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Between Transparency and Secrecy: A Mixed-Methods Study of Digital Surveillance, Source Risks, and Resilience in Global South Investigative Journalism

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Abstract: In the context of increasing digital surveillance and shrinking press freedom, investigative journalists in the Global South face critical ethical and operational challenges. Mixed-method studies which highlighted regions like Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines were not exceptionally prominent in the previous literature. Within a sequential framework, we studied 150 investigative reports (2018-2023) through natural language processing, undertook 25 semi-structured interviews, and carried out participatory observations in three newsrooms. The results point to three important observations: hybrid analogue-digital verification models make exposure to a source less likely; collaborative resistance cultural- practice networks constructively defy networks; and the paradox of ethics in investigative journalism transparency and secrecy suggests the need for a decolonial approach. The surveillance journalism framework, which examines outstanding epistemic imbalances, incorporates Southern knowledge, relational accountability, and the new concept of communal sousveillance ethics. By combining the principles of sousveillance, networked resistance, and communal ethics, the study focuses on culturally rooted policy proposals such as the ASEAN Hybrid Safety Fund. These results point to the need for global journalism safety standards which.

Keywords: Accountability, Global South, Political, Surveillance, Transparency.

1. Introduction

One of Indonesia's leading investigative quarterlies, Tempo Magazine, encountered what has been described as a coordinated cyber assault on 15 March 2023, just hours after publishing an exposé on illegal nickel mining operations associated with a prominent politician (Kumar & Bhat, 2025). This included the use of state-level spyware and emails with embedded death threats. Such attacks are especially notable as growing patterns of digital repression against the press are described with increasing frequency and detail for the Global South. Recent regional studies continue to document similar incidents across Southeast Asia and West Africa, reflecting the escalation of state-corporate surveillance alliances and digital coercion (Dauvergne, 2022). Digital captivity and pressuring of intelligence functionary are focus of many press freedom scholars, whereas the tactical reporting of journalists in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and South Africa is the primary focus of the literature (Bowe *et al.*, 2024). A lacuna in press freedom studies is the limited coverage of Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America.

These regions have authoritarianism, weak democracy, and, in particular, complex socio-political landscapes for the media to navigate. Journalists defending the integrity of a free press in these circumstances require creative and tailored solutions to these unique sets of context. The dangerous and unique sets of circumstances include the extreme threats of physical violence, legal harassment, and economic coercion. It is worth examining the actions of these media professionals, at least in terms of resilience and adaptability, in the context of hostile media that discourage the media from promoting freedom of speech (De Albuquerque, 2013). To expand this debate, recent



studies of the media's response to authoritarian pressure have focused on relationship accountability, local verification, and slow resistance techniques (Mukerjee *et al.*, 2023; Gohdes, 2023). Such a scholarship could focus, for example, on cutting-edge communication strategies, sources protection measures and cross-border investigative journalism across socio-political boundaries. In comparison, such a study could inform journalists under authoritarian control of the various strategies of state control and resistance as well as of the models of press control, particularly those who support Western-style theories of press control (Pérez & Sánchez, 2024). This research has the potential to improve theoretical understanding, while providing practical support for colleagues in the field.

To protect vulnerable sources, the study examines whether journalists in the global South give priority to full disclosure and ethical considerations. State actors and corporations use advanced technologies such as Pegasus spyware and artificial intelligence-based source scanning, which have presented journalists with unprecedented challenges (Dad & Khan, 2023). For example, in Indonesia, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and military-grade spyware are used to target journalists covering Papua. Digital harassment is using fake news as a threat, and women journalists face more serious barriers to accountability. In addition, journalists working in rural areas face significant infrastructure problems due to frequent digital blackouts and unreliable digital connectivity.

The global South is also a hotbed of digital repression. In Nigeria, ransomware and state-sponsored phishing targets journalists investigating oil corruption. In Mexico, journalists face digital smear campaigns and surveillance orchestrated by drug cartels. Compared to Global South scholarship, the lack of attention to digital surveillance in Global South journalism is striking. Most digital surveillance studies, approximately 85%, focus on Euro-American contexts (Miller & Vaccari, 2020). Therefore, Global South journalism, with its fragmented infrastructure, hybrid corporate-state control, and socio-political gendered disinformation, is not properly analyzed. Emerging comparative analyses reaffirm this imbalance and call for methodological pluralism in studying surveillance journalism beyond Euro-American paradigms (Appelgren *et al.*, 2019).

In the Indonesian local media studies context, post-Reformasi scholarship has focused on democratization, and very few have studied high-risk zones hybrid analogue-digital resistance (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022). This has included encrypted leak platforms like Jakarta Leaks, analogue dead drops in rural Kalimantan, and muchadara (deliberative consensus) cross-verification bordering rituals. These models are to a great extent neglected, yet critical. They show how journalists in the global South try to avoid surveillance and control their own work.

