

Citizen Journalism Debacle: A Case Study of *Codeblue's* *Clairmont* Reportage

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Abstract

The emergence of digital platform has transformed *content creators* into citizen journalists, often operating outside the ethical principles of professional journalism. This study highlights the conflict between food vlogger *Codeblu* and *Clairmont* Patisserie as an illustration of the clash of information production standards between new media and professional journalism. The main objective of this study is to understand in depth how the tension between citizen journalism practices and professional journalism standards affects the public information ecosystem, particularly in verification, accountability and transparency. Using Grounded Theory approach with a constructivist basis from Kathy Charmaz and situational mapping from Adele Clarke. Data was obtained from three main sources: *Codeblu* viral videos, online media reports (Kompas.com and Liputan6.com) and *Clairmont's* official statements. The analysis was carried out through qualitative coding, and discursive analysis of the power relations and ethical standards involved. Most studies on citizen journalism in Indonesia have mainly addressed its role in democratizing information and its legal or regulatory implications. However, little is known about the epistemic tension that arises when citizen journalism adopts the form of professional reportage, particularly in viral conflicts such as the *Codeblu–Clairmont* case. This study fills that gap by critically examining how ethical standards, verification practices, and accountability is negotiated in the digital public sphere.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism; Digital Media; Ethical Conflicts; Professional Journalism; Public Information

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the line between professional journalists and ordinary people who convey information is increasingly blurred. This phenomenon is known as citizen journalism, that is, a practice in which individuals without formal journalistic backgrounds contribute to the production and distribution of public information (Darbo and Skjerdal 2019). Citizen journalism allows ordinary people to use available technologies to create and share journalistic content, often operating independently (Popović 2024).

By utilizing social media, blogs, and video channels such as YouTube and TikTok, people can now record events, give opinions, and even do reportage Journalist's style (Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero 2024; Kehinde 2024). On the one hand, Citizen journalism opens up a wider space for public participation in the information ecosystem. But on the other hand, this practice holds the potential for serious problems, especially when done without an understanding of journalistic ethics, verification principles, and responsibility for the impact of the information disseminated (Kehinde 2024; Farooq and Rashid 2021).

Degradation of the ethical values of the media due to clickbait is inevitable in this era, as there is significant risk of citizen journalists abusing their autonomy to send misinformation and fabricate data, as they are not subject to the same professional standards (Baranova et al. 2022). Without such a control mechanism Editorial Gatekeeping and fact-checking, citizen journalism that is uncontrollable can trigger disinformation, opinion bias, and digital lynch mob on the subject reported (Awofadeju and Odunayo 2024).

Similar patterns have also been noted in recent studies, where communication practices often rely on oversimplification and spectacle to provoke public attention and emotional resonance (Widodo and Dani 2023). These dynamics illustrate how performative strategies can transform complex realities into simplified narratives that privilege sensation over substance. This trend becomes particularly visible in the rise of digital influencers, especially food vloggers, who increasingly position themselves as new information actors within the public sphere.

One of the most striking forms of the practice citizen journalism current is the emergence of Food vlogger and influencers as new information actors in the public information field. They not only provide food reviews, but also often claim roles as truth-tellers or truth-tellers to the public (Saka 2018). With great reach, personalized communication style, and speed of content distribution, the Food vloggers are able to significantly influence consumer perception and behavior (Lichtenstein, Herbers, and Bause 2021).

Under ideal conditions, this role can encourage business accountability and transparency of public services. However, when done tendentiously, without data verification, and prioritizing sensations to pursue virality, this practice can transform into a detrimental form of digital power. Food vlogger like *Codeblu*, in this context, is not only conveying personal opinions, but has occupied a semi-journalistic space that needs to be critically reviewed through the perspective of journalism ethics and public communication responsibilities (Sari 2025; Averilloureds 2025).

This phenomenon becomes increasingly problematic when non-journalistic figures adopt reportage resembling the practice of professional journalism, but without the ethical and methodological framework that underpins journalistic work. In the digital space, the boundaries between entertainment content, personal opinions, and factual reporting are becoming blurred. Figures like *Codeblu*, for example, appear not only as food vloggers but also begin to claim roles as public watchdogs, using narratives such as “dismantling the facts” or “voicing the truth” regarding restaurant services.

The form of reportage he presents is often arranged in a theatrical style, marked by affirmation and dramatization (sinergimedia 2025). This practice does not involve a confirmation process with the reported party, lacks complete contextualization, and instead ignites public anger before an issue is verified. This marks the shift in media function from the information space to the performative space, which emphasizes impression over accuracy.

Such practices illustrate a broader pattern in contemporary media culture, where dramatization and emotional appeal are often prioritized over verification. Scholars have observed that this tendency reflects a structural transformation in digital communication, in which the value of content is increasingly measured by its capacity to attract attention rather than its factual grounding (Plekhanov, Franke, and Netland 2023). In this sense, the theatrical style of non-journalistic figures is not merely an individual choice, but part of a systemic shift that aligns with wider debates on media ethics and the erosion of professional standards in the digital public sphere.

