



The Implementation of UKW-Certified Journalists' Competencies in Digital Journalism Practice: A Case Study of the East Halmahera Journalists' Community

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Abstract

The transformation of the digital media ecosystem has fundamentally reshaped journalistic practices, creating new competency demands for journalists worldwide. In Indonesia, the Uji Kompetensi Wartawan (UKW) serves as the primary instrument for ensuring journalistic professionalism; however, empirical studies examining the implementation of these competencies within digital journalism practice remain limited. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of post-UKW journalist competencies and evaluate the relevance of Standar Kompetensi Wartawan (SKW) to contemporary digital journalism needs. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research investigated the Komunitas Wartawan Halmahera Timur (KWHT). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Lembaga Penguji Kompetensi Wartawan (LPKW) LSPR examiners and journalists who participated in UKW, observations of UKW implementation, and document analysis. The findings revealed that foundational competencies—including information verification, news writing, and journalistic ethics—remained central to journalistic practice. However, the evolving digital media ecosystem necessitated additional competencies, such as data literacy, multiplatform distribution, digital verification, and artificial intelligence utilization, which were not yet fully accommodated within UKW competency standards. This study identified a significant gap between existing competency standards and the demands of digital journalism practice, offering implications for the development of more adaptive Standar Kompetensi Wartawan that are responsive to media industry transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the digital media ecosystem has significantly changed the way journalism operates, from information gathering and news production to content distribution to the public. The development of online media, social media, platform algorithms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technologies has encouraged newsrooms to adapt to increasingly rapid, complex, and data-driven work patterns. This condition has not only transformed the news production process but has also expanded the competencies that journalists must possess to verify information across platforms, utilize digital technologies responsibly, and maintain journalistic quality amid digital media transformation (Hermida, 2010; Pavlik, 2024; Singer, 2014).

In Indonesia, journalist professionalism is maintained through the Uji Kompetensi Wartawan (UKW), which is conducted based on the Press Council's Standar Kompetensi Wartawan. The standard regulates the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes that journalists must possess in conducting journalistic practices. The update of the Standar Kompetensi Wartawan through Press Council Regulation Number 03/Regulation-DP/XI/2023 demonstrates that the development of journalist competencies must follow the dynamics of the media industry, including changes influenced by digital technology transformation (Press Council, 2023).

The Uji Kompetensi Wartawan has become an important instrument for improving journalist professionalism by strengthening understanding of journalistic ethics, news writing standards, and professional responsibilities (Hidayat, 2020; Purwadi, 2018). However, the application of these competencies does not always occur ideally because journalistic practices are influenced by newsroom dynamics, news production targets, and the interests of media organizations (Nourkinan, 2016). This condition indicates that competency implementation is not solely determined by the standards assessed but is also shaped by the work context encountered by journalists.

The development of digital technology presents new challenges to journalist competencies. Journalists are no longer required only to master news reporting, interviewing, writing, and verification techniques but also need to understand multiplatform distribution, data literacy, and the use of AI-based technologies in journalistic processes. These changes demonstrate that journalist competencies are dynamic and continue to evolve alongside transformations in the digital media ecosystem (Beckett et al., 2023; Pavlik, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2025).

Although the Standar Kompetensi Wartawan has become a reference for UKW implementation, the application of these competencies does not occur within a static environment. Journalistic practices are influenced by newsroom dynamics, technological developments, characteristics of media organizations, and changes in public information needs. In this regard, certified journalists continue to encounter various situations that require adjustments to competency standards, thereby creating the possibility of a gap between normative competencies and journalistic practices in the field (Nourkinan, 2016).

The development of digital journalism is also closely related to the increasing complexity of press freedom. On the one hand, the digital space provides broader opportunities for media organizations to deliver information quickly and openly. However, this condition also requires journalists to maintain accuracy, credibility, and journalistic ethics within a rapidly changing information environment. (Purwoko & Mahmud, 2025) demonstrated that increased media freedom is not always accompanied by journalist competency readiness, particularly in addressing challenges related to information verification and pressure from rapid news production demands. These findings indicate that changes in the media ecosystem also influence journalist competency requirements in the digital era.