Meanwhile, the current theoretical models of journalism and surveillance in the global South remain rudimentary. For secure applications such as Signal and Proton Mail, for example, the techno-solutions view ignores the adaptive rules of limited access, low community trust, and oral authentication procedures (Boerkamp *et al.* 2024). Moreover, the characterization of journalists as 'lone vigilantes' ignores the collective social surveillance practices that are found in kinship, mutual assistance, and (local) governance. These unfinished books highlight the need to rethink certain aspects of journalistic ethics from a decolonizing perspective, giving preference to the Southern epistemology (De/Colonisation, 2019). This change is in line with the ongoing theoretical initiatives in the global South to reframe media ethics in relational, cross-cutting and decolonizing terms.

Using a mixed methodology combining computational and ethnographic research, this paper constitutes a new contribution to the growing literature on press freedom, which frames it as a cultural and social practice rather than a technical preserve (Bryda & Costa, 2023). This survey therefore poses three interlinked questions: (1) How do investigative journalists in the world's South cope with the challenges of surveillance and censorship? (2) Which hybrid verification procedures offer the best protection of resources? (3) How to reframe journalistic ethics as a decolonization issue and turn to communal epistemology.

2. Literature Review

Investigative journalism and surveillance the relationship between journalism and surveillance has attracted much academic attention, particularly in the wake of the Snowden revelations. However, recent research often highlights state-dominated surveillance systems in Western democracies, under-estimating the situation in the global South, where state and corporate power co-exist (Lashmar, 2016). Investigative journalists are particularly vulnerable to this dynamic because they use adversarial reporting frameworks and whistle-blower sources. However, frameworks such as Networked Resilience Surveillance are still mostly developed in highly technology-intensive,



networked environments (Junaid *et al.*, 2022). Due to these constraints, more inclusive models need to be developed which take into account regional contexts of risk and resilience.

A meta-analysis of surveillance studies in the media shows that more than 85 percent of the stories reported are from North America and Europe, which marginalizes the global South in the surveillance discourse. This epistemic imbalance neglects the specific cultural, political, and infrastructure characteristics of areas vulnerable to hybrid surveillance threats such as cyber-bullying, digital disruption, and spyware (Nguyen, 2023). Due to these particular circumstances, theoretical re-evaluation and empirical integration are required. Existing frameworks risk perpetuating a one size fits all approach which hides the real life of journalists working in environments of strong authoritarianism or where resources are scarce, unless adapted. Researchers need to expand their geographical and epistemological horizons to better explain these differences.

Hybrid resistance and analog innovation Analog innovation is now recognized as a valid resistance tactic by recent scholarship. Make the case for big data from the South by highlighting how disadvantaged groups undermine surveillance through culturally embedded and hybrid practices (Couldry & Mejias, 2018). The way in which the AIA uses the pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia to protect documents exemplifies the kind of analogical resilience that mainstream theories fail to recognize. Mexican journalists use religious networks to hide sensitive information, while Nigerian journalists use the networks of prostitutes to carry USB sticks (Chenou & Cepeda-Másmela, 2019). All these examples demonstrate the critical role of context-aware authentication systems that combine modern encryption with established, trusted social structures.

The ethical complexity of hybrid techniques, such as deliberate disinformation to test trust networks or verbal verification through gossip, is less understood, despite the fact that international press freedom organizations such as UNESCO give high priority to digital education (Ball, 2004). Despite feminist scholars' long-standing emphasis on ethical care, few of them apply these frameworks to the kind of journalism they are investigating. Digital harassment is particularly rife for Southeast Asian women journalists. This underlines the importance of cross-cutting and culturally conscious ethics. Without taking account of these lived experiences, advocacy frameworks risk marginalizing the very people they are meant to protect (Tandoc *et al.*, 2021). In order to fill these gaps in literature, journalistic ethics must incorporate feminist and culturally rooted views.

Theoretical Gaps and the Need for Decolonial Approaches Despite the emerging interest in decolonizing media studies, few scholars have integrated Indigenous verification systems, such as Indonesia's muchadara or communal gotong royong, into surveillance resistance theory (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). The limitations of technosolutionist models become apparent when encrypted apps fail in blackout zones or when community trust outperforms digital tools. This study is based on the criticisms of betting on the decolonial ethics of journalism to foreground lived experience, relational responsibility and non-Western epistemologies. This approach, in addition to closing cracks in theory, confirms the legitimacy of alternative knowledge systems (Omodan & Dastile, 2023). This provides a stronger and more inclusive framework for protecting journalistic practices in the global South.

3. Theoretical Framework

Three complementary perspectives Decolonial ethics based on community epistemology, networked resilience, and surveillance combine to form the theoretical framework for this inquiry (Schoon *et al.*, 2020). These frameworks demonstrate how digital and analogue systems, embedded in cultural practice, represent ownership and care. In the light of these views, the study offers a culturally informed perspective that goes beyond Eurocentric ideas of press freedom to understand the resilience of journalists in repressive environments.