This phenomenon also resonates with what scholars describe as the performative turn in media, where information is increasingly valued not for its factual accuracy but for its ability to generate attention and emotional engagement. Frandsen, Jerslev, and Mortensen (2022) through their notion of “media events,” and later (Debord 2021) with “the society of the spectacle,” highlight how media can transform into arenas of performance rather than channels of objective reporting. In the digital context,

this performative orientation amplifies dramatization, personalization, and spectacle journalism, making virality a more dominant currency than verification.

This global tendency toward spectacle-driven communication has also been observed in the Indonesian media landscape. Several studies note that the convergence of social media and participatory content production has blurred the lines between entertainment, personal expression, and public information (Saka 2018; Lichtenstein et al. 2021; Frandsen et al. 2022). Thurman (2008) observes that in such an environment, influencers and content creators can quickly gain legitimacy as public opinion leaders, often without adhering to the verification standards expected in professional journalism. This makes Indonesia an important site to examine how performative strategies in citizen-generated content may collide with questions of ethics, accountability, and the public right to know.

The case between Codeblu and Clairmont Patisserie is a clear example of the problem of excessive citizen journalism. The feud between content creator *Codeblu* and Clairmont bakery highlights the tension between new media practices and professional journalism in Indonesia's digital context. Both of these practices claim to work on the basis of a "public right to know," but the standards of ethics and accountability they adhere to are very different.

This dispute stemmed from a negative review video uploaded by *Codeblu* at the end of 2024, highlighting one of Clairmont's outlets in Jakarta with allegations of poor service and claims of serving expired food." The video went viral on social media and triggered a chain reaction in the form of review bombing, public condemnation, and calls for a boycott (Achmad and Djumena 2025). The situation intensified until March 2025 when *Clairmont* claimed to have suffered significant financial and moral losses, then took legal action by reporting *Codeblu* to the police for alleged defamation through electronic media based on the ITE Law, and demanding compensation of five billion rupiah (Indriawati 2025).

Although *Codeblu*'s narrative is claimed to be a form of consumer criticism, the approach it uses resembles investigative reporting that has a major effect on the reputation of the business—without providing any room for clarification or right of reply for the reported party (Dedi and Paramitha 2025). This is where the fundamental epistemic and ethical question lies: can this kind of content be categorized as journalism?

Beyond the legal dispute, the case also reflects broader social implications. When content creators prioritize spectacle over balanced reporting, it risks eroding public trust in media and blurring the line between critique and defamation. Such practices can polarize online audiences into camps of support and opposition, creating echo chambers that magnify conflict. Moreover, without clear governance of digital content—whether through self-regulation, platform responsibility, or legal frameworks—these conflicts may escalate into digital vigilantism, undermining ethical standards in the public information ecosystem.

From this point, an important question emerges: What distinguishes *Codeblu*'s "reportage" practices from professional journalism? This question is crucial not only to clarify the boundary between private opinion and public reporting, but also to affirm the limits of responsibility in the production and dissemination of information. Professional journalism stands on the foundations of principles such as fact verification, narrative balance, data accuracy, and accountability to the public (Oso, Adeniran, and Arowolo 2024). In contrast, *Codeblu*'s form of "reportage" tends to favor entirely personal viewpoints, placing credibility on popularity and audience numbers rather than on independently verifiable facts. These fundamental differences are not only technical, but also concern the moral legitimacy and social impact of the information conveyed to the public.

Such contrasts highlight the epistemic tension at the heart of this study: while professional journalism is bound by institutionalized norms and ethical safeguards, citizen journalism often operates within a performative logic that privileges immediacy and spectacle. This tension is not merely a matter of style, but reveals competing frameworks of legitimacy that shape how the public receives, interprets, and reacts to information in the digital sphere.

Building on this tension, this article seeks to critically examine the dynamics between professional journalism and citizen journalism in the context of the *Codeblu*–*Clairmont* conflict. The study does not aim to determine which practice is superior, but rather to analyze how standards of information production, accountability, and public ethics are differently enacted in the new media ecosystem. By doing so, the authors underscore that in an increasingly fluid and decentralized digital public space, it is essential to understand the social context, power structures, and normative principles

that shape the circulation of information. It is expected that this deeper understanding will contribute to the development of fairer, more ethical, and more inclusive public information governance.

Based on this background, the formulation of this research problem is how citizen journalism practices carried out by content creators such as *Codeblu* reflect the shift in information production standards in the digital media era and what are the implications for the principles of professional journalism and public information governance in Indonesia: (1) In what ways do *Codeblu*'s practices differ from the principles and ethical standards of professional journalism?; (2) How do *Codeblu*'s practices represent the characteristics of citizen journalism in Indonesia's digital media landscape?; (3) What are the implications of the *Codeblu*–Clairmont conflict for public trust, business reputation, and the governance of information in the digital public sphere?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To contextualize these research questions, it is important to review previous studies on citizen journalism, digital influencers, and journalism ethics. Such a review not only demonstrates how the topic has been explored in different settings, but also helps identify gaps that this study seeks to address.

