

Journalist association perspective regarding of intervention and intimidation against student press

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Abstract

Student press as an alternative media often faces intervention and intimidation, both from within and outside the university environment. The absence of legal protection, due to their exclusion from Law No. 40 of 1999 of the Press, makes student journalists vulnerable to repression. This study is important to explore how journalist associations, namely the Press Council (Dewan Pers), the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), and the Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI) perceive and respond to this issue. Using a qualitative approach, this research employs in-depth interviews with key informants and document analysis of reported cases. The findings reveal that regulatory gaps, a campus culture resistant to criticism, and asymmetrical power relations contribute to the persistence of intimidation. Moreover, existing mechanisms such as the Cooperation Agreement (PKS) are seen as legally weak and ineffective in protecting student press activities. This study recommends the establishment of higher-level regulations, such as a ministerial decree, to provide legal standing for student press within the national media ecosystem.

Introduction

Student press is a represent of student activism that plays a vital role to fulfilling the functions of press and promoting nationalism ideals. This is happened due to the fact if students press organizations are managed by students themselves, so it reflects critical reasoning distinctive to student college perspectives and it doesn't used as a political tools agitations (Irfan, 2022). Unfortunately, in practice, student press in Indonesia frequently encounters various form of interventions and intimidations orginating from both internal and external actors within the university enviroment (Shodikin, 2023).

This condition is driven by several factors. First, student press lacks of legal standing, as it is classified merely as a Student Activity Unit (UKM), and thus is not protected under Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press (Prawira, 2023). Second, from a historical perspective, student press has been systematically marginalized, notably since the issuance

of Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus (NKK)/ Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan (BKK) following the January 15 Tragedy (MALARI) in 1974 during the New Order era (Achmad, 2014). The establishment of NKK/BKK introduced the 'back to campus' policy, which was deliberately designed to direct students and student activists to focus only on academic activities and disengage from political criticism (VOI.id, 2022). As a result, the critical stance and courage of student press were perceived as threats to the government. Consequently, during that period of time, student press was facing various forms of pressure, including intervention and intimidation (Utomo, 2014).

Even with Law No. 40 of 1999 of the Press, which regulates the protection of press freedom, the definition of what constitutes the national press is restricted. This limitation arises from Article 1, Paragraphs (2) and (6), which define the national press as press companies that are legally incorporated under Indonesian law (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 40 Tahun 1999, 1999). As such, student press, which operates as a Student Activity Unit (UKM), does not possess legal standing as part of the recognized national press in Indonesia. Consequently, student press organizations are not protected under the Press Law when they face intervention or intimidation (Shodikin, 2023). This legal loophole regarding the lack of legal status renders student press highly vulnerable to interference and intimidation while carrying out journalistic duties. According to data from the Indonesian Student Press Association (Perhimpunan Pers Mahasiswa Indonesia/PPMI), a total of 185 cases of repression, originating from both internal and external university environments were recorded during the period of 2020–2021 (PPMI, 2022).

Therefore, it is essential to strengthen advocacy networks as a platform to address the structural limitations faced by student press organizations. Support from journalist associations such as the Press Council and the Alliance of Independent Journalists is crucial, not only in terms of capacity building (Masduki, 2017), but also because these associations have their strategic role in monitoring and addressing issues of intervention and intimidation against student press (Haghia *et al*, 2025). In this regard, journalist associations hold a significant position in empowering media diversity, including alternative media such as student press, which deserve legal protection and advocacy, particularly in terms of securing legal certainty (Dorida & Dharmawan, 2018).

When the legal standing of alternative media, including student press, is strengthened, journalist associations not only reinforce advocacy networks but also gain formal recognition in terms of legal status and position (Fazri *et al*, 2022). However, this remains a significant challenge, as the effort to build advocacy networks by journalist associations concerning the status of student press as alternative media continues to be a global issue. A study in the United States by Brown (2015) revealed that the legal standing of student press is still a point of contention among various stakeholders. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes that journalist associations bear a responsibility to advocate for the legal rights of alternative media, as such media have considerable potential to remain critical, independent, and free from conglomerations.