The development of digital journalism has also introduced increasingly complex challenges. Journalists are required to work within a system influenced by platform algorithms, multiplatform distribution, and real-time information flows (Hermida, 2010; Singer, 2014). Furthermore, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms has transformed processes such as information searching, initial manuscript preparation, and content verification.

According to Tomlison et al. (2023), as cited in (Johansah et al., 2024), the use of AI in scientific contexts is considered reasonable and does not violate copyright, considering that AI technologies will continue to develop in the future. This condition requires new competencies that are not only oriented toward conventional journalistic skills but also toward technological literacy, the ability to evaluate AI-generated outputs, and editorial decision-making grounded in journalistic ethical principles (Wahyuni et al., 2025; Jaakkola, 2023). UKW is also positioned as a professional defense mechanism in responding to the AI era, in which journalists are required to verify information amid rapid technological advancement (Suwandi, 2025).

Although research on UKW has developed, most studies still focus on journalist professionalism or evaluations of UKW implementation. Studies that examine the relationship between the implementation of journalist competencies and digital journalism practices, particularly from the perspectives of UKW participants and examiners, remain relatively limited. Furthermore, the development of digital technologies and the use of AI have not been widely incorporated as contexts for evaluating the relevance of Standar Kompetensi Wartawan to contemporary journalistic practices (Sahputra et al., 2025).

Based on this research gap, this study aimed to analyze the implementation of journalist competencies assessed through UKW in digital journalism practices within the Komunitas Wartawan Halmahera Timur (KWHT). This study also evaluated the relevance of Standar Kompetensi Wartawan to journalists' competency needs amid transformations in the digital media ecosystem, including emerging challenges associated with the use of AI-based technologies in journalistic practices.

Based on these objectives, this research was formulated into two research questions: (1) how were journalist competencies assessed through UKW implemented in digital journalism practices within the Komunitas Wartawan Halmahera Timur; and (2) to what extent were journalist competency standards relevant to the competency needs of digital journalism, including responses to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms. Academically, this research contributed to enriching studies on journalist competencies from the context of developing countries that remain underrepresented in global literature (Estella, 2021), while also presenting a dual perspective from examiners and UKW participants, which has rarely been applied in previous studies. Practically, the results of this research are expected to provide input for the Press Council and journalist competency testing institutions in developing competency assessment materials that are more responsive to transformations in digital journalism.

Journalist Competence

Journalist competence is one of the main elements that determines the quality of journalistic practices because it affects journalists' ability to produce accurate, independent, and responsible information to the public. These competencies are not only related to technical abilities in searching, processing, and presenting information, but also include knowledge, professional attitudes, and decision-making skills based on journalistic ethical principles. Thus, journalists' competence constitutes an important foundation in maintaining media credibility and press professionalism amidst changes in the communication ecosystem (Guo & Volz, 2021; Khubetsova et al., 2015).

In Indonesia, journalists' competencies are regulated through the Journalist Competency Standards based on Press Council Regulation Number 03/Regulation-DP/XI/2023 which covers the dimensions of knowledge, skills, and awareness. In terms of knowledge, journalists should have a journalistic theory and foundation and master general and special knowledge. The skill aspect refers to the ability to report from searching and obtaining data to conveying information accurately. The awareness aspect includes an in-depth understanding of journalistic codes of ethics and press regulations (Pramesti, 2014; Sulistyowati, 2013, as quoted in Suwandi, 2025).

These three dimensions are the basis for the implementation of the Journalist Competency Test (UKW) as a mechanism to ensure that journalists have professional capacity in accordance with the demands of their profession. Through these standards, journalists are expected to produce accurate, balanced journalistic works, uphold journalistic codes of ethics, and carry out press functions professionally in serving the public interest (Press Council, 2023; Putra, 2024).