Ritonga and Syahputra (2019) examined how citizen journalism in Indonesia has evolved from traditional channels to social media platforms such as Twitter. Their study highlights how this shift has led to greater public participation but also triggered polarization and declining trust in news, as much of the content lacks verification. This work provides a local context that underlines the challenges of accuracy and ethics in participatory journalism. While earlier studies in Indonesia have mainly focused on the participatory dimension of citizen journalism and its implications for public trust, more recent research has turned to the role of digital influencers. This shift reflects the growing significance of individual content creators—such as food vloggers—who not only entertain but also shape public perceptions in ways similar to journalistic practices.

Luong and Ho (2023) investigated the influence of food vloggers on social media users, focusing on credibility, entertainment value, and consumer perceptions. The findings suggest that food vloggers significantly shape audience expectations and behavior, demonstrating how digital influencers can act as opinion leaders. This research is relevant for understanding the blurred boundaries between entertainment content and journalistic practices in the digital sphere. Beyond the specific case of food vloggers, scholars have also examined how broader platform dynamics shape the emergence of new hybrid roles. The rise of content creators who operate at the intersection of entertainment and news points to a wider transformation in journalism, where influence and visibility are increasingly determined by the logic of digital platforms.

Esma Gültüvin Gür Omay (2023) examined the impact of digital platforms on journalism and highlighted the emergence of the so-called “influencer journalist.” Her study shows how platform logic fosters hybrid roles that blur the distinction between citizen-produced content and professional journalism. This blurring not only challenges the boundaries of the profession but also underscores the epistemic tension between performativity and ethical accountability in today's media ecosystem. Building on this discussion of hybrid roles shaped by digital platforms, other scholars have turned their attention to the broader issue of audience participation in journalism. While the rise of influencer journalists illustrates how individuals blur professional boundaries, audience-centered studies provide insight into the structural challenges that emerge when citizens themselves are increasingly involved in the production of news.

Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Agirreazkuenaga (2024) reviewed audience participation in news production and pointed out its structural limitations. Their work revealed that while citizen journalism expands opportunities for public engagement, it often struggles with editorial control, objectivity, and content quality. This review provides a broader theoretical basis for identifying gaps in how citizen participation contributes to—or undermines—the credibility of journalism. While Peña-Fernández et al. (2024) provide a global perspective on the structural challenges of audience participation, Indonesian scholars have also examined these issues in a more localized context. Their analyses highlight how similar tensions appear within Indonesia's citizen journalism landscape, where ethical and legal considerations are intertwined with the credibility of information produced by non-professional actors.

Nuswantari and Alyasuci (2023) offered a literature-based overview of the development and challenges of citizen journalism in Indonesia. They identified issues of ethics, legal responsibility, and

reliability, highlighting how citizen journalism often overlaps with mainstream media but lacks professional safeguards. Although the study does not address specific micro-cases, it strengthens the contextual foundation for examining citizen journalism practices in Indonesia.

Taken together, the reviewed studies demonstrate that citizen journalism, digital influencers, and participatory media practices raise critical questions about ethics, credibility, and accountability. However, most existing research either focuses on global trends or offers broad overviews without engaging deeply with specific conflicts. This opens space for the present study to contribute a more nuanced understanding by situating the *Codeblu–Clairmont* case within the framework of journalism ethics and public information governance.

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that citizen journalism, digital influencers, and participatory media practices pose recurring challenges to media credibility, ethics, and accountability. Yet, most of these works either focus on broad theoretical discussions or provide general descriptions of citizen journalism practices without analyzing specific cases of conflict between citizen-generated content and professional journalism. This indicates a lack of research that captures the epistemic and ethical tensions that arise when citizen journalism adopts the form of professional reportage and directly contests established journalistic standards.

In the Indonesian context, existing scholarship has largely emphasized the democratizing role of citizen journalism and its legal or regulatory implications. However, little attention has been paid to the ways in which food vloggers and digital influencers position themselves as public watchdogs while bypassing verification, balance, and accountability mechanisms. This creates a unique site of tension, particularly when such practices generate viral conflicts with tangible impacts on business reputation, public trust, and legal accountability—as illustrated in the case of *Codeblu* versus Clairmont Patisserie.

The present study seeks to advance this discussion by situating the *Codeblu–Clairmont* conflict within the framework of journalism ethics and public communication responsibility. By combining Grounded Theory with Situational Analysis, the study not only contributes empirical evidence from a contemporary Indonesian case but also offers a methodological innovation that maps the complexity of digital actors, power relations, and narratives in the information ecosystem. This positioning distinguishes the research from previous studies and underscores its contribution to both scholarly debates and practical considerations of media ethics in the digital age.

