Kartini and Dewi Sartika, Indonesian women's struggles have transformed from issues of education and emancipation to the struggle for equal rights in all aspects of life.² As times have changed, the global wave of feminism has influenced the mindset and collective actions of women in Indonesia, especially in fighting for political and economic rights and freedom of expression.³ However, the feminist movement in Indonesia still faces major challenges, one of which is the dominance of patriarchal values that are still deeply ingrained in society, including in the mass media as an instrument for shaping public opinion.⁴

The mass media, both print and electronic, play a vital role in shaping public perceptions of gender.⁵ Ironically, however, the media often reproduce and perpetuate

¹Alfirdaus, L. K., Divina, L. A., & Fitriyah, F. (2022b). Anti-feminist Movement, Hegemonic Patriarchy, and Gender Equality Challenges: The Case of the Sexual Violence Elimination Bill. *Humaniora*, 34(2), 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.22146/JH.73538>

²Maryani, E., Janitra, P. A., & Ratmita, R. A. (2021). @Indonesiatanpafeminis.id as a Challenge of Feminist Movement in Virtual Space. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 6, 668840. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FSOC.2021.668840>

³Deem, A., & Deem, A. (2023). "Feminine, Not Feminist": Trad Truth-making on Social Media. *Ethnologia Europaea*, 53(2). <https://doi.org/10.16995/EE.8841>

⁴Moore, L. J., & Sirri, L. (2024). From Theory to Action: A Saudi Arabian Case Study of Feminist Academic Activism against State Oppression. *Societies* 2024, Vol. 14, Page 31, 14(3), 31. <https://doi.org/10.3390/SOC14030031>

⁵Figuroa-Domecq, C., & Segovia-Perez, M. (2020). Application of a gender perspective in tourism research: a theoretical and practical approach. *Journal of Tourism Analysis*, 27(2), 251–270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTA-02-2019-0009/FULL/PDF>

gender stereotypes that are detrimental to women.⁶ The representation of women in the media is often narrowed down to domestic roles, sexual objects, or supporting figures, rather than active subjects with power and intellectuality.⁷ Women in news or advertisements are often not portrayed as leaders, decision-makers, or empowered figures, but rather as complements to male narratives or commodities displayed for economic gain. This pattern shows that patriarchy is still very dominant, where masculine values are considered superior and worthy of being highlighted, while feminine values tend to be marginalized.⁸

Furthermore, the mass media not only reflects patriarchal social structures, but also reinforces them through its choice of narratives, use of language, and editing of content.⁹ This phenomenon poses a serious challenge to feminist movements that seek to raise women's voices and demand equality in the public sphere. In many cases, feminist voices are often considered a threat to the “traditional moral order” or even accused of being an attempt to adopt Western culture.¹⁰ As a result, the discourse of feminism in the Indonesian mass media is often met with resistance, both from conservatives and from some members of society who do not yet understand the substance of the struggle for gender equality.¹¹

This challenge becomes even more complex in the digital and social media era, where information spreads so quickly, but is not always critical or fact-based.¹² The digital feminist movement has indeed opened up new spaces for women's activism, but at the same time it also faces resistance from groups that hold fast to patriarchal values.¹³ Amidst this rapid flow of information, both conventional and digital mass media in Indonesia have a great responsibility to be fair and objective in voicing gender equality issues. However, in reality, great efforts are still needed to encourage the media to become a platform that supports gender justice, rather than reinforcing oppressive patriarchal biases.¹⁴

A study of the feminist movement and the challenges of patriarchy in the Indonesian mass media is important to understand the extent to which women's struggles are given fair

⁶Edström, J., Greig, A., & Skinner, C. (2024). Patriarchal (Dis)orders: Backlash as Crisis Management. <https://doi.org/10.1086/726744>, 49(2), 277–309. <https://doi.org/10.1086/726744>

⁷Hamid, M. A., Basid, A., & Aulia, I. N. (2021). The reconstruction of Arab women role in media: a critical discourse analysis. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 11(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S13278-021-00809-0/METRICS>

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⁹Demirhan, K., & Çakir-Demirhan, D. (2015). Gender and politics: Patriarchal discourse on social media. *Public Relations Review*, 41(2), 308–310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2014.11.010>

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¹¹Valdivia, A. N., & Projansky, S. (2006). Feminism and/in mass media. *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication*, 273–296. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976053.N15>