Therefore, this study is crucial to conduct, as it broadly offers a new perspective for journalist associations regarding cases of intervention and intimidation faced by student press, as well as issues related to their legal standing. The challenges surrounding alternative media, such as student press, thus become a critical area of inquiry. This is particularly important because alternative media are often marginalized in various aspects, despite their significant role in balancing information and fulfilling a watchdog function amidst the dominance of mainstream media, which is increasingly influenced by media conglomerates (Azeb, 2018).

According to Subarkah (2021), if journalist associations are able to effectively leverage their strategic role in addressing the legal standing issues of alternative media particularly student press then these associations, such as the Press Council or the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), will have succeeded not only in facilitating conflict resolution through mediation, but also in revitalizing the diversity of press media and promoting the democratization of information. However, the main issue is that press freedom in Indonesia is not fully realized. Even journalist associations do not possess complete autonomy to pressure policymakers, as constitutionally, the Press Council, despite being an independent institution does not hold judicial or sanctioning authority. As a result, their actions are limited to moral force strategies, such as mediation, legal assistance, and advocacy.

If the main journalist associations like the Press Council, which enjoys constitutional recognition continue to face limitations in advocating for journalism-related issues, then this presents an even greater challenge for student press organizations like the Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI), which has limited access to legal protection and remains vulnerable in practice (Bevani *et al*, 2024). Despite the vulnerable position of student press, and the fact that associations like PPMI lack formal authority in shaping policy regarding the protection and legal standing of student press, research by Prasetya & Yuliati (2020) emphasizes that the presence of alternative media should be acknowledged and protected. Historically, from the colonial period to the peak of state repression during the New Order, student press remained active under pressure, offering critical alternative ideas, promoting intellectual freedom, and serving as a catalyst for student-led social movements.

Several studies indicate that the absence of legal standing one not yet fully supported or advocated for by journalist associations exposes journalists from both mainstream and alternative media, including student press, to various forms of conflict and pressure (Frost, 2021). Furthermore, regulatory gaps are often exploited as tools for intervention and intimidation (Hiltunen, 2017). Therefore, the absence of a legal framework governing student press makes their journalistic activities inherently risky (Hardiyanti, 2021), particularly when reporting on sensitive issues such as sexual violence, which significantly increases their vulnerability. In light of this, it is imperative for stakeholders to advocate for the establishment of a legal framework to protect student press. Student press freedom is not merely about carrying out journalistic functions; it also symbolizes democratic principles within higher education institutions, as well as the rights to freedom of association and expression. According to Wahyudi (2023), his study employs a normative juridical method to examine the constraints faced by student press from various perspectives. As a result, the position of student press becomes highly vulnerable to repressive actions, intimidation, intervention, and even censorship.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the perspectives of journalist associations regarding cases of intervention and intimidation experienced by student press organizations. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate for exploring and interpreting complex social phenomena by focusing on the meaning and interpretation constructed by the participants (Neuman, 2014). A descriptive research design was chosen to explore the research problem in depth and to provide a detailed account of the experiences and perspectives of the selected informants. Descriptive research allows the researcher to present a comprehensive picture of real-life events and social situations (Lune & Berg, 2017). This design supports the aim of this study to systematically

assess how journalist associations perceive and respond to incidents of intervention and intimidation faced by student press organizations.

To ensure the collection of relevant and in-depth data, this study utilizes purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who possess specific knowledge or experience related to the research problem (Neuman, 2014). The key informants in this study include representatives from three journalist associations, such as Expert Staff for Legal and Legislative Affairs of The Press Council (Dewan Pers), Secretary General of The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), and Secretary General of The Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI). These informants were selected based on their institutional roles and involvement with press freedom advocacy and alternative media, particularly student press.

The primary data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with journalist associations such as The Press Council (Dewan Pers), The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), The Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI). That focused on the roles of journalist associations in addressing the challenges faced by student press organizations, including legal standing, repression, and institutional support.

In addition, secondary data were gathered from document analysis, particularly case documentation of intervention and intimidation against student press, which served to contextualize and triangulate the interview findings. The data analysis process followed a coding-based analytical strategy. Interview transcripts were coded to identify key themes, categories, and patterns that aligned with the research objectives (Neuman, 2014). The analysis was centered on the perspectives of journalist associations, especially in relation to their responses to student press repression and their broader role in supporting alternative media in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

Based on the collected interview data from three journalist associations, the Press Council, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), and the Indonesian Student Press Association (PPMI), each institution have diverse perspectives on cases of intervention and intimidation against student press, particularly concerning the absence of a legal protection framework. To explore these findings in greater depth, the researcher organizes the field data into four analytical categories: (1) the legal protection gap, (2) Student Press Seen as a Threat, (3) vulnerability of student press during Journalistics Duties, (4) power relations in cases of intervention and intimidation. These categories serve to systematically elaborate the associations perspectives on the challenges faced by student press in Indonesia.