To address these research questions, an appropriate methodological approach is required. Given that the practices under study—such as *Codeblu*'s form of “reportage” and its implications in the Clairmont case—have not yet been systematically theorized, this research employs Grounded Theory (GT). This approach is considered suitable because it allows concepts and categories to emerge from the data itself, rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory (GT), especially in the constructivist approach developed by Kathy Charmaz (2014), allowing researchers to build theoretical understanding inductively from direct interaction with data. Within this framework, researchers defer the use of established theories so as not to limit interpretation, and choose to let the category of meaning “grow” from the data itself. GT allows for an in-depth exploration of the meaning of motives and narrative structures formed by actors in the social context being researched – in this case, the digital space. Researchers can explore how symbols, language, and actions used by content creators, audiences, and media institutions form a distinctive value system and power relations, without having to be bound by normative or structural conceptual frameworks.

This approach becomes particularly relevant when the phenomenon being studied does not yet have an established theoretical structure – such as in the practice of “reportage” by non-journalistic actors that goes viral on social media. In this kind of situation, the meaning of the role of journalism, the truth, and accountability is not fixed, but is negotiated continuously in social practice. GT allows researchers to capture how digital actors interpret their own roles, respond to social normalities, and navigate the tension between freedom of expression and information responsibility. Therefore, GT not only helps explain what happened, but also how and why certain practices emerged and were accepted in the digital public space.

In the case of *Codeblu*, the GT approach helps researchers to understand in depth how *Codeblu* itself interprets its actions as a form of “reportage”, not just entertainment content. GT allows for analysis

of the justifications used when passing the standards of professional journalism, as well as how audiences contribute to reinforcing the narrative through comments, shares, and other digital infections. With this framework, researchers can capture how the meaning of "truth" and "information responsibility" is socially negotiated in the digital space, not simply defined by regulations or norms of formal journalism. GT provides space to explore the epistemic tensions that arise from the relationship between viral content, public perception and the ethics of journalism. To capture the complexity of digital contexts such as the *Codeblu* case, GT was then expanded, through a Situational Analysis approach. This approach not only retains the inductive logic of GT, but also adds a visual analysis tool to map broader social complexity.

Situational Analysis (SA) is a methodological development of the GT approach developed by Adele Clarke (2005) in response to the increasingly complex challenges of postmodern social research. SA remains rooted in the inductive logic of Grounded Theory – which is to build theories from data – but expands the analytical framework by adding visual mapping of actors, positions, discourses, and power relations in a dynamic social context. One of the main strengths of SA is the ability to map the complexity of social situations involving various actors, both human and non-human (such as algorithms, media, legal rules, or cultural norms), interacting in a single arena of conflict or a particular issue. Through three main types of maps – situational maps, social world/arenas maps, and positional maps – researchers can construct conceptual representations of who is involved in how their positions interact, and what narratives are fighting each other to form social meaning.

In the context of citizen journalism that moves in the digital space, this approach is very relevant. Conflicts such as the *Codeblu* vs Clairmont case do not only occur between two individuals or two institutions, but also involve algorithmic networks, public reactions, mainstream media, and legal frameworks such as the ITE Law. SA helps researchers to not only capture content narratives, but also power structures, shifting social roles, and a broader digital field of meaning. Thus, SA complements Grounded Theory with a reflective and visual layer that allows for a more complete reading of media conflicts in the post-truth era and digital disruption. With the dual approach of GT and SA, the complexity of meaning and social structure in the digital space can be explored in depth. However, the effectiveness of this method certainly requires a planned research design that is proportional to the implementation time. Therefore, it is important to show how this research strategy is structured to remain realistic within the limited grant duration scope.

Although the GT approach is often associated with intensive long-term research, it can still be effectively executed over a period of one year, as long as the research design is structured, focused, efficient, and structured from the start. In this study, the selection of a single analysis unit (the *Codeblu* vs *Clairmont* case) and the use of digital-based public data allowed researchers to collect and analyze data simultaneously, according to the basic principles of GT. This research is designed to avoid over-expanding the topic, by limiting the focus to a single viral case study that is socially meaningful and has been widely documented in the digital space. In addition, the data used – such as video transcripts, netizens' comments, media reports, and institutional responses – is available open-source, so it does not take a long time for access or complicated ethical processes.

Research on citizen journalism and digital media has developed rapidly, especially in the context of democratization of information and public participation in discourse products. However, most previous studies have focused more on normative or structural approaches – such as the alternative relationship between citizen journalism and press freedom, or on the legal and regulatory aspects of digital media. Studies that in-depth examine the epistemic tension between the practice of citizen journalism and professional journalism standards, especially through case analysis based on actual dynamics in Indonesia, are still very limited. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution in filling the literature gap by presenting a critical approach based on case studies and empirical analysis of the practice of information distribution still by non-journalistic actors.

