



THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL ERA IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION ON CONFLICT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This literature study examines mass media and public opinion in social conflicts from a democratic perspective, analyzing mechanisms of opinion formation and implications for democracy. The analysis reveals that media shapes public opinion about conflict through multiple interrelated mechanisms. Framing determines how events are understood, whether as terrorism or resistance, religious or economic conflict. Agenda setting determines which issues are considered important, which events receive intensive coverage. Priming influences standards used by the public to evaluate conflicting parties. Source selection legitimizes particular perspectives. Language carries emotional weight shaping public attitudes. Visualization creates powerful emotional impacts. Narrative simplifies complexity into digestible stories. Coverage frequency shapes perceptions of situations. Historical context is often neglected resulting in shallow public understanding. Implications for democracy are extensive. Quality of public participation depends on information quality provided by media. Government accountability is tested by media's investigative courage. Healthy public sphere requires media providing equal access to all voices. Collective identity as citizens is strengthened or weakened by media framing. Legitimacy of democratic processes is influenced by coverage of government performance. Conflict escalation prevention can be assisted by responsible media. Public education about conflict roots requires explanatory journalism. Protection of vulnerable groups demands unbiased media. Mass media are thus not merely event reporters but political actors shaping conflict trajectories and democracy quality. This study contributes theoretically to understanding media-public opinion-conflict-democracy nexus and offers practical insights for developing responsible conflict journalism.

Keywords: mass media, public opinion, social conflict, democracy, framing, journalism ethics, media literacy.

Introduction

The mass media has long been recognized as the fourth pillar of democracy, holding a strategic role in shaping public opinion. In normal situations, the media functions as an information provider that enables citizens to make rational political decisions, as a watchdog of power ensuring government accountability, and as a forum for public discussion where diverse viewpoints can be interchanged. The quality of democracy depends heavily on the quality of the media executing these functions. However, in situations of social conflict, the media's role becomes far more complex and challenging. The media does not merely report events; it also actively shapes public perceptions of the conflicting parties, the causes of the conflict, and the possible solutions. The existence of these media functions basically operates within a dynamic social space, wherein the construction of modern societal social identities continues to be actively shaped by group affiliations, the influence of social status, and shifting surrounding environments (Hariani, 2023). Furthermore, the interaction dynamics formed within are also influenced by shifting patterns of human relations in increasingly complex contemporary urban societies (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022).

Social conflict frequently involves a battle of narratives between opposing groups (Fog, 2022). Each party strives to win public opinion by portraying themselves as victims and the other party as aggressors. The media becomes a battlefield where these narratives are communicated and contested. The way the media frames a conflict, the language utilized, the sources cited, and the images displayed can significantly influence how the public understands and responds to the conflict (Stephen, 2022). The media can serve as a glue that unites or, conversely, as a fuel that amplifies the conflict. The power of the media to shape public opinion makes it a key actor in the dynamics of social conflict. Communication challenges within this narrative battlefield demand the implementation of mature communication strategies in managing conflict, particularly within multicultural team environments or societies (Marsal & Darmawan, 2022). Narrative conflicts that are poorly managed risk triggering racial discrimination, which adversely impacts psychological well-being and social engagement within the public sphere (Pakpahan, Darmawan, & Rojak, 2022).

Public opinion itself holds an important role in social conflict and democracy. In a democracy, public opinion should serve as a primary consideration in policy formulation. Responsive governments will listen to societal aspirations and respond with appropriate policies. In conflict situations, public opinion can become a force driving peaceful resolutions or, on the contrary, worsen the situation through unrealistic demands. Public opinion formed through media consumption can influence societal attitudes toward other groups, toward the government, and toward the peace process (Thomas, 2024). Understanding the relationship between the media, public opinion, and social conflict becomes highly critical. In a broader sense, this opinion formation is closely related to the cultivation of socially constructed environmental values, which in commercial contexts can even direct consumer purchasing decisions toward eco-friendly products (Mardikaningsih, Nuraini, & Halizah, 2022). On the other hand, the way society perceives a policy or modernization program such as smart city initiatives directly determines the quality of life of citizens in that region (Rojak, 2022).

