

Objectivity and the Ethics of Freedom of Expression in the Perspective of Democracy in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the objectivity of the ethics of freedom of expression in the perspective of democracy in Indonesia. Using a qualitative library-research (*studi kepustakaan*) approach, data were collected from national and international journals, scholarly books, legislation, and official documents, then analysed through content analysis and source triangulation. The findings reveal four key dimensions: (1) democracy and freedom of expression, where the right to speak is a prerequisite for inclusive and participatory democracy; (2) communication ethics and objectivity, which require that expression be grounded in facts, accuracy, and respect for human dignity; (3) digital democracy, disinformation, and polarisation, where algorithmic echo chambers and the spread of unverified information threaten deliberative quality; and (4) the empirical condition of Indonesian democracy, which shows progress in digital participation alongside persistent challenges of civil liberty restrictions and political polarisation. The study concludes that objectivity in communication ethics is a normative foundation for balancing the protection of freedom of expression with ethical responsibility, ultimately strengthening substantive and deliberative democracy.

Keywords: *freedom of expression, objectivity, communication ethics, digital democracy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is understood as a political system that places the equality of citizens, respect for diversity, and political participation as the primary foundations of governance. Quality democracy requires an inclusive public space in which every individual has an equal opportunity to participate without domination or exclusion based on group identity (Sumaktoyo & Soedirgo, 2026) [1]. In this context, freedom of expression constitutes one of the main pillars sustaining democracy, as it provides space for citizens to voice aspirations, criticisms, and ideas openly in the conduct of public life. Freedom of expression is regarded as one of the fundamental norms of democracy that guarantees citizens the right to express their views freely.

The implementation of this freedom depends not only on constitutional guarantees or legal protections but is also shaped by the attitudes of political elites and public opinion, which can generate support or resistance toward freedom of speech in democratic life (Hall et al., 2026) [2]. Ideally, freedom of expression should be understood not merely as the fulfilment of the right to express oneself but also as a moral responsibility that demands objectivity in the ethics of information delivery and argumentation.

The ethics of communication in freedom of expression must be practised by upholding the values of responsibility, objectivity, rationality, and respect for the rights and dignity of every individual. The expression of opinions should not only be oriented toward the fulfilment of the right to expression but should also consider its impact on social life so that public communication remains courteous, constructive, and respectful of diverse perspectives (Mayolaika et al., 2021) [3].

Pratama et al. (Pratama et al., 2026) [4] explain that objectivity is a fundamental principle in the exercise of freedom of expression because it ensures that every opinion is assessed on the basis of facts, evidence, and rational argumentation rather than media pressure, public opinion, or political interests. The application of objectivity in the context of technological development is critical for maintaining the balance between the protection of freedom of expression and legal certainty, so that the democratic process continues to proceed in a fair and civilised manner.

The development of digital technology has transformed democratic practice by creating a more open public space in which citizens can participate in political processes, voice aspirations, and oversee government administration. The presence of social media and digital platforms has widened access to information and accelerated interaction among government, media, and society. However, this transformation has also introduced new challenges, including the growing spread

of disinformation, political polarisation, information manipulation, and the formation of echo chambers that can weaken the quality of public deliberation. Digital-media algorithms tend to reinforce users exposure to information that aligns with their existing preferences, thus promoting the fragmentation of public opinion and narrowing the space for rational argument based dialogue (Bennett & Livingston, 2018) [5]; (Tucker et al., 2018) [6].

The spread of unverified information and the dominance of emotional narratives further increase the risk of declining public trust in democratic institutions and weaken the quality of freedom of expression as an instrument of political participation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) [7]; (Guess et al., 2020) [8]. Digital democracy does not only require the protection of the right to freedom of expression; it also demands the application of objectivity in communication ethics so that the delivery of information and opinions remains grounded in facts, rationality, and social responsibility.

This study aims to analyse the objectivity of the ethics of freedom of expression in the perspective of democracy in Indonesia, and to explain how the principle of objectivity can serve as a normative foundation in maintaining the balance between the protection of the right to freedom of expression and ethical responsibility for the creation of substantive, deliberative, and civilised democracy.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using the library research (*studi kepustakaan*) method. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on a conceptual examination of the objectivity of the ethics of freedom of expression in the perspective of democracy in Indonesia through the analysis of various theories, previous research findings, and regulations related to freedom of expression, communication ethics, and democracy. Library research enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by reviewing various relevant scholarly sources without conducting fieldwork (Zed, 2018) [9].