¹²Nazneen, S., & Okech, A. (2021). Introduction: feminist protests and politics in a world in crisis. *Gender & Development*, 29(2–3), 231–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.2005358>

¹³Prasetya, A. A. A. D., & Oktafiyani, E. (2023). Teenager's Resistance to Patriarchy in School: A Feminist Movement Representation on Moxie Film. *Buletin Al-Turas*, 29(2), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.15408/BAT.V29I2.27500>

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space and recognition. This research is expected to raise awareness of the need for a transformation of media narratives that are more supportive of gender equality and the feminist movement in the face of patriarchal hegemony in the public sphere.

This study aims to critically analyze how the mass media in Indonesia represents the feminist movement and how patriarchal values still play a role in shaping narratives about women in the public sphere. Through a critical discourse analysis approach, this study seeks to uncover patterns of domination and gender bias that are concealed in media reporting practices and content, as well as to trace feminist resistance efforts in negotiating a more equitable space for representation. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on examining the power relations between feminism and patriarchy in the context of contemporary Indonesian media, both conventional and digital, highlighting how social, cultural, and ideological dynamics influence the construction of women's images. This research also offers a new perspective on the transformation of feminist discourse in the media as an arena of symbolic struggle between patriarchal hegemony and progressive gender awareness.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which was chosen because it is appropriate for the study's objective of gaining an in-depth understanding of experiences, perspectives, and social practices in the context of the feminist movement and mass media. This approach is based on a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of meaning construction, making it appropriate for examining gender representation and patriarchal domination as formed through media narratives.

Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews and observation. Interviews were conducted with five informants who had direct connections to the issues of feminism and mass media, namely: NS (local community feminist activist), ND (female online media journalist), NT (senior print media editor), NK (communication and gender lecturer), and NF (media observer and digital literacy activist). The interviews aimed to explore the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced in fighting for gender equality narratives in the media. Meanwhile, observations were made on mass media reports that raised issues of women and feminism to identify emerging patterns of gender representation.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis with stages of data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation by comparing interview results with observations and media documents. In addition, the credibility of the sources was ensured through their active involvement in the media and feminist movements. This method is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of how feminist movements face the challenges of patriarchy in the mass media sphere in Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

A. Representation of the Feminist Movement and Patriarchal Narratives in Mass Media

Mass media play a central role in constructing public understanding of social movements, including feminism. In Indonesia, however, media representations of the feminist movement remain deeply shaped by patriarchal values that influence how gender equality issues are framed and interpreted. Rather than presenting feminism as a legitimate

struggle for social justice, many media outlets continue to portray it as controversial, radical, or culturally incompatible. This framing limits public comprehension of feminism's structural goals and reinforces dominant gender hierarchies within society.

Findings from the interviews indicate that feminist representation in the media is both limited and stigmatized. NS explained that feminism is frequently depicted as aggressive or oppositional to local cultural norms, which positions feminist activists as social deviants rather than agents of change. ND further emphasized that feminist issues tend to appear only during symbolic moments, such as International Women's Day, without sustained coverage. This seasonal treatment reflects a lack of editorial commitment and suggests that gender equality is not considered a long-term public concern.

In addition to limited visibility, feminist narratives are often oversimplified. NT highlighted that media reports frequently fragment feminist issues by removing historical, political, and social contexts. As a result, coverage focuses on surface-level events rather than examining the structural roots of gender inequality. This reductionist approach weakens the transformative potential of feminist discourse and prevents audiences from engaging critically with the systemic nature of patriarchy.

Structural bias within media institutions further reinforces these patterns. NK noted that many editorial decision-makers lack gender sensitivity, resulting in biased framing and story selection. This indicates that patriarchal dominance operates not only at the level of content but also within newsroom power structures. Consequently, feminist perspectives struggle to gain legitimacy in editorial processes that prioritize masculine norms and conservative ideologies.

Moreover, digital media do not necessarily offer a solution to these challenges. NF emphasized that although online platforms provide broader access, they often reproduce patriarchal narratives through misogynistic discourse and anti-feminist content. Even spaces perceived as progressive can reinforce gender bias. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that feminist representation in Indonesian mass media remains constrained by patriarchal narratives, underscoring the need for sustained, inclusive, and structurally informed media reform.