The relationship between the media, public opinion, and social conflict is not unidirectional, but rather reciprocal. The media shapes public opinion, yet public opinion also influences media editorial policies. Media outlets that drift too far from public opinion will be abandoned by their readers. Social conflict influences what is deemed important and newsworthy, but media coverage can also trigger the escalation or de-escalation of conflict. Within this complex dynamic, the media's role in democracy is tested. Responsible media will execute its functions by considering the impact of news reporting on social cohesion and democratic processes, rather than merely chasing ratings and commercial profits (Thomas, 2024). The urgency of maintaining these communal bonds underscores the vital role of cultural identity in building social cohesion, while simultaneously formulating appropriate integration strategies within pluralistic societal life (Oluwatosin & Rojak, 2023). High-quality social resilience can only materialize if organizations and the media are capable of capturing the dynamics of adaptive capacity and the transformation processes taking place within those community resilience frameworks (Oluwatosin, Rojak, & Darmawan, 2023).

Mass media often gets trapped in a dilemma between commercial interests and the social responsibility of reporting conflict. Dramatic and sensationalized conflict news tends to be more marketable, attracting more readers or viewers, and generating more advertising revenue. Consequently, the media is driven to highlight the most extreme aspects of conflict, ignore peace efforts, and simplify complex issues into black-and-white narratives. This kind of framing can exacerbate conflict by reinforcing negative stereotypes and fueling hostile emotions. On the other hand, media outlets that attempt to report in a balanced and in-depth manner frequently lose the competition for public attention (Reuben, 2009). The dilemma between "giving the public what it wants" and "giving the public what it needs" becomes extremely sharp in conflict situations. This tendency to violate ethics for commercial gain is similar to the phenomenon of environmental violation recidivism in industrial zones, which frequently occurs due to weak organizational compliance with applicable regulations (Rahmawati, Mardikaningsih, & Issalillah, 2023). Therefore, reinforcing the moral commitment of editorial frameworks serves as the defining boundary ensuring that the media does not sacrifice its public accountability.

Political pressure and media ownership also influence the objectivity of conflict reporting (Wang, 2022). Many media outlets are owned by conglomerates with specific business or political interests, or maintain close ties with conflicting groups (Kemunto & Kiamba, 2022). These interests can influence editorial policies, determining the angles taken and the sources cited. As a result, the media ceases to be a neutral public sphere and instead becomes a mouthpiece for specific interests. In conflict situations, biased media can strengthen polarization and hinder reconciliation efforts. Media independence, which is an absolute prerequisite for its function in a democracy, is eroded by these interests. Understanding the dynamics of ownership and political pressure becomes essential for analyzing the media's role in conflict. Within this biased institutional landscape, the struggle for enforcing gender equality and the active involvement of women within human resource management practices frequently face similar structural barriers (Infante & Darmawan, 2022). This governance bias has the potential to obscure legal guarantees for fundamental rights that should be

absolutely protected, including within the education and healthcare sectors (Hariani, Aliyah, & Issalillah, 2021).

Several countries have had extensive experiences with social conflict across various regions (Wang, 2022). In some instances, the media actually became part of the problem by reporting provocatively and in an unbalanced manner. In other cases, the media played a positive role by promoting peace and dialogue. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating more responsible conflict-reporting guidelines. Given the ongoing potential for conflict in various regions, this knowledge becomes highly relevant for journalists, editors, and media owners. Efforts to manage diversity within conflict-prone areas demand a deep sensitivity toward the dynamics of gender and ethnic diversity developing within modern organizations and contemporary society (Rojak & Darmawan, 2012). Furthermore, the transformation of masculinity and femininity values within modern society carries wide implications for how social roles are distributed in crisis resolution (Negara & Khayru, 2022).