The data sources used in this study consisted of secondary data derived from national and international journal articles, scholarly books, legislation, and official documents related to democracy, freedom of expression, objectivity, and communication ethics. The selected literature took into account aspects of relevance, source credibility, and publication recency in order to provide a

conceptual and empirical picture of the development of freedom of expression in the era of digital democracy (Sugiyono, 2022) [10].

Data collection was carried out through a process of identification, classification, documentation, and critical review of various literature relevant to the research focus. Subsequently, the data were analysed using content analysis (*analisis isi*) with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was conducted in a descriptive analytical manner to identify the relationships among objectivity, the ethics of freedom of expression, and democratic practice in Indonesia, thereby yielding a systematic understanding of the role of objectivity in building public communication that is democratic and responsible (Krippendorff, 2019) [11].

To enhance the validity of the data, this study applied source triangulation comparing information obtained from various scholarly journals, books, and legal documents related to the research theme. This technique aims to achieve consistency of information so that the results of the analysis have a higher level of validity and credibility (Moleong, 2021) [12].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Democracy and Freedom of Expression

Democracy is a system of government that places the people as the holders of sovereignty through participation in political processes and public decision making. Democracy is realised not only through the conduct of general elections but also through the protection of civil rights, including freedom of expression. According to Dahl (Dahl, 1989) [13], ideal democracy is built upon the principles of political participation, equal rights, public control over the political agenda, and the involvement of all citizens in the democratic process. These principles demonstrate that freedom of expression is one of the primary conditions for the creation of participatory and inclusive democracy.

Freedom of expression provides an opportunity for citizens to voice aspirations, criticisms, and ideas regarding the conduct of government. This right constitutes an important instrument in creating transparency and accountability, as it enables citizens to exercise oversight over public policies. Diamond (Diamond, 2019) [14] explains that the quality of democracy is determined not only by democratic political institutions but also by the guarantee of civil liberties, press freedom, and freedom of expression. The more open the space for citizens to voice opinions,

the greater the opportunity for the creation of government that is responsive to public needs.

The public sphere constitutes the primary arena for the exercise of freedom of expression. Habermas (Habermas, 1989) [15] explains that the public sphere is a deliberative arena that enables citizens to engage in rational dialogue on various shared issues. Through the public sphere, citizens can exchange information, voice criticisms, and build public opinion oriented toward the common good. Democracy therefore requires not only freedom of speech but also a communication space that is open, inclusive, and free from the domination of any particular group.

The exercise of freedom of expression must still take into account social responsibility. Mill (Mill, 1859) [16] through the harm principle explains that an individual's freedom may be limited when it causes harm to the rights of others. This principle demonstrates that freedom of expression cannot be used to spread hatred, defamation, or false information. This condition affirms that democracy requires a balance between the protection of the right to expression and the moral responsibility in the expression of opinions, so that freedom of expression is capable of strengthening the quality of democracy rather than creating social conflict.

Communication Ethics and Objectivity

Communication ethics is a set of values and moral principles that guide individuals in conveying and receiving information responsibly. In democratic life, communication ethics functions to ensure that freedom of expression serves not merely as a means to express views but also as a medium that promotes rational, honest dialogue that respects the rights of others. Christians et al. (Christians et al., 2020) [17] explain that ethical communication demands responsibility toward the truth of information, respect for human dignity, and concern for the social impact of every message conveyed. Communication ethics thus constitutes the moral foundation for building high-quality public communication.

Objectivity is one of the main principles in communication ethics because it relates to the delivery of information based on facts, evidence, and accountable argumentation. Ward (Ward, 2019) [18] states that objectivity does not mean eliminating one's viewpoint but rather ensuring that the communication process remains oriented toward accuracy, honesty, transparency, and balance of information. Opinions expressed objectively enable citizens to obtain correct information and thereby form public opinion rationally. This principle becomes

increasingly important when freedom of expression is exercised through digital media, which allows information to spread rapidly without an editorial process.

Objectivity in freedom of expression also functions as a check to prevent the right to expression from being misused to spread misleading information or trigger social conflict. McQuail (McQuail, 2013) [19] explains that objectivity is constructed through two main elements: factuality, which emphasises factual accuracy, and impartiality, which foregrounds balance in the delivery of information. The application of these two principles produces more credible communication and enhances public trust in the information received. Conversely, communication that disregards objectivity tends to give rise to informational bias, the manipulation of opinion, and a deterioration in the quality of the public sphere in democracy.

These conditions demonstrate that objectivity does not restrict freedom of expression but rather strengthens the function of democracy through responsible information delivery. Opinions grounded in facts and rational argumentation promote the creation of constructive public discussion, while opinions dominated by personal or group interests have the potential to exacerbate social polarisation. The application of communication ethics and objectivity therefore constitutes an urgent need in maintaining the quality of freedom of expression, particularly in the era of digital democracy characterised by the high volume of information exchange.