The novelty of this research lies in two main aspects. *First*, in terms of approach, this study combines the constructive version of Kathy Charmas' grounded theory with Adele Clarke's Situational Analysis, which allows reading not only of the content of the discourse but also of the actors, positions, and power relations in digital conflicts. This approach has not been widely used in the study of citizen journalism in Indonesia, which is generally still dominated by critical discourse approaches or mainstream media theories.

Second, in terms of object and context, this study offers a distinctive empirical contribution by raising the conflict between *Codeblu* and *Clairmont Patisserie*, a real and actual phenomenon that has never been systemically accepted. This research not only describes the dynamics of cases, but also maps shifts in the function of journalism, accountability structures in the digital space, and new challenges in public information governance. Thus, this study provides a new perception of the transformation of the role of media and the boundaries of communication ethics in the era of digital content.

Specifically, this research positions itself as the first to employ a combination of Grounded Theory (GT) and Situational Analysis (SA) to study digital conflicts in the Indonesian context. While previous studies on citizen journalism in Indonesia have generally relied on discourse analysis, content analysis, or legal perspectives, none have systematically mapped the epistemic tensions between citizen and professional journalism through the dual methodological lens of GT and SA. This methodological innovation allows the study not only to examine discourse content but also to visualize the relational dynamics among actors, institutions, and digital platforms, thereby offering a more comprehensive analytical framework.

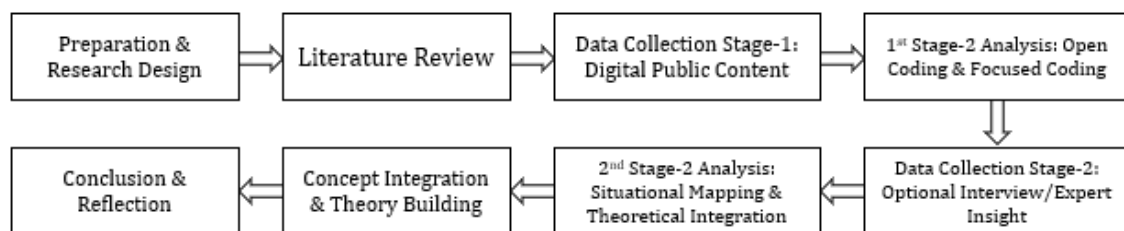


Figure 1. Research Framework

Grounded Theory (GT) is a qualitative methodological approach that allows theories to be born inductively from direct interaction with data, rather than being predetermined by an established conceptual framework. This approach places the researcher as a digger, meaning that constantly moves between the process of data collection and analysis, so that the theoretical category develops gradually from the field (Glaser and Strauss 2006). Thus, GT makes room for new findings that fit the empirical context, while avoiding research from the pitfalls of reproducing old theories that are irrelevant to actual phenomena.

GT was first introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in a classic work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), as a critique of the dominance of deductive approaches in the social sciences. Its development was later enriched by a constructivist version of the Kathy Charmaz (2014), which emphasizes the active role of researchers in building meaning with participants through the process of reflexivity. This constructivist perspective views theory not as merely the result of data categorization, but as a social construct influenced by the researcher's position, language, and subjective experiences involved in the process (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006). Thus, GT underwent an important shift from a positivistic paradigm to a more dialogical interpretive paradigm.

In the context of digital conflicts such as the *Codeblu* versus *Clairmont* case, the GT approach is relevant because it is able to capture how meaning is constructed through dynamic interactions between content creators, business institutions, mainstream media, and digital audiences. Instead of just testing hypotheses about journalistic ethics, GT allows researchers to explore narrative justifications, framing strategies, and public responses formed in cyberspace. As noted by Mohajan and Mohajan (2023), GT is very useful for examining new phenomena in the digital media ecosystem that do not yet have a standard theory, because it opens up opportunities for the birth of new concepts of ongoing social practices.

The phenomenon of "reportage by *Codeblu*" until now does not have a standard theoretical framework in the academic literature, especially in the Indonesian context. Studies on citizen journalism still largely emphasize aspects of public participation or regulatory implications, not on the form of reportage practices that resemble professional journalism but carried out by non-journalistic actors. In these conditions, Grounded Theory is the right methodological choice because it opens up space for theories to "grow" from data, rather than being forced from established theories that may be less relevant (Bryant and Charmaz 2019). This approach allows researchers to interpret the *Codeblu–Clairmont* case

as a unique social phenomenon, while providing an opportunity for the development of new concepts about the clash of ethics and information legitimacy in the digital space.

In addition, Grounded Theory also excels at capturing the narrative dynamics, moral justifications, and audience interactions formed around the *Codeblu* case. The coding and memo-writing process allows researchers to explore how the meaning of "truth," "consumer criticism," or "digital attack" is constructed and debated by various actors. A quantitative or survey approach will not be able to explain this symbolic layer, since it only measures static perception without revealing the process of production of meaning. In line with the view Makri and Neely (2021), GT offers the flexibility to capture social complexity through an ever-evolving category of field data. Thus, this method is relevant for researching digital conflicts that are fluid, full of negotiations, and influenced by the mutual interaction between creators, media, and the public.