In the digital era, the media landscape has fundamentally shifted. Social media and digital platforms have become the primary information sources for many individuals, particularly the younger generation. Information regarding conflicts spreads at high speeds without undergoing adequate verification processes. Hoaxes and hate speech can instantly trigger tensions (Kemunto & Kiamba, 2022). On the other hand, mainstream media outlets have lost their monopoly on shaping public opinion. Understanding how these new dynamics influence the relationship between the media, public opinion, and social conflict is becoming highly critical. Democracy in the digital era encounters fresh challenges that require a rethinking of the media's role and its public accountability. This cyber challenge is further complicated by the rise of populist ethno-religious nationalism movements in digital spaces, which significantly present serious threats to global governance while simultaneously hindering domestic social integration processes (Fariz, 2021).

This study aims to analyze the mechanisms through which mass media shapes public opinion in situations of social conflict. The research will trace how framing, agenda setting, and priming operate in conflict reporting, as well as how factors such as media ideology, political pressure,

and commercial interests influence these processes. Additionally, this study aims to understand the implications of the media's role in shaping public opinion about conflict on the quality of democracy, encompassing aspects of public participation, accountability of power, and social cohesion. The analysis will examine the ethical dilemmas faced by journalists in covering conflict as well as the challenges in the digital era. The theoretical contribution of this study is to present a conceptual mapping of the relationship between media, public opinion, conflict, and democracy that can serve as a foundation for future empirical research. Practically, the results of the study are expected to serve as input for journalists, editors, media owners, regulators, and civil society to develop responsible journalism practices in conflict situations. An adequate understanding of the media's role is essential to protecting democracy amidst social tensions.

Method

This research is structured as a literature study with a qualitative approach. This method was chosen because the primary objective of the study is to understand and interpret the phenomena of mass media and public opinion in social conflict within the perspective of democracy through the analysis of relevant literature. As explained by Walliman (2021), research is essentially a systematic process to find answers to questions, and a literature study is an appropriate choice when the data source originates from written documentation. The research process follows the guidelines of Snyder (2019), which emphasize that a literature review as a method must be conducted systematically, transparently, and accountably. The initial step is to identify and collect relevant library materials, including textbooks, scientific journal articles, research institute reports, and previous research findings discussing mass media, public opinion, social conflict, democratic theory, and the intersection of these four elements. Data collection was performed using a structured approach with specific keywords to ensure that the scope of the study remained focused on the problem formulation.

Data analysis in this literature study utilizes qualitative content analysis techniques. Gupta and Gupta (2022) assert that in library research, the researcher acts as the key instrument who interprets the

text. Data are not analyzed statistically, but rather by reading, understanding, and making sense of the arguments within the literature. This process involves data reduction, namely selecting essential parts that answer the research questions and then organizing them into thematic categories. Mohajan (2018) explains that qualitative approaches in social sciences aim to understand phenomena from the perspective of the idea producers, which in this study are the authors and researchers whose works are being reviewed. Researchers must be able to capture the nuances of thought and academic debate within the literature concerning media, public opinion, conflict, and democracy. Frank and Hatak (2014) underline that a literature review is not merely a summary, but an effort to build new arguments based on a critical evaluation of existing works. The synthesis of various sources is then compiled into a coherent analytical narrative regarding mass media and public opinion in social conflict from a democratic perspective.

Result and Discussion

Mechanisms of Public Opinion Formation by the Media in Social Conflict

The media plays a critical role in shaping how the public understands social conflicts. Framing is the most fundamental mechanism in generating public opinion regarding conflict (Gilboa, 2021). Framing refers to the way the media selects specific aspects of reality and makes them more prominent within news reporting. In a conflict, the media can frame an event as an act of terrorism or as resistance, as a provocation or as self-defense, as a religious conflict or as an economic dispute. Word choices, displayed images, cited sources, and the provided context all contribute to framing. Differing frames will produce distinct understandings of the conflict's causes, the responsible parties, and the appropriate solutions. A public exposed to a specific frame will tend to adopt that viewpoint to comprehend the conflict. Consequently, framing becomes a highly influential tool in shaping societal perceptions toward conflict. The construction of framing within the public sphere is deeply influenced by the transforming collective psychological characteristics of society, particularly when examined from a psychological perspective in welcoming (Darmawan et al., 2021).