The development of the digital media ecosystem shows that journalists' competencies are dynamic and continue to develop following changes in technology and journalistic practices. Estella (2021) explained that journalist competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences that continue to develop in accordance with the social context and changes in the media environment. In line with that, Guo and Volz (2021) emphasized that journalists' competence in the digital era is no longer only measured through journalistic technical skills, but also the ability to adapt to technological developments, digital literacy, cross-platform collaboration, and responsible editorial decision-making. Recent developments also demonstrate that the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms requires journalists to possess additional competencies, such as the ability to evaluate AI outputs, verify digital-based information, and ensure that the use of technology remains aligned with journalistic ethics and integrity principles (Wahyuni et al., 2025; Jaakkola, 2023).

Digital Journalism

Digital journalism is a form of transformation of journalistic practices that is developing along with the advancement of information technology, the internet, and digital platforms. This transformation not only changed the process of news production and distribution, but also changed the way journalists obtain, verify, process, and convey information to the public. This change encourages newsrooms to work in a faster, collaborative, and technology-based environment, making adaptability an important part of contemporary journalistic practice (Hermida, 2010; Singer, 2014).

Hermida (2010) explained that the digital environment allows information to be produced and distributed in real-time, so speed is one of the main characteristics of digital journalism. On the other hand, the acceleration of information flows also increases the risk of the dissemination of unverified information so that the verification process remains a fundamental principle in journalistic practice. Singer (2014) added that the development of digital media has changed the relationship between media, technology, and audiences, where journalists no longer play the role of the sole producer of information, but also as managers of various digital information sources in an increasingly interactive and multiplatform media ecosystem.

The rapid development of digital technology is also marked by the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the newsroom. The technology began to be used to support

various journalistic activities, such as information search, data analysis, interview transcription, initial manuscript preparation, and content distribution. Although it provides efficiency in the news production process, the use of AI still requires human supervision to ensure the accuracy of information, reduce potential bias, and maintain compliance with journalistic ethical principles (Jaakkola, 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2025).

This transformation demonstrates that digital journalism is not only understood as a change in the medium of delivering information, but also as a change in the journalistic work ecosystem that demands new competencies for journalists. The ability to conduct digital verification, understand the characteristics of multiplatform distribution, and use technology critically and responsibly are part of the competencies that are increasingly needed in contemporary journalistic practices (Lewis et al., 2022).

Journalist Competency Test and Journalist Competency Standards

The Journalist Competency Test (UKW) is a professional certification mechanism organized by an examining institution licensed by the Press Council to ensure that journalists meet the Journalist Competency standards. The certification is carried out in stages through the levels of young, intermediate, and major journalists, each of which has a different unit of competence and professional responsibility (Press Council, 2023). The presence of UKW cannot be separated from efforts to maintain the professionalism of journalists as a professional ideology that places public interest, independence, and ethics as the core values of journalism (Deuze, 2005). Previous research has shown that UKW contributes to strengthening the understanding of journalistic ethics and work standards, although journalists' interpretations of these certifications vary according to their respective work contexts (Purwadi, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2020).

Along with the development of cyber media, a number of studies encourage UKW materials to be strengthened with digital competencies, including understanding how platforms work, optimizing content distribution, and verifying digital information (Sahputra et al., 2025). The regulatory update also demonstrates the same direction, namely through Press Council Regulation Number 03/Regulation-DP/I/2025 concerning Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Journalistic Works, which emphasizes that the use of technology must remain under human control and guided by the Journalistic Code of Ethics (Press Council, 2023, 2025). This regulatory framework serves as a normative reference in assessing the relevance of the competencies tested in UKW to the needs of digital journalism practices.

Artificial Intelligence in Journalistic Practice

The use of artificial intelligence in journalism has evolved from simple automation to support almost the entire news production chain, from information search, data analysis, transcription, to draft manuscripts (Diakopoulos, 2019; Marconi, 2020). In the context of investigative journalism, this technology has even been used to help journalists discover the idea of public data-driven coverage (Broussard, 2015). Studies of media industry perceptions show that artificial intelligence is seen as an opportunity to improve the efficiency of editorial work, but at the same time raises concerns regarding accuracy, algorithmic bias, and the future of journalistic work (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022).