Digital Democracy, Disinformation, and Polarisation

Digital democracy is a development of the democratic system that utilises digital technology to broaden public participation in political life. The presence of social media provides space for citizens to express opinions, obtain information, and monitor government policies more openly. This shift has transformed citizens from mere receivers of information into producers of information capable of influencing public opinion. According to Chadwick (Chadwick, 2017) [20], the development of digital media has formed a hybrid media system that connects conventional media with digital media, thus transforming patterns of political communication in democracy.

Disinformation has become the primary challenge in digital democracy because information can spread rapidly without undergoing adequate verification. Wardle and Derakhshan (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) [7] explain that disinformation is information deliberately created to mislead the public, while misinformation is incorrect information spread without intent to deceive. The dissemination of both

forms of information has the potential to form erroneous public perceptions and to lower the quality of discussion in the democratic arena.

Political polarisation has intensified due to the use of social media algorithms that tend to display information aligned with users' preferences. This condition creates echo chambers situations in which individuals receive more information that aligns with their own views than perspectives that differ from them. Sunstein (Sunstein, 2021) [21] states that this phenomenon narrows the space for dialogue and reinforces political division because citizens more readily accept information that confirms their beliefs than verify facts.

Objectivity in communication ethics is an important factor in reducing the negative impacts of digital democracy. The delivery of information grounded in facts, verification processes, and rational argumentation can prevent the spread of disinformation and strengthen the quality of freedom of expression. The reinforcement of digital literacy is also needed so that citizens can evaluate the credibility of information before forming an opinion or disseminating it to the public. Digital democracy will thus be better positioned to create a public sphere that is healthy, inclusive, and democratic.

The Empirical Condition of Indonesian Democracy

The development of democracy in Indonesia shows progress in the aspect of political participation but continues to face various challenges in guaranteeing freedom of expression. The use of digital media has expanded the space for public participation in voicing criticisms, aspirations, and oversight of government policies. Nevertheless, the quality of Indonesian democracy is still affected by various issues such as restrictions on civil liberties, increasing political polarisation, and the spread of inaccurate information. The Freedom in the World report indicates that civil liberties in Indonesia continue to face challenges in guaranteeing freedom of expression and protecting the rights of citizens in digital spaces (Freedom House, 2024) [22].

The use of social media as a space for political communication offers both opportunities and challenges for Indonesian democracy. Digital media enables citizens to disseminate information quickly but also increases the risk of spreading hoaxes, hate speech, and disinformation. The Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network report (SAFENet, 2024) [23] shows that cases of criminalisation of digital activities and the use of regulations related to electronic information remain a concern in the protection of freedom of expression. This condition demonstrates that technological development has not yet been fully

accompanied by the strengthening of the protection of the right to freedom of expression.

Objectivity in the delivery of information is an important factor in maintaining the quality of Indonesian democracy. Information delivered without a verification process often triggers misunderstandings, reinforces polarisation, and erodes public trust in public institutions. McQuail (McQuail, 2013) [19] explains that communication objectivity is constructed through accuracy, balance, and the proportional presentation of facts so as to produce credible information. The application of this principle becomes increasingly important amid the growing flow of digital information that is difficult to control.

Strengthening communication ethics and objectivity constitutes a strategic step in supporting higher-quality democracy in Indonesia. Digital literacy, respect for differences of opinion, and the delivery of fact based information can create a more healthy and democratic public sphere. Freedom of expression requires not only legal protection but also the moral awareness of every individual to exercise that right responsibly. Objectivity in communication ethics thus constitutes an important element in strengthening the quality of democracy while keeping freedom of expression aligned with democratic values and the public interest.

IV. CONCLUSION

Objectivity in the ethics of freedom of expression is a fundamental element in maintaining the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Democracy does not merely demand the guarantee of freedom for every citizen to express opinions; it also requires that this freedom be exercised responsibly, based on the principles of objectivity, honesty, and respect for the rights of others. The development of digital democracy has broadened the space for public participation in political life, yet it has also given rise to challenges in the form of disinformation, polarisation, and the misuse of freedom of expression that have the potential to undermine the quality of the public sphere. The application of communication ethics grounded in objectivity therefore constitutes an important prerequisite for creating public communication that is rational, accurate, and oriented toward the common good. The strengthening of digital literacy, a culture of information verification, and moral awareness in the exercise of the right to freedom of expression are strategic steps for strengthening inclusive democracy, maintaining public trust in democratic institutions, and realising a civilised democratic life in Indonesia.

VI. REFERENCES

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