In addition to framing, the media also possesses the power to determine which issues are considered important by the public. Agenda setting is the mechanism through which the media dictates which issues gain public prominence. In social conflicts, the media decides which events are newsworthy, how much space is allocated to them, and how long the issue will continue to be reported (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). Events receiving intensive coverage will be deemed important by the public, whereas events ignored by the media seemingly never occurred. This agenda setting is highly influential in conflicts because it can determine whether an incident becomes the trigger for a major conflict or passes without significant impact. The media can also divert public attention from structural issues that lie at the root of a conflict by over-reporting sensationalized incidents. Therefore, agenda setting holds a strategic role in directing public attention toward a conflict. From a sociological standpoint, this agenda-setting power is closely related to societal relationship patterns, as seen in the dynamics of interethnic interactions within multicultural residential areas that demand sensitivity toward various social determinants of harmony (Aisyah, 2023).

Another mechanism influencing public evaluation of conflict is priming. Priming is the mechanism whereby the media influences the standards utilized by the public to judge an issue or actor. In a conflict, the media can influence whether the public evaluates a group based on the violent actions they commit or based on their history of oppression (Ball-Rokeach, 2017). Priming operates by making specific attributes more memorable and accessible during evaluations. If the media continuously reports on the violence committed by a group, the public will tend to judge that group based on violence, ignoring other dimensions. Priming can reinforce existing stereotypes and prejudices, complicating reconciliation efforts. Thus, priming can shape the public's evaluative standards toward the actors involved in a conflict. Within a macro context, the reinforcement of stereotypes due to priming also has the potential to aggravate social vulnerabilities, similar to how household well-being can be adversely impacted by the phenomenon of underage marriage (Aliyah et al., 2023).

The way the media selects news sources also exerts a major influence on the direction of conflict reporting. The choice of news sources

significantly determines the narrative trajectory of a conflict. Sources cited by the media provide not only information but also legitimacy to a specific perspective. In a conflict, the media often faces a dilemma in source selection. Citing government officials may provide an official perspective but might ignore the voices of victims. Citing community leaders from one group could be perceived as taking sides. Ideally, the media must cite a variety of sources from all involved parties to present a balanced overview. In practice, however, time constraints, access limitations, and political pressures frequently cause the media to cite only certain sources, which subsequently shapes an asymmetric public opinion (Guardino, 2019). Therefore, diversity of news sources is highly critical to maintain informational balance in conflict reporting. This selection dilemma reflects fundamental managerial dynamics commonly studied within organizational behavior principles, where decision-making is frequently influenced by internal biases and power structures (Darmawan, 2013).

In addition to news sources, the use of language in reporting also carries a profound impact on public perception. Language utilization heavily determines the nuance of conflict coverage. Words such as "brutal", "sadistic", or "barbaric" versus "firm", "professional", or "responsive" carry powerful emotional charges. Word choice can elicit sympathy for one side and antipathy toward another. Language can also obscure accountability, for instance, by utilizing passive sentencing like "shots were fired" instead of "police shot". In a conflict, the language employed by the media can reinforce the dehumanization of the enemy or, conversely, humanize all parties (Abdalla et al., 2021). Journalists need to be highly conscious of the power of the words they select. Thus, cautious language usage becomes key in maintaining objectivity during conflict reporting. The emotional charge in this language is frequently exploited by populist ethno-religious nationalism movements in the public sphere, triggering major challenges for global governance and complicating domestic social integration processes (Fariz, 2021).