Legal Protections Gap

In relation to the legal protection gap, both PPMI and AJI highlighted the weaknesses of the Cooperation Agreement (PKS) between the Press Council (Dewan Pers) and the Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen Dikti), particularly in terms of administrative aspects, protection mechanisms, and legal recognition of student press. These shortcomings reflect the structural inequality in legal protection, as student press has never been accommodated under Law No. 40 of 1999 on the Press. As a result, student press organizations are not entitled to the same protections afforded to mainstream press (Prawira, 2023). The absence of a legal framework exposes student press to legal vulnerabilities not only while conducting journalistic activities in the field, but also in terms of legal recognition. Student journalists are more susceptible to criminal charges such as defamation, a deeply rooted issue in the student press landscape.

Although a *Perjanjian Kerjasama* (PKS) currently exists between the Press Council and Ditjen Dikti, it is widely perceived as insufficient in providing the level of protection expected for press institutions. This includes shortcomings in ensuring legal standing, capacity building, and clear mechanisms for conflict resolution. The protection of student journalistic activities as promised in the PKS remains conceptual and abstract, failing to establish tangible guarantees for recognition and protection of student press within the media ecosystem and legal framework.

The Press Council acknowledges this issue, noting that the exclusion of student press from the national press law stems from Article 6, Paragraph 1 of Law No. 40 of 1999, which states that press entities must be legally incorporated companies to be recognized as part of the national press (*Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 40 Tahun 1999*, 1999). This legal requirement marginalizes student press, which typically does not possess legal corporate status, and therefore cannot be protected under existing press regulations. As a result, journalist associations are expected to play a greater role in advocating for legal protection, ensuring that student press organizations are safeguarded when performing journalistic duties in the field (Singh & Drugunalevu, 2016).

The regulatory gap surrounding student press has also resulted in an ineffective problem-resolution mechanism. According to PPMI, which focuses specifically on student press advocacy, existing processes have not been maximized due to ambiguities in legal protection (Interview with PPMI, 13 December 2024). AJI further observed that most student press organizations in Indonesia resolve legal conflicts not through the official mechanisms outlined in the PKS, but rather by seeking support from external actors such as AJI, the Legal Aid Institute for the Press (LBH Pers), or through solidarity networks among fellow student press members (Interview with AJI, 15 January 2024). This tendency indicates a lack of trust in the effectiveness of the PKS, which is seen as failing to address the real protection needs of student journalists.

This issue poses an ongoing challenge for preserving alternative media such as student press. On the one hand, there is a clear need for support from journalist associations to adopt a transformative role in voicing the demands of student press. On the other hand, associations such as the Press Council, while institutionally committed to safeguarding press independence in Indonesia, are constrained by their lack of judicial or sanctioning authority. Consequently, their efforts are limited to moral-based interventions such as mediation, accompaniment, and advocacy, while final decision-making power remains in the hands of the ruling government (Subarkah, 2021). This dynamic underscores the power relations embedded in cases of intervention and intimidation against student press (Hiltunen, 2017).

Then how to resolve the complexity problems faced by student press? The Press Council argues that resolving the inequality affecting student press requires the establishment of regulations with a higher legal standing than the existing Cooperation Agreement. As the institution that formalized the agreement with the Directorate General of Higher Education (Ditjen Dikti), the Press Council acknowledges that the agreement lacks legal strength and is not binding. Therefore, a new regulation at the level of a Ministerial Regulation is deemed necessary. Such a regulation should not only establish the position of student press within the media ecosystem but also provide clear mechanisms for protection and clarify the role of the academic community in addressing issues related to student journalism. This step is essential to avoid regulatory overlaps concerning the legal status of student press under national law and to ensure clear protection and formal recognition (Mahliati *et al*, 2025). The regulatory ambiguity surrounding student press has created legal uncertainty, which also affects other forms of alternative media. As a result, the formulation of such regulations

should not be limited to the legislative and executive branches (DPR and government), but must actively involve journalist associations. These associations play a crucial role in monitoring and ensuring that any regulation developed is not merely a formality, nor overlapping in its application (Silalahi, 2020).