These developments confirm that the relationship between journalists and machines needs to be understood as a reconfiguration of roles, not a replacement of human roles (Lewis et al., 2019). Journalists remain in control of editorial decisions, verification, and ethical

responsibility, while artificial intelligence serves as a production aid. Therefore, the competencies needed by journalists in the era of artificial intelligence include the ability to critically evaluate technology outputs, understand the limitations of algorithmic systems, and apply the principles of transparency and accountability in their use (Jaakkola, 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2025). This conceptual framework is used to read the research findings regarding the readiness of UKW-certified journalists in responding to technological transformation.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach to examine the implementation of digital journalism competencies in journalistic work practices. This approach was selected because it enabled researchers to explore the experiences and perspectives of research participants within their actual professional context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2019). The research design was a case study focusing on the implementation of the Uji Kompetensi Wartawan (UKW) among digital media journalists. A case study design was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within a specific context (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted during the implementation of UKW organized by the Lembaga Penguji Kompetensi Wartawan (LPKW) LSPR, an institution licensed by the Press Council. The location was selected based on its relevance to the research objectives and accessibility to the UKW implementation process.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven informants, consisting of two LPKW LSPR examiners and five journalists participating in UKW at the young, intermediate, and main journalist levels. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in UKW implementation, experience as UKW participants or examiners, and active engagement in digital journalism practices. The study also involved observations of UKW implementation and document analysis of Materi Uji Kompetensi (MUK) and Standar Kompetensi Wartawan published by the Press Council. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of alignment and gaps between competency standards and journalistic practices. The analysis process involved data reduction, categorization, and conclusion development (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Data validity was maintained through triangulation by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2017).

The research was conducted from June to July 2026, coinciding with the implementation of UKW for journalists from the Komunitas Wartawan Halmahera Timur (KWHT) organized by LPKW LSPR. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, lasting approximately 30–50 minutes per informant. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis followed six stages of reflective thematic analysis: data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report development (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding was conducted on interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents related to Standar Kompetensi Wartawan and MUK to identify themes reflecting the relationship between normative competency standards and journalistic practices.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through four qualitative research criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility was established through source and technique triangulation, as well as member checking of interview summaries. Transferability was supported through contextual descriptions of the

research setting, while dependability and confirmability were maintained through documentation of the coding process and data interpretation. The study also adhered to research ethics principles. All informants participated voluntarily after providing informed consent and receiving explanations regarding the research objectives. Informants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Their identities were anonymized using the codes P1–P2 for examiners and W1–W5 for UKW-participating journalists to maintain confidentiality and protect professional privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research were obtained through in-depth interviews with seven informants consisting of two LPKW LSPR examiners and five participants of the Journalist Competency Test (UKW) from the young, intermediate, and main journalist levels. In addition to interviews, the data was also strengthened through observation during the implementation of UKW as well as the analysis of Journalist Competency Standards and Competency Test Materials (MUK) documents. Based on the analysis process, this study identifies four main themes that describe the implementation of journalist competencies in digital journalism practices and the relevance of UKW competency standards to the needs of current journalistic practices.

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

Code	Informant	Category	Description
P1	Examiner 1	UKW Examiner	LPKW LSPR Assessor
P2	Examiner 2	UKW Examiner	LPKW LSPR Assessor
W1	Participant 1	Young Journalist	UKW Participant
W2	Participant 2	Young Journalist	UKW Participant
W3	Participant 3	Intermediate Journalist	UKW Participant
W4	Participant 4	Intermediate Journalist	UKW Participant
W5	Participant 5	Senior Journalist	UKW Participant

Source: Primary research data, 2026.

Based on these characteristics, the research obtained perspectives from two groups of informants, namely examiners as parties who evaluate the competence of journalists and participants as parties who directly experienced the UKW process. The combination of these two perspectives allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of journalist competencies in digital journalism practices.