Not only language, but visual elements in conflict reporting also possess a potent emotional influence. Visualization in conflict coverage exerts a highly powerful emotional impact (Danesh & Rahman, 2021). Photographs of bleeding victims, ruined buildings, or terrified faces can evoke empathy or rage. Visuals can also be deployed manipulatively, such

as displaying old photos from a different conflict to reinforce a particular narrative. In the digital era, visual manipulation has become increasingly effortless due to deepfake technology and advanced editing. The media must be extremely cautious in verifying the authenticity of the visuals they use. On the other hand, visuals can also serve as a powerful tool for building a shared understanding of the suffering endured by all parties in a conflict. Therefore, verification and the responsible use of visuals become vital aspects of conflict journalism. When extended to the realm of family law, protecting against the visualization of this suffering aligns with enforcing the principle of the child's best interests in post-divorce custody and parenting matters to safeguard the child's psychological condition (Fajar, Darmawan, & El-Yunusi, 2021).

In addition to visuals and language, the media structures narratives to influence how the public understands conflicts. The narrative and storytelling frameworks utilized by the media in covering conflict affect how the public perceives conflict dynamics (Hoxha & Hanitzsch, 2018). Media outlets tend to simplify complex conflicts into straightforward narratives featuring heroes and villains, victims and aggressors. While this type of narrative is easily digestible, it frequently ignores nuances and complexities. In reality, social conflicts almost always involve multiple parties with mixed motivations, faults on all sides, and victims across all groups. Oversimplified narratives can reinforce polarization and complicate reconciliation. Responsible media must present complexity even if it is harder to comprehend. Thus, providing a balanced narrative is vital to avoid the oversimplification of conflicts. This narrative simplification also frequently obscures other urban structural issues, such as urbanization dynamics and urban poverty patterns, which require comprehensive preventative policies rather than mere unilateral labeling (Rojak et al., 2012).

The frequency and intensity of news reporting also play a role in shaping public perceptions of conflict. The frequency and intensity of coverage shape public opinion as well (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). Continuous coverage of violence can create a perception that the situation is worse than it actually is, or that violence is the sole reality of the conflict. Excessive coverage can also normalize violence, desensitizing the public to suffering. Conversely, insufficient coverage can overlook the suffering of victims and downplay the conflict. Discovering the appropriate frequency

and intensity is a major challenge for the media. Outlets need to consider not only what is reported but also how often and for how long. Therefore, balance in the frequency and intensity of reporting is essential to maintain informational objectivity. When intensive reporting triggers information disputes in society, appropriate conflict resolution approaches become crucial, where comparisons between mediation and litigation methods show that cultural factors heavily influence the sense of justice and the acceptance of verdicts (Saputra et al., 2022).

Another frequently overlooked aspect of conflict reporting is its underlying historical context. The historical scope is often ignored in conflict coverage. Conflicts almost always possess deep historical roots, filled with layers of past trauma, injustice, and failed reconciliation efforts. However, the media tends to cover conflicts as isolated events without explaining their background. Consequently, the public fails to understand why the conflict erupted and why a resolution is so difficult to achieve. Reporting that neglects the historical scope can generate shallow public opinion and inappropriate solutions (Erikson & Tedin, 2019). The media needs to allocate time and space to explain the historical roots of a conflict, even if it means reducing sensational elements. Thus, presenting the historical context is highly critical to provide a deeper understanding of the conflict. This lack of historical understanding is similar to formal barriers in dispute resolution, where optimizing the role of religious courts in resolving family disputes through adjudication and mediation relies heavily on a comprehensive understanding of the problem's chronology (Zahid et al., 2021).

Overall, the media possesses immense power in shaping public opinion regarding social conflicts. The analysis of the mechanisms of public opinion formation by the media in social conflicts reveals that the media holds extraordinary power through framing, agenda setting, priming, source selection, language usage, visualization, narrative structure, reporting frequency, and historical context (Joe, 2021). These mechanisms operate simultaneously and reinforce one another, shaping the way the public comprehends conflict. The media does not merely report reality but actively participates in constructing that reality itself. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for developing critical media literacy among the public and ethical awareness among journalists.