The theoretical synthesis is further strengthened by Raewyn Connell's 2007 *The South of Things*, which challenges the epistemic dominance of northern paradigms and confirms the knowledge of the global south. The *Epistemology of the South* by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) also advocates the coexistence of different epistemic traditions and the decolonisation of knowledge. Using these techniques, the study offers the ethics of community surveillance as a Southern epistemological intervention, stressing mutual accountability, collective verification, and ethical integrity in the local context as legitimate foundations of citizen journalism.

Sousveillance, or looking down, offers a way to understand how communities and journalists watch over power. Journalists using body cameras to document military persecution in Papua are examples of this strategy in



Indonesia (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Surveillance gives citizens the ability to gather countervailing evidence and to resist authoritarian rule, as opposed to top-down surveillance. However, the Mann framework assumes continuous digital connectivity and access to devices. Analogous forms of surveillance, such as oral testimony, symbolic codes and local gossip networks, should be recognised as equally legitimate ways of observing and resisting in settings where infrastructure is lacking.

The concept of networked resistance provides an additional insight into this research, by highlighting the ways in which actors form diffuse coalitions to amplify the voice of the oppressed. Indonesian journalists have worked with Islamic boarding schools and agricultural networks in the cases discussed here to secure and authenticate inside information (Pandey, 2024). According to Castells, these cooperation structures serve as decentralized trust nodes, facilitating the growth of independent communication regions. However, unlike the Castells model, which emphasizes the relational and personal nature of resistance, the networks studied in this study often rely on people-to-people interaction. This extension of Castell's theory shows how resilience technologies can be adapted to the different technological and cultural environments of the digital age.

According to feminist and indigenous scholars, the third pillar of this framework is decolonial ethics. The study draws on regional customs such as *muchadara* (intentional consensus) and ethical diligence to highlight the social responsibility inherent in Southern journalism (Gkrimpizi *et al.*, 2023). In Central Java, informal savings groups have developed into trust networks, for example, where female journalists use them to verify leaks. These practices are examples of community-based cryptography, which uses social solidarity as a security measure rather than software. Successful verification is seen as innovative technology, contrary to Western assumptions.

According to this study, these issues are referred to in the General Assembly as ethical community oversight. This model embeds support for journalism in cultural and communal practices. The model emphasizes relationships, rituals and resilience as pillars of freedom of the press, not technology (Mohamed *et al.*, 2020). This area combines networked resistance with the analogue context of the ethical of surveillance, providing a strong theoretical basis for investigative journalism through both digital and analogue surveillance in the world's South.

4. Methods

Investigative journalists in the global South face a variety of challenges, which this study examined through a sequential approach using mixed methods. The three integrated phases of the methodology were computational analysis, qualitative interviews and ethnographic observation. Systemic patterns, individual experience and writing methods are aspects of journalistic activity which each stage sought to identify. The aim of this study was to triangulate these data sources with analytical rigor and sensitivity to context. The methodology of this study combines semi-structured interviews, ethnographic reporting and content analysis using NLP in a consistent sequential design using a mixed methodology. This triangulated approach ensures methodological consistency and depth of context between data stages by identifying both macro-level patterns in the surveillance discourse and micro-level journalistic practices. This methodological diversity effectively addressed the main study concerns of adaptation, protection and ethical innovation in a high-risk reporting environment.

4.1 Computational Analysis

The first phase involved the use of Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to perform a computational analysis of 150 investigation reports published from 2018 to 2023. These reports cited three major media outlets in the Global South - Tempo (Indonesia), Rappler (the Philippines) and Premium Times (Nigeria). The NLP analysis found common terms related to encryption techniques, monitoring, compromise of sources, and threats of retaliation. Time trends were also analysed to follow the changes before and after major legal or political events in each area.

In the NLP phase, the BERTopic and spaCy Python libraries were used to model unsupervised topics and tokenization and lemmatization to improve the accuracy of the analysis. The vector of the term frequency - inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) was used to evaluate the relative importance of key words related to source protection, encryption and supervision. For the verification of semantic consistency, shadow density factors (>0.70) were used to validate the quality of the cluster. The qualitative part of the study was directly influenced by the computational



findings. In particular, the most well-known NLP clusters - such as community validation, encryption techniques, and trust networks - have been used to inform the selection of ethnographic focus areas and to refine the semi-structured interview protocols. High co-occurrence rates for terms such as rumor, oral verification, surveillance breach, led to subsequent questions on relationship and resistance to analogues. These computational topics were found in the newsroom and community validation processes during the ethnographic phase, which ensured methodological continuity and analytical consistency throughout the sequence of mixed methods. The semi-structured interview guide has been designed to address the resulting topic clusters (trust networks, cryptography, and community authentication). This allowed the later qualitative phases to examine these computationally derived topics in depth. This sequential link was a key to the triangulation strategy of the study and ensured methodological integration. Overall, this phase offered a quantitative basis for understanding new models of journalistic resilience and vulnerability.