Table 2. Main Themes of Research Results

Theme	Examiner Perspective	Participant Perspective	Researcher Synthesis
Core Journalist Competence	Journalistic ethics and information verification remain the main challenges among UKW participants.	Journalistic ethics, accuracy, and verification are still considered the most important competencies in journalistic practice.	Basic journalistic competencies remain the foundation of digital journalism practice, although the media environment continues to experience digital transformation.
Adaptation to Digital Journalism	Some participants still experience difficulties in understanding the operation of digital platforms, as demonstrated in UKW Module 1.2.	Digital capabilities vary among participants; some have adapted to digital platforms, while others still face challenges.	Adaptation to the digital media ecosystem has not developed evenly, creating challenges in implementing journalists' competencies.
Relevance of Journalist Competency Standards	UKW competency standards remain relevant as a foundation for professional journalists but require continuous adjustment according to developments in journalistic practices.	UKW is considered appropriate to current needs; however, it requires accommodation for the development of digital media practices.	Journalist Competency Standards remain relevant but require continuous adjustment to respond to the dynamics of digital journalism.
Development of AI-Based Competencies	UKW materials need to be developed to become more responsive to AI advancements and aligned with Dewan Pers guidelines (Peraturan Dewan Pers Nomor 1/Peraturan-DP/I/2025 Tentang Pedoman Penggunaan Kecerdasan Buatan Dalam Karya Jurnalistik, 2025) .	AI has begun to be utilized as a supporting tool for research, brainstorming, and discussion but has not replaced the role of journalists in producing news.	The utilization of AI has become part of journalistic practices; therefore, competency development needs to be aligned with technological advancements and (Peraturan Dewan Pers Nomor 03/Peraturan-DP/XI/2023 Tentang Standar Kompetensi Wartawan, 2023).

Source: Primary research data, 2026.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study identifies four main themes that describe the implementation of journalist competencies in digital journalism practices and the relevance of Journalist Competency Standards to the development of digital technology. The four themes were then discussed based on the perspective of the examiners and UKW participants and interpreted with reference to the relevant literature review.

Basic Journalistic Competencies Remain the Foundation of Digital Journalism Practice

Based on the results of observations on the implementation of the Journalist Competency Test (UKW), the analysis of Competency Test Materials (MUK) documents, as well as interviews with examiners and UKW participants, it was found that basic journalistic competence is still the main foundation in digital journalism practice. These competencies include information verification, news writing, interviews, the application of journalistic codes of ethics, and the management of information sources. These findings show that digital

transformation does not shift the basic competencies of journalism, but rather strengthens the importance of implementing these competencies in an increasingly fast media environment.

The results of the interviews show that the implementation of the journalistic code of ethics is the most common challenge faced by UKW participants. One of the LPKW LSPR examiners said that these challenges mainly arise in the practice of digital news.

"The most common challenge for participants is the journalistic code of ethics, especially in digital news." (P1)

The findings were reinforced by one of the UKW participants who admitted that time pressure in the news production process often affects the implementation of journalistic codes of ethics.

"Yes, the challenge is still in the journalistic code of ethics. Sometimes in the field, in such a hurry to make news, we don't have time to reopen the journalistic code of ethics. Sometimes there are languages that are not actually allowed, but because of time constraints, they are still used." (W2)

Both statements show that the main challenge lies not in journalists' lack of understanding of the code of ethics, but in the consistency of its application in the midst of the demands of publication speed. However, the results of observations show that journalists continue to verify through confirmation to sources, checking supporting documents, and validating information before the news is published. This indicates that journalistic ethics and information verification remain the basis for maintaining the credibility of news in digital media.

These findings are in line with (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011) who place verification as a key element of professional journalism, as well as Khubetsova et al. (2015) who assert that journalists' competence is determined not only by technical ability, but also by the application of ethical principles in journalistic practice. Thus, digital transformation does not reduce the importance of basic journalistic competencies, but rather strengthens its relevance in current journalism practices.