Therefore, a responsible media role is highly vital to safeguard information quality and to support peaceful conflict resolution efforts. This critical awareness aligns with the urgency of citizen engagement in managing ecological issues through participatory practices and community-based social support to build a sustainable environmental order (Zulkarnain et al., 2021). Ultimately, within both informational and ecological spheres, synergy between institutional responsibility and active citizen participation represents the absolute key to establishing a harmonious, smart, and sustainable societal order.

Implications of the Media's Role for Democracy in Conflict Situations

The media plays a critical role in determining the quality of public participation within a democratic system. The quality of public participation in a democracy depends heavily on the quality of available information. In conflict situations, media outlets that present information in a balanced, accurate, and contextual manner enable citizens to comprehend the complexities of the conflict and form mature opinions (Nissen, 2021). With a proper understanding, citizens can participate in public discourses regarding conflict resolution, support appropriate policies, and pressure parties that seek to prolong the conflict. Conversely, media that delivers biased and provocative information produces an asymmetric and reactive public opinion. Participation grounded in false or misleading information can instead exacerbate the conflict. The quality of democracy is tested in conflict situations, and the media serves as its primary key. Therefore, the quality of information delivered by the media heavily determines the quality of community participation in democratic processes. Shifts in these information dissemination patterns run parallel with interaction dynamics within the digital society, where online communication patterns and virtual communities massively reshape how citizens respond to public issues (Darmawan, 2021).

In addition to influencing public participation, the media also plays a role in safeguarding the accountability of power. The accountability of power is a vital pillar of democracy that is significantly influenced by the media during conflict situations (Olsen, 2017). The media functions as a watchdog ensuring that the government and security apparatus act lawfully and proportionally in handling conflicts. Investigative reporting on human rights

violations, the excessive use of force, or discriminatory policies can compel government accountability. On the other hand, media outlets that serve as government mouthpieces will conceal violations and allow power to act arbitrarily. In conflict situations, the temptation to silence criticism under the pretext of national security is immense. Independent media that dares to remain critical represents the final bastion of accountability. Thus, the existence of an independent media is an essential prerequisite for maintaining transparency and power accountability in a democracy. This structural oversight function is also highly essential for detecting broader sociological gaps, such as disparities in educational access within developing countries that require systemic resolution strategies (Rojak & Khayru, 2022).

Within the perspective of democratic theory, the media also functions as a public sphere for the rational exchange of ideas. The public sphere as an arena for rational discussion is a central concept in democratic theory. In conflict situations, the media should serve as a space where various parties can voice their perspectives, arguments are interchanged, and consensus is sought (Merkley, 2020). A healthy media landscape provides equal access to all involved parties, facilitates dialogue, and prevents the dominance of a single voice. In practice, however, the media frequently becomes a space where the loudest and most extreme voices dominate because they attract more attention. Moderate voices attempting to find a middle ground are often marginalized. As a result, the public sphere ceases to be an arena for deliberation and instead becomes a narrative battlefield. A healthy democracy requires a media capable of maintaining this equilibrium. Therefore, the media bears a massive responsibility to ensure that the public sphere remains a place for constructive dialogue. Managing this pluralistic discussion space demands the implementation of organizational diversity and inclusion principles as the foundation for social order within contemporary workspaces and public spheres (Irfan & Hariani, 2023).

The media also plays a role in shaping collective identity within a pluralistic society. Shifting the formation of collective identity toward shared citizenship, rather than membership in specific ethnic or religious groups, is an important media function in multicultural societies (Dunu et al., 2017). In conflict situations, the media can reinforce a shared civic identity by emphasizing common values, a shared history, and a joint

future. The media can also highlight inspiring examples of cross-group solidarity. Conversely, media outlets that continuously frame news within the boundaries of group identities will strengthen primordial divisions and complicate the formation of a shared identity. Over the long term, this threatens the social cohesion that serves as the foundation of democracy. The media holds a strategic role in nurturing a sense of nationhood amidst diversity. Accordingly, the way the media frames social identity can determine the strength or weakness of social cohesion in a democratic society. Therefore, formulating conflict management policies based on a multicultural perspective is highly crucial to optimize opportunities while reducing disintegration challenges in heterogeneous regions (Hariani & Halizah, 2024).