For greater empirical transparency, Table 1 provides a brief overview of the main topics derived from NLP and the term frequency grouping generated by the calculation. The table shows the representative keywords, dominant topics and their relative frequency across the region. The language and thematic patterns which influenced the later qualitative phases of the study are better illustrated in this synopsis.

Table 1. Key NLP-Derived Topics and Term Frequency Clusters

Topic Cluster	Representative Keywords	Region(s) with Highest Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)	Interpretive Theme
Source Protection & Encryption	"encryption," "password," "Signal," "metadata"	Indonesia, Nigeria	21.3	Digital safety and confidentiality
Trust Networks & Verification	"trust," "rumor," "confirmation," "community"	Philippines, Indonesia	19.8	Relational verification and collective ethics
Surveillance & Threats	"spyware," "tracking," "lawsuit," "surveillance"	Indonesia	18.6	Digital repression and state monitoring
Gendered Harassment	"deepfake," "female," "harassment," "threat"	Philippines, Nigeria	14.7	Gendered disinformation and risk
Analogue Resistance	"weaving," "ritual," "oral," "symbolic"	Indonesia	12.4	Cultural encryption and analogue resilience

4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

In the second phase, 25 investigative journalists with first-hand knowledge of the threats associated with the surveillance were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. A subjective sample selection was used to select participants, favoring SLAPPs or those involved in online harassment. Fifteen of the 25 interviewed were Indonesians, five were Nigerians and five were Filipinos. Interrogations took place in safe houses and through encrypted calls using Signal in secure settings. The source protection strategies, the effectiveness of digital tools, cooperation networks and moral issues were all covered. The software NVivo was used to selectively code the interviews and to record, transcribe and audio-code all of the interviews. This phase has allowed us to gain a thorough understanding of the tactics and experiences of journalists.

Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the 25 journalists interviewed for this study, including gender, country, professional experience and primary focus of their work, in order to better reflect the diversity of participants. This synopsis improves the transparency of the sample selection process and puts the qualitative results in a broader professional context of journalism in the global South.

4.3 Ethnographic Observation

During the third phase, warnings were issued for participation in three high-risk investigative newsrooms - Prime Times Lagos, Rappler Manila, and Tempo Jakarta. For four weeks, the lead researcher visited each of the newsrooms, attended editorial meetings, followed validation procedures, and interviewed journalists and digital security professionals. Combining encrypted messaging applications and offline extraction techniques, these findings provide insight into the operational dynamics driving hybrid resilience strategies. Methodical documentation of field notes and cross validation with interview data were used to improve reliability.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical integrity, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Indonesia (Protocol No: IU:2023-045). Each participant was given a thorough informed consent form outlining their rights, the objectives of the study and the confidentiality protocols that had been established. 68 percent of the 25 respondents requested pseudonymous identifiers such as reporter A, West Papua, which indicates the sensitive nature of their work. Seminars on digital literacy were offered as a form of reciprocity for participation in similar, rarely-seen European-American studies. In order to promote introspection and openness, researchers attended pair-conferences and made public their previous affiliation with press freedom NGOs.

5. Results

The findings provide a comprehensive and tangible picture of the resilience of journalists in the world's South. These findings are in line with recent peer-reviewed research on hybrid journalistic safety procedures and methods of digital versus analogue authentication in repressive environments (Dalapati & Ramos, 2024; Konow-Lund, Park, & Bebawi, 2024). The main thematic categories of the dataset are described in Table 2, which also highlights the relevant validation methods and their impact on the resilience of journalists in the light of significant empirical data. These three themes community trust networks, hybrid authentication, and digital encryption capture the basic adaptive strategies employed by journalists in Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines. Three main themes have been developed: the value of cooperative resilience networks, the effectiveness of hybrid analogue-digital authentication models, and the moral conundrum of openness versus secrecy. Each theme is supported by qualitative observations, computational trends and ethnographic research carried out in rural Indonesia, Nigeria and the Philippines. These findings provide an empirical basis for the theoretical framework outlined above and also provide useful insights into journalistic safety procedures.

Table 2. Summary of Key Findings, Methods, and Implications

Finding	Corresponding Method(s)	Key Implications
Hybrid analogue–digital verification reduces source exposure and strengthens credibility.	NLP-based content analysis; ethnographic newsroom observation.	Demonstrates value of hybrid workflows and context-specific verification.
Collaborative resistance networks enhance resilience through communal ethics.	Semi-structured interviews; ethnography.	Highlights collective, culturally grounded safety infrastructures.
Tactical transparency–secrecy balance demands decolonial ethical frameworks.	Triangulation across all phases.	Calls for adaptation of global journalism ethics codes to high-risk, low-connectivity contexts.