Adaptation to Digital Journalism Has Not Developed Evenly

The results of the interviews show that the ability to adapt to digital journalism is still a challenge for some journalists, especially in understanding the characteristics of digital platforms that are part of UKW's competence. Although the material has been accommodated in Competency Unit 1.2, its implementation shows that the level of mastery of digital competence among journalists still varies. One of the examiners of LPKW LSPR (P2) revealed that understanding how digital platforms work is still an obstacle for some participants, especially journalists from regional media.

"Adaptive in the use of digital media in accordance with Test Material 1.2 Understanding How Digital Platforms Work is still a challenge. In my group there are six participants, four of whom still need to learn more to understand the material." (P2)

The findings show that digital competence is not only related to the ability to use technology, but also to understand the characteristics of digital platforms and changes in information distribution patterns. On the other hand, the results of interviews with participants showed that there was a variation in adaptability. Some participants have used digital platforms in the process of reporting and distributing news, while others still face obstacles in keeping up with technological developments in the newsroom.

This finding is in line with Hermida (2010) who stated that digital journalism is characterized by the acceleration of technology-based information distribution, and Singer (2014) who emphasized that journalists are required to be able to adapt to various digital platforms and audience interaction patterns. Thus, the implementation of digital competencies is not only influenced by UKW standards, but also by experience, work environment, and technology adoption level in each media.

The Relevance of Journalist Competency Standards to Digital Journalism Practices

The development of digital journalism practices not only changes the way journalists produce and distribute news, but also affects the need for competencies that must be possessed in carrying out their profession. Although digital technology continues to evolve, basic competencies such as information verification, interviews, news writing, and the application of journalistic codes of ethics remain the main foundations of journalistic practice. Therefore, the Journalist Competency Standards are required to be able to maintain a balance between maintaining basic competencies and adapting them to the dynamics of digital journalistic practices (Press Council, 2023; Pavlik, 2024).

Basically, journalist competency standards need to be developed adaptively to remain relevant to changes in the media ecosystem. Sahputra et al. (2025) explained that the development of cyber media encourages the need to strengthen digital competence in the Journalist Competency Test (UKW), while Wahyuni et al. (2025) emphasized that technological transformation, including the presence of AI, does not reduce the importance of basic journalistic competence, but expands the skills that journalists need to have.

The findings of the study show that participants and examiners view the Journalist Competency Standards used in UKW as still relevant to the needs of current journalistic practices. One of the UKW participants at the intermediate journalist level (W3) said that all the material tested was still in accordance with the needs of the journalist profession, although according to him the development of AI technology had not been specifically reflected in the UKW material.

"The material is all relevant. I tested from 1.1 to 1.10 and I think everything is still relevant to this day. It's just that digital has not yet reached AI." (W3)

This view was reinforced by one of the LPKW LSPR examiners (P2) who assessed that the Journalist Competency Standards are still suitable for use as a reference in UKW. However, according to him, competency materials need to continue to be developed following the development of digital journalism practices to remain in accordance with the needs of journalists in the field.

"The competency standards are still relevant, but some materials need to be developed to keep up with the development of digital media and the needs of journalists in the field." (P2)

The findings show that there is a common view between participants and examiners that the relevance of UKW is not the main issue in digital journalism practice. On the contrary, the challenge that arises is how the Journalist Competency Standards can continue to be updated to keep pace with technological developments without eliminating the basic competencies that are the foundation of the journalist profession. These findings reinforce the view of Pavlik (2024) that technological developments demand continuous updating of journalists' competencies, while supporting the findings of Sahputra et al. (2025) that the development of

competency standards needs to be carried out in order to remain responsive to the dynamics of digital media.

Developing Journalists' Competencies in Responding to Artificial Intelligence Developments

The development of digital technology continues to affect journalistic practices, including through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in various journalistic activities. Various studies show that AI has begun to be used as a tool in information search, data analysis, transcript preparation, and the preparation of an initial draft of news. However, the use of AI still requires journalistic supervision to maintain the principles of verification, accuracy, and editorial responsibility (Lewis et al., 2019; Jaakkola, 2023).