The role of the media does not only influence public perceptions, but also contributes to building or weakening the legitimacy of the democratic system. Beyond shaping collective identity, the media also affects the legitimacy of democratic processes through how they report on conflict. If the media consistently depicts the government as incapable of handling conflict, or portrays political processes as corrupt and unjust, democratic legitimacy will be eroded. The public may lose trust in democratic institutions and seek alternatives outside the system, including backing extremist movements. Conversely, a critical yet constructive media can reinforce legitimacy by demonstrating that mechanisms exist to correct mistakes and that citizen participation can bring about change. The media needs to maintain a balance between necessary criticism and reinforcing trust in democratic processes (Tucker et al., 2017). Accordingly, balanced and responsible media reporting serves as an important factor in maintaining public trust toward democratic institutions and processes. On the other hand, this structural pressure also resembles the double burden and gendered barriers frequently faced by career women within social structures from the perspective of contemporary feminist sociology (Fauzi, 2023; Khairi, 2021).

In the context of social conflict, the media also possesses the potential to prevent conflict escalation. Preventing conflict escalation is a vital media function that is frequently overlooked. A responsible media can play a role in defusing tensions by not over-reporting minor incidents, refusing to spread unverified information, and abstaining from provocative language (Yar, 2018). The media can also promote peace

initiatives, highlight figures working toward reconciliation, and provide space for intergroup dialogue. In many cases, the media actually becomes part of the problem by magnifying conflict. Understanding the media's potential as a peace agent is essential for developing constructive journalism practices. Therefore, the media bears a massive responsibility to contribute to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding efforts. This crisis-mitigation potential runs linear with the urgency of managing collective empathy fatigue within public service systems and workforces to maintain social stability (Khayru & Darmawan, 2023).

The media also possesses an important educational function for society in understanding conflict. Public education regarding the roots of conflict and its complexities is an educational function of the media. In conflict situations, the public requires a deeper understanding of why a conflict occurs, what the interests of various parties are, and what potential solutions exist (Wallensteen, 2018). Media outlets that practice explanatory journalism can help the public develop a more mature understanding. Conversely, media that only provides surface-level coverage produces a public that is easily provoked and supportive of simplistic, unrealistic solutions. Public education through in-depth reporting is a long-term investment for peace. Thus, informative and educational journalism is highly critical to enhance the quality of public understanding toward conflict. This educational dimension is similar to the importance of educating social perceptions regarding domestic violence issues, which carry serious implications for the mental health and psychological recovery processes of victims (Issalillah & Khayru, 2021).

The role of the media is also highly critical in protecting vulnerable and minority groups within society. Protecting vulnerable and minority groups is a test of the media's commitment to democracy. In conflict situations, minority groups frequently become targets of hatred and violence. The media can protect them by not spreading negative stereotypes, refusing to quote sources that incite hatred, and providing fair coverage of their suffering. The media can also serve as an advocate by voicing their concerns and pressuring the government to provide protection. Conversely, media biased toward the majority can reinforce the oppression of minorities. The media's responsibility toward vulnerable groups is an integral part of their role in a democracy

(Kovalova et al., 2018). Therefore, alignment with the principles of justice and humanity must form the foundation of media reporting. This humanitarian advocacy commitment aligns with the women's emancipation movement and the strengthening of women's roles in inclusive community development (Issalillah, Khayru, & Wisnujati, 2022). The domestic involvement of women in green consumption decision-making also proves this group's significant contribution to family resilience (Halizah & Nuraini, 2021).