B. Challenges Faced by Feminist Activists in Resisting Patriarchy through Media

Feminist activists face multifaceted challenges when engaging with mass media as a tool for advocacy. While media offer opportunities for visibility, they also function as gatekeepers that often restrict feminist voices. One of the most significant barriers identified in this study is limited access to mainstream media platforms, which are largely controlled by conservative editorial norms and commercial interests.

NS explained that feminist messages frequently fail to penetrate mainstream media due to editorial resistance rooted in patriarchal ideology. ND added that media organizations tend to prioritize audience ratings and online engagement metrics, leading to the marginalization of feminist issues perceived as unprofitable. This market-driven logic places feminist activism at odds with media economics, reducing complex gender issues to content deemed "unattractive" for mass consumption.

Beyond commercial pressures, NT highlighted the influence of media ownership on editorial decisions. Media owners often avoid feminist topics due to fears of controversy, political backlash, or advertiser withdrawal. As a result, activists are compelled to carefully negotiate their narratives to avoid censorship. This condition forces feminist movements

to adopt strategic communication approaches that may dilute the radical critique of patriarchy.

Internal challenges within feminist movements also shape media engagement. NK pointed out that limited media literacy among activists can hinder effective message delivery. Not all activists possess the skills to frame their advocacy in ways that resonate with broader audiences or align with media production logics. Consequently, feminist struggles are not only about ideological resistance but also about mastering communication strategies.

In the digital sphere, challenges intensify through online harassment, disinformation, and coordinated attacks. NF emphasized that digital violence, including misogynistic hate speech and hoaxes, poses serious psychological and strategic obstacles. These findings illustrate that media serve as a double-edged sword: while offering platforms for resistance, they also reproduce patriarchal repression. Strengthening feminist communication capacity and digital resilience is therefore essential.

C. The Role of Media in Promoting Gender Equality

Mass media are not merely passive mirrors of social reality but have the potential to function as active agents of social change. In the context of gender equality, media possess significant power to shape public understanding, normalize certain values, and challenge entrenched inequalities. The findings of this study indicate that feminist actors place high expectations on media institutions to move beyond neutral reporting and take a more progressive stance in promoting gender justice.

NS expressed the hope that media outlets would provide equal space for women's voices and eliminate narratives that weaken or delegitimize feminist struggles. This expectation reflects a desire for media to abandon patriarchal framing that positions women as secondary or problematic subjects. Similarly, ND emphasized the importance of consistency, arguing that gender issues should not be treated as occasional or symbolic content but rather integrated into long-term editorial policies.

The educational function of media was highlighted by NT, who argued that media should serve as a public learning space that is objective, humanistic, and free from patriarchal bias. Through balanced reporting and contextual analysis, media can help audiences better understand the structural causes of gender inequality. This role is particularly important in societies where misconceptions about feminism remain widespread.

NK further emphasized that media must actively participate in social transformation by constructing inclusive narratives and representing women in their diversity. This includes challenging rigid gender norms and amplifying marginalized voices that are often excluded from mainstream discourse. Media, in this sense, are not only communicators but also cultural producers that influence how gender roles are imagined and reproduced.

NF added that digital media carry an ethical responsibility to foster critical awareness while ensuring the safety of feminist activists online. Creating supportive digital ecosystems is crucial for sustaining feminist discourse. Collectively, these perspectives underline that media play a strategic role as partners of feminist movements in advancing gender equality through consistent, inclusive, and ethical narratives.

D. Strategies for Resisting Patriarchal Dominance in Media

Resisting patriarchal dominance in media requires comprehensive and systematic strategies that operate at multiple levels. The findings suggest that such resistance cannot rely solely on individual efforts but must involve collective action from activists, journalists, media institutions, and policymakers. Strategic interventions are needed both within media organizations and in the broader public sphere.

From the perspective of feminist activists, NS emphasized the importance of developing alternative media platforms that prioritize gender justice. These spaces provide opportunities for feminist narratives to flourish without the constraints imposed by patriarchal editorial norms. Collaboration between activists and women journalists is also essential to strengthen solidarity and expand the reach of gender-sensitive reporting.

Internal reform within media institutions was highlighted by ND and NT. ND stressed the need for gender-sensitive training for journalists to reduce biased reporting practices. NT further argued that integrating gender perspectives into editorial policies and encouraging public dialogue through media channels are strategic steps toward institutional change. Such reforms can gradually shift newsroom cultures that are traditionally male-dominated.