Student Press Seen as a Threat

In addition to the absence of a clear legal framework, student press is still often perceived as a threat that may tarnish the reputation of institutions, particularly that of universities. As a journalist association that focuses specifically on student press, PPMI notes that journalistic works produced by student journalists, especially those critical of university authorities are more frequently met with intervention and intimidation (Interview with PPMI, 13th December 2024). This occurs largely due to a lack of understanding on the part of universities regarding the role and function of student journalism. Universities commonly perceive student press as merely a student organization (UKM) operating under their jurisdiction. As a result, university administrators often feel entitled to exert control and supervision over student media activities, extending even into editorial processes (Wahyudi, 2023). Such practices give rise to further concerns, as university authorities tend to abuse their institutional power to suppress student journalism through various loopholes ranging from inadequate protections to the ambiguous legal standing of student press (Matlock, 2021).

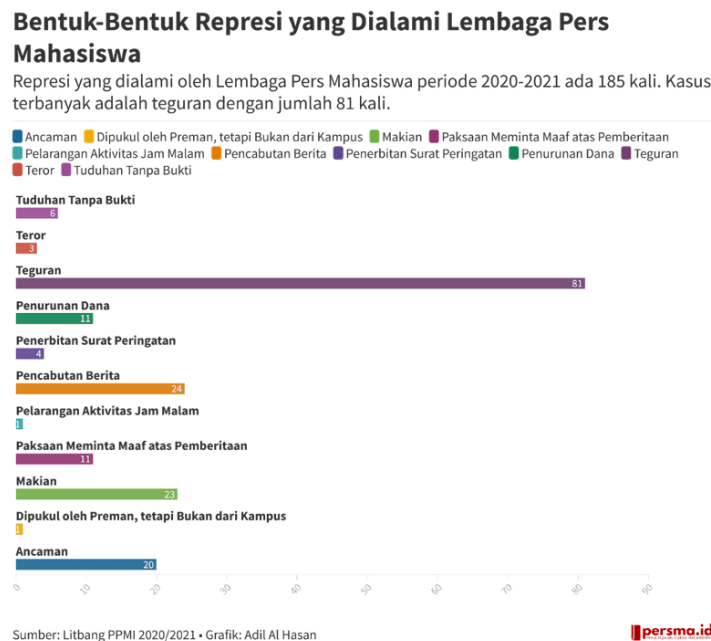
From the perspectives of AJI and the Press Council, threats against student press primarily stem from the courage and critical stance demonstrated by student journalists. Both institutions contend that university authorities often view such critical journalism negatively, interpreting it as an act of defamation against the institution (Interview with Informants, 15th January 2024). As a result, student press becomes pressured from within the academic environment itself, leading to interventions and intimidation as a common response to critical reporting (Ash Shiddiq, 2015). In reality, the activities of student journalists are merely an expression of their role as agents of social control and catalysts for change, essential in upholding democratic values in society (Hafizd, 2022). According to PPMI, the perception of student press as a threat is rooted in the deeply embedded anti-criticism culture within university environments (Interview with PPMI, 13th December 2024). Universities often create internal regulations intentionally designed to suppress the freedom of the student press, thereby hindering their role as watchdogs (Lövheim, 2024).

This suppression dates back to the New Order regime, particularly after the MALARI incident in 1974, when the government implemented the NKK/BKK policy under the “back to campus” agenda, aiming to redirect students and activists toward purely academic pursuits (VOI.Id, 2022). This reveals a systemic effort by the state to position student press and other alternative media as inferior in the media ecosystem (Ash Shiddiq, 2015). Consequently, responses to critical reports or sensitive news coverage produced by student journalists often involve intervention and intimidation to discourage further similar actions (Wahyudin, *et al.*, 2024). Over time, such responses have evolved into an embedded institutional culture, as the student press is frequently entangled in power relations with stakeholders who occupy more authoritative positions (Dayton & Tarhan, 2021).