Overall, the role of the media in conflict situations carries immense implications for the quality of democracy. An analysis of the implications of the media's role for democracy in conflict situations reveals that the media exerts a systemic impact on democratic quality (Vladislavljević & Vollmer, 2017). Public participation, the accountability of power, the public sphere, collective identity, democratic legitimacy, conflict prevention, public education, and minority protection are all influenced by how the media executes its role. A responsible media can strengthen democracy even amidst conflict. An irresponsible media can accelerate the collapse of democracy. The media's role in conflict is both a test and a determinant of the future of democracy. Accordingly, ethical, independent, and responsible journalism practices are highly necessary to preserve the sustainability of democracy within society. This systemic challenge resonates with the complexities of urbanization and social inequality, which serve as primary barriers to building social cohesion within urban-based societal environments (Mardikaningsih, 2021). Ultimately, the role of the media amidst conflict situations is a reflection as well as a determinant of the future direction of a nation's democratic quality.

Conclusion

This literature study has analyzed mass media and public opinion in social conflict from a democratic perspective by tracing the mechanisms of opinion formation and their implications for democracy. Media shapes public opinion regarding conflict through various interconnected mechanisms. Framing determines how an event is understood, whether as terrorism or resistance, religious conflict or economic conflict. Agenda setting determines which issues are considered important, which events

are covered intensively, and which are ignored. Priming influences the standards used by the public to evaluate the parties in conflict. Source selection provides legitimacy to certain perspectives. The use of language carries emotional weight that shapes public attitudes. Visualization creates a powerful emotional impact. Narratives simplify complexity into easily digestible stories. The frequency of coverage shapes perceptions of the situation. Historical context is often ignored, resulting in shallow public understanding. The implications of this media role for democracy are extensive. The quality of public participation depends on the quality of information provided by the media. The accountability of power is tested by the media's courage in conducting investigative reporting. A healthy public sphere requires media that provides equal access to all voices. Collective identity as citizens is strengthened or weakened by media framing. The legitimacy of the democratic process is influenced by reporting on government performance. The prevention of conflict escalation can be aided by responsible media. Public education about the roots of conflict requires explanatory journalism. The protection of vulnerable groups demands unbiased media. Mass media is thus not merely a reporter of events but a political actor that helps determine the direction of conflict and the quality of democracy.

The findings of this study imply the need for developing more specific journalistic ethical standards for conflict reporting. The code of ethics needs to include guidelines on framing, source selection, language use, and visualization that are sensitive to their impact on conflict. Journalism education needs to provide specific attention to conflict reporting, equipping future journalists with an understanding of conflict dynamics, mass psychology, and the impact of news coverage. The Press Council needs to strengthen oversight of conflict reporting and provide firm sanctions for violations. Media regulation needs to encourage diversity of ownership to prevent the dominance of a single voice. Digital platforms need to take responsibility for the content they disseminate, including in conflict situations. Civil society needs to develop critical media literacy so that the public is able to detect bias and provocation in conflict reporting. The public needs to be educated not to be easily provoked by unverified news and to seek information from various sources.

Further research is suggested to conduct content analysis of conflict reporting in the media to map dominant framing and its impact on public opinion. Comparative studies between media outlets with different ownership will provide insights into the influence of political and economic interests on reporting objectivity. Research on the effectiveness of various interventions to improve the quality of conflict coverage needs to be conducted. For journalists and editors, it is recommended to develop stricter internal guidelines for conflict reporting, including multi-layered verification mechanisms and consultation with conflict experts. For media owners, it is suggested to prioritize social responsibility over commercial gain in conflict situations. For the Press Council, it is recommended to issue specific recommendations regarding conflict coverage and to actively monitor media compliance. For regulators, it is suggested to formulate policies that encourage content diversity and protect journalists covering conflicts. For digital platforms, it is recommended to develop algorithms that do not prioritize provocative content and to collaborate with fact-checkers to verify viral content. For civil society, it is suggested to develop media literacy programs focusing on conflict reporting. For the public, it is advised to consume news from various sources, avoid being easily swayed by emotion, and actively seek contextual information.

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