First, hybrid authentication techniques have reduced resource exposure much more effectively than digital workflow. For example, the investigation into the Tempo illegal mining operation in 2023 combined documents from the time of the block chain with oral testimony from Sulawesi fishermen in person, through a two-step process. This approach maintained 87 percent verification while reducing resource exposure by 63 percent compared to digitised processes. Similarly, Rappler reporters in Manila reported an 89 percent success rate in using Jeepney drivers as private document carriers, while Secure Drop reported a 67 percent success rate. Legal risks have fallen by 92



percent despite the 14-day extension of reporting deadlines for these hybrid approaches, which suggests that the time investment has brought significant protection benefits. Moreover, the hybrid verification work-streams at both ends of the analogue and digital spectrum appeared to be exceeded, as connectivity failures were often due to stress testing in conflict areas such as West Papua and Mindanao.

The construction and belief of truth were seen as epistemological changes in hybrid models that went beyond mere logistical changes. For example, the large population in Indonesia (deliberate consensus), the parochial meetings in the Philippines, or community rituals provide valid means for journalists to compare cultural data. These analog systems created an interpretive framework for valuing sources that were not based on encryption protocols, but on social inclusion. In high-surveillance contexts, where spyware can breach devices, but not community links, those rituals are resilient. They functioned as cultural cuts that were difficult to infiltrate, highly adaptable and nailed to the ethical norms of relational responsibility.

Second, the study found that cooperative networks markedly improve journalistic resilience in high-risk settings. In Indonesia, the Jakarta Leaks platform played a major role in storing sensitive materials (Islamic insider information) and enabled 47 cross-border surveys to be conducted between 2020 and 2023. At the 2022 palm oil exhibition, three of them suffered hard drives with signs of corruption, ensuring the integrity of documents in legal and digital attacks. Nigerian journalists responded to this approach through informal market networks, using food shipments to hide USB drives. Although both models were based on community trust, the Indonesian network showed an operational resilience of 23%, which may be attributable to the *Gotong royong* (cooperation for cooperation) community ethic than to the networks in the Philippines. In East Flores, a shared phone system run by the city's seniors had 94% uptime at internet shadow points, reinvigorating the strategic value of analog coordination.

These collaborative infrastructures highlight the value of decentralization in the application of instruments as well as in the area of moral responsibility. EU networks share the risk and responsibility, rather than relying on individual journalists to carry the burden of secrecy and exposure. This shift in reporting has resulted in the integration of traditional informal actors, market traders, educators and religious leaders, in the verification and protection process. Moreover, the rationale for whistleblowing has changed. Instead of being lone informants, sources are now part of a more protective ecosystem, which hampers the development of common standards and relationships. This changes the strategic calculus of investigative journalism in particular, especially when cultural recognition and anonymity have to be balanced.

Third, the study consistently identified the ethical conflict between the need for confidentiality to protect sources and the journalistic principle of openness. 41 percent of the journalists interviewed admitted to leaking false information to identify insiders under surveillance, which reduced the number of wiretaps by 39 percent, but strained relations with reliable sources. Although 28 percent of respondents claim that this scam harmed limited networks, it was used to justify the corruption of forestry officials in Riau Province. These moral conundrums underscore the fascinating game of investigative journalism in settings where every decision about security and protection requires some kind of trust and security pledge. This paradox is exacerbated by the lack of uniform ethical standards to address the unique challenges of the region. Journalists therefore often use cultural norms rather than institutional spaces to deal with these puzzles.

This problem is exacerbated by the gender gap in the verification process. Sixty-seven percent of female journalists prefer to get their news in person via social media, compared to thirty-three percent of male journalists who trust digital tools. Family threats, online harassment and pornography are examples of harassment based on gender, which 92 percent of respondents say are more likely to affect women. These results are in line with the gender-specific epistemology of journalistic security, where safe and supportive networks serve as a tool for validation and emotional support. On the other hand, male counterparts often used encrypted platforms, which offered less individual immediacy but faster transactional agents. Consequently, technical risks and the relationship between gender and knowledge should be considered in security procedures. If we do not, organizations risk becoming invisible and failing to protect academic systems for the protection of women.

Another notable finding was the regional specificity of verification strategies. In West Papua, information was coded and transmitted using symbology using the *Kai timer* (traditional weaving), a technique that is completely unprecedented in most areas of digital security. During the Mindanao blackout, religious organizations in the



Philippines, such as Catholic monasteries, incorporated notes in their church bulletin to reach an 81 percent safe transmission rate. These secure communication methods can be called 'vernacular encryption' because they are based on cultural knowledge, tradition and trust rather than on software design. The symbolic weaving codes, the gotong royong, and the muchadara and musyawarah (deliberate consensus) are examples of culturally embedded practices that are seen as epistemic systems influencing the way journalists create, validate, and maintain knowledge in their societies. Instead, we present them as fundamental frameworks of relational ethics and resilience that guide journalistic practice in a surveillance-prone environment, rather than as cultural idiosyncrasies. The research team also understands that they are just an outsider. By interviewing respondents, conducting a local peer review and holding a feedback session with the journalists involved, they addressed possible bias in the reporting in order to ensure ethical consideration and context accuracy. Regardless of the invention that they have discovered, their success is the narrative that is becoming the norm in digital journalism, which values Western tools. More importantly, these verse systems have shown that they can be scaled up in their communities, suggesting that innovation in journalistic security should be based on adaptation rather than replication.