These developments demonstrate that journalists' competencies no longer include only conventional journalistic skills, but also the ability to understand the responsible use of AI. Pavlik (2024) explained that changes in the media ecosystem require the development of journalists' competencies to be able to adapt to new technologies without ignoring basic journalistic values. In line with that, Wahyuni et al. (2025) emphasized that AI disruption expands the competencies that journalists need to possess, especially in aspects of digital literacy, ethics, and editorial decision-making.

The research findings show that journalists are starting to utilize AI as an aid in their daily work, especially to find information and support the research process. However, AI has not been used as a substitute for the news writing process because the quality of the language, the point of view of the news, and editorial decisions still require the role of journalists.

"Even though AI is now commonplace, we still use it because it really needs to be adaptive. It's just to find data. Because I also work as an editor, sometimes when I find a news script written by AI, the sentences and language immediately look different, so I ask for revisions. It's just that I don't know, in UKW there is no one leading there." (W5)

This view was reinforced by one of the LPKW LSPR examiners (P1) who revealed that the use of AI began to appear in the UKW implementation process. According to him, there are participants who are suspected of using AI when working on news writing materials so that participants are asked to repeat tasks using their own writings.

"There were very good participants when I tested the news writing material. I suspected it was the result of AI, so I finally told him to rework it based on his own writing." (P1)

The findings demonstrate that AI does not reduce the relevance of the basic journalistic competencies tested in the UKW, but presents new competency needs that need to be considered in the development of journalist competency standards. Based on the perspective of participants and testers, the use of AI is seen as a tool that can improve work efficiency, but still requires the ability to verify, ethical considerations, and editorial decisions that lie with journalists. Therefore, the development of UKW materials can consider competencies related to the responsible use of AI to stay in line with the development of journalistic practices and the Guidelines for the Use of AI in Journalistic Works that have been published by the Press Council. These findings are in line with (Carlson, 2018) who asserts that journalists' professionalism remains determined by their editorial decision-making ability, and Diakopoulos (2019) who explains that the development of AI demands competency adjustments in modern journalistic practices.

Overall, the four themes demonstrate that the implementation of the competencies of UKW-certified journalists in digital journalism practices takes place in four interrelated competency dimensions, namely cognitive competence or knowledge, functional or skill, personal, and ethical (Guo & Volz, 2021). Cognitive and ethical competencies are relatively strong because they are the core of UKW material, while functional competencies in the digital realm are still developing unevenly among journalists. Meanwhile, the need for competencies related to artificial intelligence is in the third slice, namely knowledge of how technology works, skills to use it, and ethical assessment of its use as mandated in the Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Journalistic Work (Press Council, 2025). These findings confirm that the gap identified does not lie in the relevance of basic competencies, but in the speed of updating competency standards in following technological transformation.

is in the third slice, namely knowledge of how technology works, skills to use it, and ethical assessment of its use as mandated in the Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Journalistic Work (Press Council, 2025). These findings confirm that the gap identified does not lie in the relevance of basic competencies, but in the speed of updating competency standards in following technological transformation.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrated that the competencies assessed through the Uji Kompetensi Wartawan (UKW) remained relevant as the foundation of journalist professionalism in the digital journalism era, particularly fundamental competencies such as information verification, news writing, interviewing, and journalistic ethics. However, the implementation of digital competencies had not developed evenly among journalists. Both UKW participants and examiners considered the Standar Kompetensi Wartawan to remain relevant to current professional needs; nevertheless, technological developments, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), introduced new competency demands that had not yet been fully addressed in UKW materials. AI was utilized as a supporting tool but had not replaced journalistic skills, critical judgment, or editorial decision-making processes.

Practically, this study recommended strengthening UKW competency materials related to digital literacy and ethical AI utilization for the Press Council and journalist competency testing institutions. Theoretically, this study reinforced the understanding of journalist competence as a dynamic and multidimensional construct. The limitations of this research included its focus on a single journalist community and testing institution, a limited number of informants, and the absence of quantitative measurement. Future research is therefore recommended to involve broader participant groups and employ mixed-methods approaches to obtain more comprehensive findings.

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