Situational Analysis (SA) developed by Adele Clarke (2005) expands Grounded Theory by mapping human and non-human actors, such as algorithms, digital platforms, regulations, mainstream media, and the public involved in a conflict. This approach presents visual tools such as situational maps, social world/arena maps, and positional maps to show inter-stakeholder connections. Thus, digital conflicts such as the *Codeblu*–Clairmont case can be understood not just as a two-party conflict, but as a multiactor ecosystem full of power relations, discourses, and norm structures. This approach has proven effective in unraveling the complexity of contemporary phenomena involving digital networks (Enserink et al. 2022).

To ensure the validity of the findings, this study applied a systematic qualitative rigor strategy. Triangulation was carried out by comparing three key sources: *Codeblu*'s videos on YouTube, mainstream media reports such as *Kompas.com* and *Liputan6.com*, and Clairmont's official statements. Credibility was maintained through iterative coding and memo writing, which allowed categories to develop transparently from the data. Dependability was strengthened by documenting an audit trail using NVivo software to ensure traceability of the analytical process. These strategies concretely demonstrate how triangulation was implemented, ensuring that the research remains transparent, trustworthy, and methodologically sound even though it relied primarily on public data within a one-year research timeline (Nowell et al. 2017).

In line with this design, the data for this study were drawn from three primary categories. *First*, *Codeblu*'s viral video on YouTube served as the initial trigger of the dispute. This video was analyzed in terms of narrative structure, tone of voice, linguistic choices, and visual elements that shaped public perception. Although the original content was later removed, it continues to circulate widely across various social media platforms (initially accessible at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kt9QpR4Y82E>).

Second, online news coverage from *Kompas.com* and *Liputan6.com* was examined to provide chronological context, clarify the sequence of events, and document responses from Clairmont and law enforcement authorities regarding the legal process. These reports included articles such as "Duduk Perkara Kasus Food Vlogger Codeblu vs Perusahaan Roti Clairmont" (*Kompas.com*, March 17, 2025) [<https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2025/03/17/211634466/duduk-perkara-kasus-food-vlogger-codeblu-vs-perusahaan-roti-clairmont->] and "Mediasi dengan Clairmont Gagal, Food Vlogger Codeblu Harus Ganti Rugi Rp5 Miliar" (*Liputan6.com*, March 2025) [<https://www.liputan6.com/lifestyle/read/5968020>].

Third, Clairmont's official statements, as distributed through online media, served as an additional data set. These texts not only clarified the company's position but also provided a point of comparison to the claims advanced by *Codeblu*, allowing the study to capture divergences between institutional self-representation and citizen-generated narratives.

The main contribution of this research lies in the use of a combination of Grounded Theory (GT) and Situational Analysis (SA) which are still rarely applied in citizen journalism studies in Indonesia. This approach not only allows for an in-depth reading of discourse content but also maps the broader configuration of power relations, narratives, and public resonance in the digital space, thereby producing a more comprehensive analytical framework. With this methodological foundation, the following analysis will discuss how *Codeblu*'s "reportage" practices reflect shifts in information production standards in the digital media era and their implications for journalistic ethics and public information governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial analysis of *Codeblu*'s video that triggered the dispute showed a communication pattern that resembled journalistic reportage, but with a performative orientation that emphasized dramatization and personalization. In terms of narrative structure, *Codeblu* not only features a personal consumer experience, but builds a storyline that positions itself as a "whistleblower" over alleged violation of Clairmont's service standards. The straightforward, affirmative delivery style combined with close-up visuals and firm intonation reinforce the investigative impression, albeit without the data verification procedures prevalent in professional journalism practice (Lichtenstein et al. 2021). Thus, the video shifts public perception from just a food review to a semi-journalistic form that has the potential to invite the trust of the public at large.

In terms of language use, *Codeblu* tends to use hyperbolic, repetitive, and emotional diction, which effectively builds resonance with digital audiences. This practice is in line with the findings of Frandsen, Jerslev and Mortensen (2022) regarding the tendency of *spectacle journalism*, where the value of news shifts from factual accuracy to emotional appeal and virality. The application of diction such as "unpack," "shocking facts," or "covered truths" frames the narrative as *exposé*, when comprehensive supporting data is not presented. This situation poses ethical problems because sensational framing can reinforce the cognitive biases of audiences, especially in a social media ecosystem dominated by preference algorithms (Sara Enli and Thumim 2012).

In addition, the visual framing used—such as the shooting of a product that was considered problematic, dramatic expressions, and confrontational tone of voice—prompted the public to interpret the case as a form of fatal mistake on Clairmont's part. Analysis of audience comments shows that most responses are no longer critical questions, but rather direct condemnations and calls for boycotts, showing how digital narratives structured in a performative style can create the *digital lynching effect* (Awofadeju and Odunayo 2024). This corroborates previous findings that citizen journalism that is not constrained by professional ethics is prone to eroding the principle of news balance and driving polarization of public opinion (Popović 2024).