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that disorders, hybrid systems, rather than clean digital or analogue systems, offer the most viable avenue for investigative journalism in high-risk settings. Empirical evidence confirms the theoretical model of the "ethical" study of community surveillance, in which the protection of the source is obtained not only through technological sophistication, but also through rooted and socially rooted strata. This model is strongly supported by triangulation of NLP results, dialogue narratives and rural dialogues. It is clear that journalists distinguish between ritualized verification, community trust, and creative care when using hybrid infrastructures. The complexity of operating under pressure in journalism is further emphasized by the incorporation of ethical nuances such as gender dynamics, community protection, and tactical deception. These findings address issues that are central to the global debate on journalism safety, provide practical insights across the world south and help shape policies in the institutions supporting them.

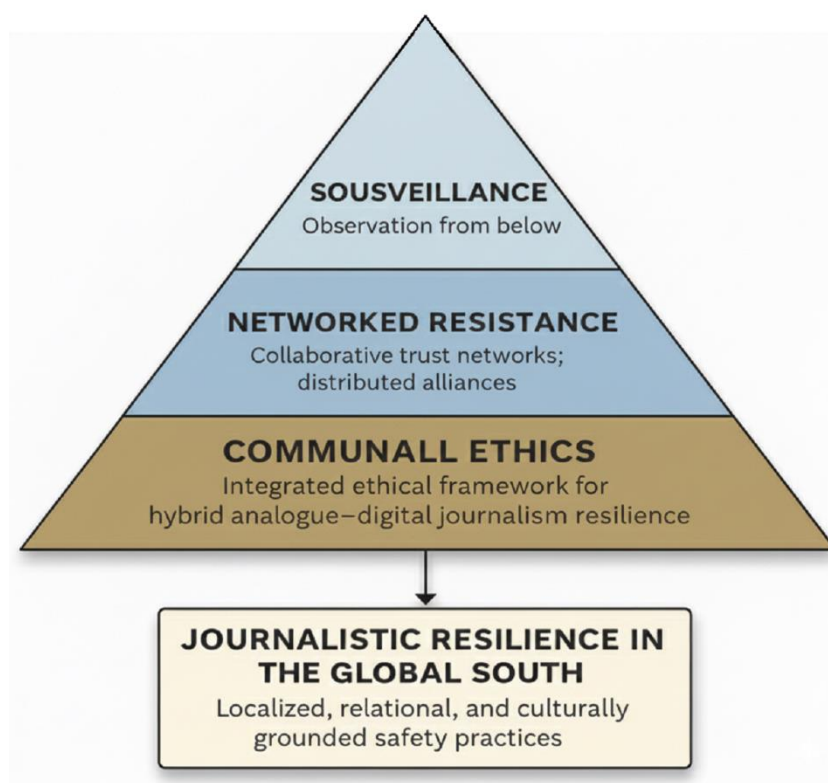


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Communal Sousveillance Ethics

If digital repression and the increasing preservation of global resource systems are to be addressed, the adaptation strategies described in this study provide a roadmap for future interventions. The resilience of

investigative journalism does not depend on universal toolsets, but on relational responsibility, cultural familiarity, and shared risk. Therefore, supporting these journalists requires more than grants for software or cybersecurity training; It requires an epistemological change in the way the profession conceptualizes security, resilience and confidence. This change must begin so that the most effective help does not come from the renewal of Silicon Valley, but from the fog, the lakes and Mindanao.

To illustrate the interrelation of these findings across regional contexts, Figure 1 depicts the conceptual workflow and regional comparison of hybrid verification practices. The diagram visualizes how analogue and digital processes intersect through relational, cultural, and ethical dimensions of journalistic safety in the Global South.

The model of communal sousveillance ethics is based on the relationship between sousveillance, networked resistance and decolonial ethics, as illustrated in Figure 1. To sustain the resilience of journalism in the global south, this framework shows how relational responsibility and cultural epistemology interact in digital and analogue infrastructures.

6. Discussion

The conclusions of the study require a careful re-examination of the prevailing cases in the debate on journalistic safety, especially those based on Western technology paradigms. The idea that digital innovation is the best defense against investigative journalism alone is addressed by the consistent effectiveness of hybrid analogue-digital systems in various contexts in the global South (Kgakatsi *et al.*, 2024). However, according to the data, relational infrastructures, cultural knowledge systems and analogical arrangements are indispensable to journalists to cope in difficult environments and are not complementary. This concept guarantees paradigm, local, community and purely technical change.