NK proposed long-term structural solutions through advocacy targeting journalism education, broadcasting regulations, and media governance. By embedding gender justice principles into formal curricula and regulatory frameworks, media transformation can become more sustainable. This approach recognizes that patriarchal bias is deeply rooted and requires systemic intervention rather than short-term fixes.

Meanwhile, NF highlighted the importance of strengthening digital literacy among the public to counter patriarchal narratives online. Empowering audiences to critically evaluate and produce content transforms them into active agents of change. In conclusion, resisting media patriarchy demands a multilevel strategy that combines institutional reform, alternative media development, policy advocacy, and public education.

E. The Role of Social Media and Public Responses to Feminist Movements

Social media have significantly transformed the landscape of feminist activism by expanding spaces for expression and engagement. Unlike traditional mass media, social media platforms allow activists to bypass editorial gatekeeping and communicate directly with audiences. This shift has reshaped how feminist movements disseminate ideas and mobilize support.

NS acknowledged that social media provide alternative spaces where feminist activists can voice their concerns without relying on mainstream media. ND similarly noted that these platforms enable journalists and activists to reach wider audiences more freely. This accessibility has strengthened feminist visibility and facilitated rapid information sharing across social boundaries.

However, NT cautioned that the speed and openness of social media also present risks, particularly in the form of misinformation and oversimplified narratives. While ideas can spread quickly, they are not always accompanied by critical reflection or contextual understanding. This condition can weaken the quality of feminist discourse and open opportunities for distortion.

NK further emphasized that social media have become contested arenas where feminist ideas clash with conservative and anti-gender movements. Resistance to feminism often manifests through coordinated attacks, hate speech, and ideological opposition.

These dynamics illustrate that digital platforms are not neutral spaces but sites of ongoing power struggle.

NF added that algorithmic systems and content moderation policies may limit the visibility of feminist content or expose activists to harassment. Therefore, feminist digital strategies must adapt to technological constraints while remaining collaborative and resilient. Overall, social media offer both opportunities and challenges, requiring careful navigation to maximize their emancipatory potential.

Discussion

A. Representation of Feminist Movements in Indonesian Mass Media

The representation of feminist movements in Indonesian mass media remains largely inadequate and problematic. Feminism is often framed narrowly and negatively, reinforcing the perception that it contradicts local cultural values rooted in patriarchy. Such representations hinder public understanding of feminism as a struggle for social justice.¹⁵ Media coverage frequently reduces feminism to symbolic gestures, such as highlighting popular female figures or ceremonial events, without addressing structural gender inequality. This superficial framing obscures the political and economic dimensions of feminist struggles and limits critical engagement among audiences.¹⁶

As argued by Mendes and Carter, media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of feminism, often marginalizing women's voices and normalizing inequality.¹⁷ When feminist activism is framed as disruptive or threatening, it reinforces stereotypes that delegitimize gender justice movements. Although some media outlets have begun to provide space for feminist narratives, these efforts remain reactive rather than systemic. Media engagement with feminism often depends on external pressure or trending issues rather than sustained editorial commitment. As a result, progress remains fragmented and inconsistent.

While digital media offer more inclusive possibilities, low levels of digital literacy among content producers and consumers continue to enable sensationalized and patriarchally biased framing. Therefore, collective awareness within media institutions is essential to ensure feminist representation that is comprehensive, critical, and grounded in gender justice principles.¹⁸

B. Challenges Faced by Feminist Activists in Countering Patriarchal Media Narratives

One of the primary challenges faced by feminist activists is the dominance of conservative ideology within media structures. Patriarchal values embedded in editorial practices often shape how feminist issues are selected, framed, or excluded. This dominance

¹⁵Alfirdaus, L. K. (Laila), Divina, L. A. (Lupyt), & Fitriyah, F. (Fitriyah). (2022). Anti-feminist Movement, Hegemonic Patriarchy, and Gender Equality Challenges: The Case of the Sexual Violence Elimination Bill. *Humaniora*, 34(2), 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.22146/JH.73538>

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¹⁷Mendes, K., & Carter, C. (2021). *Feminism and the Media: Representations in Public Discourse*. Routledge.