Findings from Mainstream Media (Kompas & Liputan6)

Analysis of mainstream media coverage, particularly *Kompas.com* and *Liputan6.com*, reveals a pattern of news that differs significantly from the *Codeblu* narrative. Instead of emphasizing dramatization, the media presents more of a factual chronology of events, including the stages of mediation carried out between *Codeblu* and Clairmont and the legal positions taken by both parties. *Kompas.com*, for example, highlights regulatory aspects related to consumer protection and potential violations of the ITE Law, while *Liputan6.com* emphasizes the failed mediation process and the amount of compensation claims filed by Clairmont (Achmad and Djumena 2025; Pamela 2025). Thus, the mainstream media acts as a clarifying channel that provides space for various parties, although not completely free from a particular framing.

From a framing perspective, mainstream media tend to emphasize the legal and ethical dimensions compared to the performative aspects. The presentation of direct quotes from Clairmont and law enforcement officials shows an effort to balance information and present a *right of reply*, something that is absent in *Codeblu*'s video. This is in line with the findings of Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Agirreazkuenaga (2024) who affirm that professional media still maintain institutional standards such as verification and editorial control, although in practice they still face pressure from the logic of digital platforms. In this case, the media framing shows an attempt to mitigate the escalation of the conflict by placing it in the legal-formal realm, not just public opinion on social media.

However, discourse analysis also shows that mainstream media reporting is not completely sterile from the logic of attention. News headlines continue to use sensational diction such as "failed mediation" or "demand billions in damages" to attract reader clicks, signaling a negotiation between the standards of professional journalism and the need to compete in the digital ecosystem (Thurman 2008). Thus, the mainstream media displays a dual role: on the one hand it maintains ethical principles such as balance and verification, but on the other hand it remains trapped in the dynamics of the attention market that encourages the use of provocative language. This situation confirms that although professional media are more accountable than citizen journalists, both remain under the same digital economic-political pressure.

Findings of the Clairmont Official Statement

Clairmont's official statements spread in various online media show a defensive communication strategy oriented towards the restoration of reputation and legal legitimacy. Instead of engaging in an emotional narrative like *Codeblu*, *Clairmont* has consistently emphasized that the allegations made through the video are unfounded, detrimental to the business, and have violated the principles of information fairness. The statement emphasizes formal evidence such as product quality certification, compliance with health standards, and internal documentation that refutes claims of expired food. This strategy is in line with the findings of Benoit (2015) in *Image Repair* theory, that organizations facing reputational crises tend to use corrective and legalistic strategies to maintain public credibility.

In terms of framing, *Clairmont's* statement also shows an effort to shift the conflict arena from a fluid digital space to a more structured legal space. By filing a claim for compensation of IDR 5 billion through civil and criminal channels, *Clairmont* seeks to position itself not only as a victim of defamation, but also as a party entitled to legal protection under the ITE Law and consumer protection regulations (Indriawati 2025). This step confirms that in the digital media ecosystem, business institutions still rely on the formal legitimacy of the state to match the power of the virality of digital content. This perspective is consistent with the findings of Oso, Adeniran, Arowolo (2024), who state that journalistic ethics and information accountability are often restored through institutional mechanisms when the logic of digital markets fails to control them.

In addition, *Clairmont's* public communications highlight the risks of *trial by social media*, where public opinion forms faster than verifiable facts. By emphasizing the transparency of the legal process and affirming openness to the audit of the authorities, *Clairmont* seeks to restore the arena of discourse from a viral space to a formal verification space. This reflects a hybrid pattern in reputational crisis management, where organizations not only clarify in the mass media, but also integrate legal strategies as a means of *damage control*. Thus, *Clairmont's* official statement reveals a fundamental difference in the standards of information legitimacy compared to *Codeblu's* narrative: one rests on digital perperitvity, while the other on institutional legality.

Discussion

The findings from *Codeblu's* video analysis, mainstream media coverage, and *Clairmont's* official statement confirm the existence of epistemic tensions between citizen journalism practices and professional journalism standards. On the one hand, citizen journalism like *Codeblu* claims to speak on behalf of *the public right to know* with a *reportage style* that resembles an investigation. However, this style is run without verification mechanisms, source balance, and editorial accountability. Instead, the mainstream media seeks to maintain ethical standards such as *the right of reply* and the use of official sources, while still being influenced by the logic of digital attention. This tension affirms the view of Baranova et al. (2022) that in the era of media convergence, journalism ethics are fragmented due to the presence of new actors who are not subject to institutional rules.