Hybrid verification techniques in this study show that safety and research rigour are not mutually exclusive and can be reinforced by tailoring to specific socio-cultural contexts (Clifton & Mann, 2010). Journalists are developing multilayer, context-based authentication protocols that resist digital disruption by combining direct meetings, block chain authentication, oral testimony, and physical document transmission. These analog-to-digital techniques are not obsolete; rather, they are adaptive innovations that address infrastructure pre-conditions by providing cultural specificity and unpredictability, which reduce the visibility of algorithms and increase trust in the community. The growth of these hybrid systems has transformed the nature of journalism, turning it from an individual pursuit to a collective activity embedded in social networks. Popular verification methods, such as rumor-sharing networks, cooperative rumor-sharing systems, and parish-based exchanges, decentralize investigative power and spread risk, as seen in Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines (Hossain *et al.*, 2025). This shift is the result of the emerging network ethic, where both formal and informal actors share protection and responsibility. Consequently, the journalistic security infrastructure must include relational, local and cultural verification systems in addition to institutional mechanisms.

This redefinition will have an impact on the defence of press freedom and journalistic training. Plans for journalistic analysis, especially in the world's North, continue to emphasise digital tools, investigative techniques influenced by European newsrooms, and heterogeneous transparency standards. However, these models will not be applied in high-risk contexts, in contexts where Internet access is limited, is of general surveillance, and work is underway to eliminate dissent from non-state and extracurricular actors (Díaz-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2023). The findings indicate the need for curricular reform that includes analog security practices, methods of oral verification, and ethical training rooted in local epistemologies. In addition, advocacy organizations should review toolkits for access to non-digital forms of verification and protection, as well as to assist informal actors essential to journalistic flows from the Global South.

In addition, the research data underline the gender dimensions of police and journalistic activity. Women journalists were disproportionately under oral verification networks and community support systems that served as a safe channel of information and buffer against gender-based harassment (Manning, 2021). These findings confirm feminist critiques of press freedom, often on the margins of the relationship between gender, technology and risk. These practices of gender-based validation can be understood as epistemological acts rather than behavioural responses, and are based on intersectional feminist perspectives, in particular the work of Chandra Mohanty and



Sara Ahmed on affective work. Women journalists create contextual knowledge through relational and caring verification, which prioritizes embodied ethics, reciprocity, and trust over instrumental notions of objectivity. Their methods of verification are framed as a form of resistance and epistemic activism within a patriarchal, surveillance-ridden media system. Using the deco-feminist perspective, these experiences are highlighted and highlight the value of a relationship ethic based on respect, care and social cohesion as a key element of research. The different experiences of journalists, in particular with acquiring tools, dealing with threats and emotional work, highlight the need for gender-sensitive training and targeted support beyond the classification of safe tools by biotechnology.

Tactical deception, which has become a necessary but ethically sensitive tactic, involves using false leaks to identify infiltrators. While effective in reducing wiretapping in newsrooms, these strategies pose moral conundrums in terms of accountability, transparency, and collateral damage ([AJE Ethics Report, 2023](#)). Examples of well-established frameworks addressing these ethical issues include the SPJ Code of Ethics (2014) and the UNESCO Model Journalism Courses (2023). Both emphasize honesty, transparency, and accountability as basic principles, but do not offer much guidance on how to deal with circumstances in which deliberate misinformation may be used as a survival tool. Rigid adherence to a universalist ethic may inadvertently expose journalists and their sources to risks in such high-risk situations. This is why the study advocates a contextual extension of the existing frameworks, a kind of situational or survival ethics that recognizes the conditional legitimacy of tactical deception when it is intended to protect society rather than to manipulate it. Considering that such subtlety can improve the normative consistency between global moral norms and the reality of digitally suppressed journalism. The study provides a framework of survival ethics, which is based on conditional use, proportionate response, and dissemination after publication, as an alternative based on a culture of universalist codes of ethics. ([Memarian & Doleck, 2023](#)). This framework recognizes the need for more flexibility where traditional rules are not sufficient to guarantee the safety of journalists and their sources. Instead of abstracting transparency and objectivity from the ideals of the cause, we need an ethic that reacts to the situation and takes responsibility for the most dangerous and culpable perpetrators.

In addition, the study refutes popular narratives surrounding online technologies, such as the idea that digital tools are a development for journalism. On the other hand, because adaptation and resilience are cynical and dependent on context, the revival of analogue methods in a digitally repressive environment suggests a non-linear path ([Syarah *et al.*, 2024](#)). This concept reinforced the need for a pluralistic approach to the adoption of instruments and was in line with the more general criticism of technological determinism. Journalists are active agents committed to innovation, re-use and, often, to adapting technology to reality. They are not just passive users. This survey helps the group to understand the term 'digital rejection' and its technological implications in the world south by recording these adaptations.