¹⁸Figueroa-Domecq, C., & Segovia-Perez, M. (2020). Application of a gender perspective in tourism research: a theoretical and practical approach. *Journal of Tourism Analysis*, 27(2), 251–270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTA-02-2019-0009/FULL/PDF>

creates systemic barriers to equitable representation.¹⁹ Activists are frequently stigmatized as anti-men or accused of violating cultural norms. Such labeling, reinforced by biased media representations, positions feminism as a disruptive force rather than a movement for equality. These narratives discourage public empathy and legitimize resistance against feminist advocacy.

Byerly argues that patriarchal hierarchies within media industries restrict access for feminist voices. Editorial censorship, coupled with pressure from media owners and advertisers, limits the space available for critical gender discourse. These constraints illustrate the structural nature of media bias.²⁰ In the digital era, challenges intensify through online harassment, doxing, and misogynistic hate speech. Although social media allow independent dissemination of messages, the psychological burden of digital violence can undermine activists' capacity to engage effectively in public education.

Furthermore, limited gender awareness among journalists perpetuates biased reporting practices. These conditions require feminist activists to develop advanced communication strategies and forge alliances with progressive media actors to counter patriarchal narratives more effectively.²¹

C. The Role of Mass Media in Promoting Gender Equality

Mass media hold strategic potential as agents of social change in advancing gender equality. Their influence over public discourse positions them as key actors in either reinforcing or challenging existing power relations. To fulfill this potential, media must adopt deliberate and sustained commitments to gender justice. One essential step is integrating gender perspectives into all areas of reporting, rather than isolating them within women-focused topics. This integration requires strong editorial commitment and continuous training for journalists to enhance their understanding of gender-sensitive reporting.²²

Gallagher and Sarikakis emphasize that media framing determines whether inequality is normalized or contested.²³ When women are portrayed in diverse roles, gender-neutral language is used, and female experts are included as sources, media messages can effectively promote equality. Media can also advance gender justice through collaborative campaigns, inclusive public discussions, and evidence-based journalism. Policy reforms within media organizations, including gender diversity in leadership and newsroom staffing, further strengthen institutional accountability.

In the digital era, ensuring safe online spaces for women's voices is increasingly important. By fostering ethical digital practices, media can support feminist participation

¹⁹Gupta, M., Madabushi, J. S., & Gupta, N. (2023). Critical Overview of Patriarchy, Its Interferences With Psychological Development, and Risks for Mental Health. *Cureus*, 15(6), e40216. <https://doi.org/10.7759/CUREUS.40216>

²⁰Byerly, C. M. (2020). *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*. International Women's Media Foundation.

²¹Prasetya, A. A. A. D., & Oktafiyani, E. (2023). Teenager's Resistance to Patriarchy in School: A Feminist Movement Representation on Moxie Film. *Buletin Al-Turas*, 29(2), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.15408/BAT.V29I2.27500>

²²Deem, A., & Deem, A. (2023). "Feminine, Not Feminist": Trad Truth-making on Social Media. *Ethnologia Europaea*, 53(2). <https://doi.org/10.16995/EE.8841>

²³Gallagher, M., & Sarikakis, K. (2019). *Gender and Communication: Theoretical Approaches and Research Practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.

and protect activists from harm. Ultimately, media are not merely conveyors of information but powerful drivers in shaping a more gender-equal society.

CONCLUSION

The feminist movement in the Indonesian mass media is still represented in a narrow and biased manner, thus failing to fully reflect the complex reality of women's struggles. Research findings show that patriarchal bias still strongly influences news construction, both through narrative selection, issue framing, and limited space for feminist voices. Feminist activists face various challenges, such as negative stigma, editorial pressure, and digital attacks that reinforce patriarchal hegemony in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the media continues to play a strategic role in promoting gender equality through fair, educational, and gender-sensitive reporting.

Conceptually, this study enriches the study of media feminism in Indonesia by highlighting the dynamics of power relations between patriarchy and the feminist movement in the context of digital media, as well as showing how alternative online spaces can become arenas of resistance and transformation of gender narratives. The results of this study also provide a basis for the development of media policies that are more supportive of gender justice, including increasing gender literacy for journalists and strengthening ethical reporting regulations. Further research is recommended to explore feminist communication strategies on broader digital platforms in order to strengthen women's voices and challenge the dominance of patriarchy in the Indonesian media ecosystem.

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