The epistemic tension is not just a technical issue, but concerns the legitimacy of authority in the production of public knowledge. As noted by Oso, Adeniran, Arowolo (2024), professional journalism gains legitimacy through the institutionalization of norms such as verification, accuracy, and accountability, while citizen journalism relies more on performativity, virality, and audience trust. When these two epistemic frameworks meet in the digital space, what emerges is a clash of legitimacy: the content creator's version of "truth" claims versus the "truth" of media and legal institutions' versions of "truth." This phenomenon is in line with Debord (2021) idea of *a society of the spectacle*, in which information is no longer judged based on its truthfulness, but rather the extent to which it is capable of generating emotional resonance and public attention.

This discussion shows that epistemic tension has implications for the erosion of the boundaries of the journalism profession and the transformation of digital public spaces. As Frandsen, Jerslev, and Mortensen (2022) have revealed, the logic of participation and *liveness* in digital media enlarges the space for non-professional actors to claim positions as *watchdogs*, but without adequate ethical mechanisms. In the context of *Codeblu–Clairmont*, this condition gives birth to a paradox: the practice of citizen journalism can encourage business transparency, but at the same time threaten information fairness when sensation takes precedence over verification. Thus, this discussion emphasized the importance of reformulating the boundaries of ethics and public information governance in an increasingly fluid digital era.

The findings regarding the epistemic tension between citizen journalism and professional journalism carry important implications for public information governance. *First*, practices like Codeblu show how digital narratives can quickly shape public opinion, creating a *trial by social media* before fact-checking is carried out. This condition confirms the view of Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta, and Agirreazkuenaga (2024) that citizen participation in news production often faces limitations in editorial control and the risk of deteriorating information quality. Without a clear ethical mechanism, the digital space can become an arena of information injustice, where the reputation of individuals and institutions can be damaged only by viral narratives.

Second, the *Codeblu–Clairmont* case shows that public information governance cannot be left to the logic of platform algorithms or attention market mechanisms. A hybrid model is needed that integrates formal regulations, platform initiatives, and digital literacy education. As shown by Napoli (2019), the sustainability of the public information ecosystem depends on a balance between freedom of expression and social accountability. In the Indonesian context, this means strengthening coordination between state regulations (such as the ITE Law), media ethics guidelines, and digital platform policies so that there is no lack of responsibility in controlling excessive citizen journalism practices.

Third, in terms of digital ethics, this case shows the need to redefine ethical standards that are relevant to the participatory era. If professional journalism is based on verification and *the right of reply*, then citizen journalism needs to be directed to the principles of narrative transparency, personal accountability, and clarity of the boundaries between opinion and facts. As stated by Ward (2019), media ethics in the digital era must be more inclusive, participatory, and adaptive to the new role of non-professional actors. Thus, the *Codeblu–Clairmont* case not only reflects individual conflicts, but also highlights the urgent need to build public information governance that is fair, ethical, and able to respond to the challenges of the digital age.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated how the *Codeblu–Clairmont* conflict illustrates the epistemic tension between citizen journalism practices and the ethical standards of professional journalism in the digital era. Through the analysis of *Codeblu*'s viral video, mainstream media reports, and Clairmont's official statements, the findings reveal that citizen journalism, when performed in a performative and spectacle-driven style, can blur the line between consumer critique and investigative reporting. While such practices amplify the voice of ordinary citizens and generate public attention, they also risk undermining journalistic principles of verification, balance, and accountability, thereby exposing the digital public sphere to misinformation and reputational harm.

The comparison with mainstream media coverage underscores that professional journalism still attempts to uphold ethical safeguards such as the right of reply and factual verification, even though it is not immune to the pressures of digital attention markets. By contrast, *Clairmont*'s official statements highlight how institutions rely on legal legitimacy and image repair strategies to counter the viral effects of citizen-generated content. Together, these findings demonstrate that the legitimacy of information production in the digital public sphere is contested not only through competing narratives but also through divergent epistemic frameworks—performative virality versus institutional accountability.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the scholarship on citizen journalism by combining Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis, which enables a nuanced reading of both discursive narratives and the broader constellation of human and non-human actors, including algorithms, regulations, and media platforms. This dual approach offers a comprehensive analytical framework that is rarely applied in Indonesian communication studies, particularly in cases of conflict between digital influencers and established institutions. The findings thus enrich theoretical debates while also offering empirical insights into the dynamics of media convergence and ethical challenges in the digital age.

In practical terms, the study points to the urgent need for hybrid governance of public information that integrates state regulation, platform responsibility, and digital literacy. The *Codeblu–Clairmont* case shows that leaving the circulation of information entirely to algorithms and attention-driven logics risks creating social injustice and digital vigilantism. Therefore, strengthening digital ethics—anchored in transparency, accountability, and inclusivity—is essential to ensure that citizen journalism contributes to a more democratic rather than destabilizing information ecosystem. Future research could expand this inquiry by examining comparative cases across sectors, thereby further clarifying the

evolving boundaries of journalism, ethics, and public responsibility in a participatory digital environment.

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