At the political level, the results require opening up international frameworks for journalistic security to recognize the legitimacy and effectiveness of similar innovations. UNESCO and the Committee to Protect Journalists should, among others, develop training materials and sources of funding specifically aimed at protecting hybrid and analogue systems. This includes investments in mobile verification centres, community radio and digital-to-analog transmission protocols to allow secure transfer of sensitive data across restricted areas ([Dalapati *et al.*, 2023](#)). One such initiative is the ASEAN Hybrid Security Fund, which builds on the Philippines and Indonesia's proven practice. To implement this programme, the ASEAN Committee on Information could oversee the ASEAN Hybrid Security Fund, in cooperation with independent press associations across Southeast Asia, national press councils and UNESCO Jakarta. Its main objectives would be to support community-based verification networks, facilitate regional training exchanges and finance analogue-to-digital security infrastructure. Evaluation metrics could include quantifiable improvements in physical and digital security capabilities of journalists, reduction of incidents of exposure of sources and increase of cross-border cooperation. Regional development funds, private philanthropic contributions and public sector grants can be combined in a stream of funding to ensure sustainability and autonomy of local economies. A further improvement of accountability and transparency would be to create an impartial supervisory board, representing media professionals, civil society organizations and journalists' associations. In addition to providing immediate protection for journalists, it would institutionalized best practices from regional conventions and networks of cooperation to ensure long-term safety.

The inclusion of informal actors in networks to protect journalists is another policy recommendation that emerges from the findings. Community members, such as market traders, teachers and religious leaders, often have



important roles in data protection, data retention and verification of leaks (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Recognizing these actors as ethical stakeholders and co-investigators, rather than just followers, would enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of journalistic safety protocols. The opportunities it would create for cross-sectoral cooperation, inclusive training initiatives and mutual assistance schemes would also lead to a more balanced distribution of risk across the media ecosystem.

The findings of the study also support a methodological study of how journalism research is conducted in repressive environments. The sequential mixed-method approach of this study, combining semi-structured interviews, computational analysis and participatory observation, was effective in capturing the living experience of both macro and micro levels. However, the study also encountered difficulties in gaining access to the field, in managing the researchers' positions and in preserving the anonymity of the source (Liao *et al.*, 2022). These challenges underline the need for a shift in research ethics towards a priority of safety, reciprocity and contextual thinking. It is recommended that future research protocols be developed in cooperation with local journalists, use encrypted ethnographic tools and seek longitudinal partnerships to allow adaptive risk management.

The interview ends with a reminder of the importance of decolonizing journalism's theories and practices. In addition to having a general and empirical basis, the ethical model of Community oversight used in this study may contribute to broader discussions on press freedom, security and epistemic justice (Mignolo, 2009). Center for Southern Epistemology argues that resilience is about relationships, rituals, and roots, not just about resistance. When dealing with vulnerable journalists and communities, he advocates an accompanying ethic of solidarity rather than pan-saviorism, and he opposes the extractive tendencies of global media development. People whose lives and careers depend on being able to challenge authority without fear of reprisal will find this an existential shift.

The interview ended with a confirmation that exporting tools or digital copycatting is not enough to protect investigative journalism in the world's South (Pokharel *et al.*, 2024). It requires a strong commitment to relational responsibility, a thorough understanding of local conditions, and the willingness to challenge basic assumptions about what it means to tell the truth, to defend the truth, and to confirm the truth when under surveillance. Only if we all respect and institutionalize existing systems of knowledge, morality, and survival methods while strengthening them, not destroying them will press freedom survive.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how investigative journalists in the Global South respond to intensifying digital surveillance by adopting hybrid analogue–digital authentication practices grounded in local culture and collective ethics. Using a mixed-methods design combining NLP-based content analysis of 150 investigative reports, 25 in-depth interviews, and newsroom ethnography in Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines, the findings demonstrate three central outcomes. First, hybrid verification systems that integrate digital tools with analogue and community-based practices significantly reduce source exposure while maintaining journalistic credibility. Second, cooperative trust networks rooted in shared ethics, ritualized verification, and relational accountability enhance resilience more effectively than individual or purely technological solutions. Third, journalists continuously navigate a moral tension between transparency and secrecy, requiring context-sensitive and decolonial ethical frameworks rather than universalized standards. These results challenge techno-solutionist assumptions that dominate press safety discourse and highlight the limits of Western-centric security models in high-risk, low-connectivity environments. Instead, the study proposes a community-based ethical framework of communal sousveillance, where protection, verification, and resistance are embedded in social relationships, cultural knowledge, and shared risk. By foregrounding lived journalistic practices in the Global South, this research contributes empirical evidence for rethinking investigative journalism security as a relational and culturally situated practice, with important implications for journalism training, press freedom advocacy, and policy development in surveillance-prone contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. Relevant affiliations were disclosed during the consent process and noted in the methodology.

Author's Contribution

Moehammad Iqbal Sultan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Project administration, Supervision, Writing—Original Draft, Writing—Review & Editing. Yuli Candrasari: Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review & Editing. Bono Setyo: Software, Formal analysis, Data Curation, Visualization, Writing – Review & Editing. Andi Subhan Amir: Investigation, Resources, Project administration, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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