Vulnerability Of Student Press During Journalistics Duties

According to data compiled by PPMI, there were 185 recorded cases of intervention and intimidation against student press between 2020 and 2021. These incidents included: 81 cases of verbal warnings, 24 cases of forced content retraction, 23 cases of verbal abuse, 20 cases of threats, 11 cases of coerced apologies, 11 cases of budget cuts, 6 cases of baseless

accusations, 4 cases of official warning letters, 3 cases of terror acts, 6 cases of night-time activity bans, and 1 case involving physical assault by hired thugs (PPMI, 2022).



Picture 1 Case Records of Intervention and Intimidation Against Student Press

Source: (PPMI, 2022)

In alignment with the data presented, both AJI and the Press Council express similar concerns regarding the vulnerability of student press organizations. A key factor underlying this vulnerability is the absence of a definitive legal framework that safeguards student journalists in the same manner as professional journalists working in mainstream media (Interview with Informants, 15th January 2025). Since student press institutions operate under the administrative authority of universities, the protections afforded by the national Press Law do not extend to them (Masduki et al, 2024). This legal gap poses serious risks, not only to press freedom but also to the academic futures of student journalists. According to AJI's data, there have been cases in which university administrations have threatened student journalists with academic sanctions, including expulsion. Under such pressure, student journalists may resort to self-censorship to avoid conflict, or in extreme cases, may choose to leave their journalistic roles entirely posing a significant threat to the sustainability and regeneration of student press organizations (Barrios & Miller, 2021).

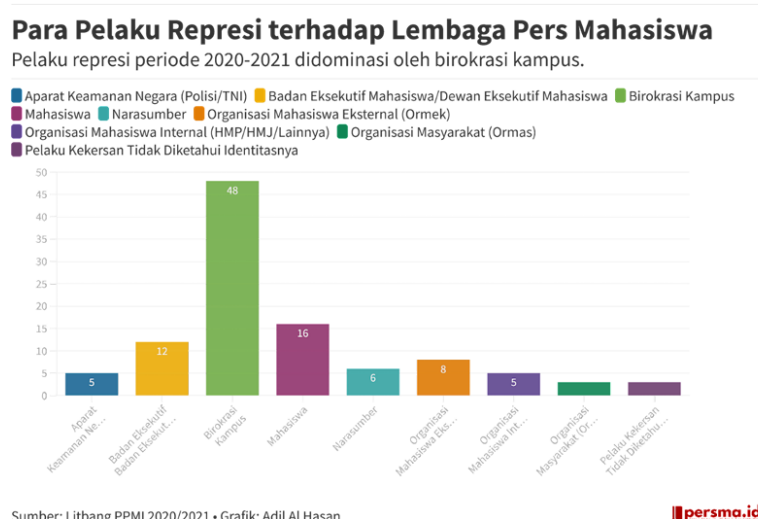
The question then arises: how can the vulnerability of student journalists be addressed in the field? On a deeper level, acts of intervention and intimidation should be understood as mechanisms through which dominant groups attempt to maintain the status quo by discrediting dissent and criticism. Thus, addressing this vulnerability requires institutional and structural support, particularly through associations and bodies committed to defending alternative media, including student press. This issue is further complicated by bureaucratic obstacles and power dynamics embedded in case management. As noted by Widyaningtyas et al., (2023), cases of intimidation against student journalists are often entangled with asymmetrical power relations, which hinder fair resolution processes. In such cases, the Press Council has played a limited yet notable role by assessing the ethical validity of journalistic content, issuing official letters to universities, and conducting awareness campaigns. However, these efforts are insufficient to neutralize power asymmetries, which continue to undermine the autonomy of student journalists. Additionally, the Press Council

acknowledges that student journalists remain legally vulnerable to defamation lawsuits, precisely because they are not formally recognized under the existing Press Law. In legal disputes, student journalists may face criminal charges instead of being protected through press-specific legal channels (Shodikin, 2023).

In light of these findings and corroborating academic research, a crucial first step in mitigating the vulnerabilities of student journalists both on and off campus is the strengthening of their legal standing. This entails not only providing protective mechanisms but also ensuring formal recognition of student press institutions as legitimate journalistic entities. By doing so, relevant stakeholders such as journalism associations and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology can collaboratively formulate appropriate protections and clarify the institutional status of student press.

Power Relations In Cases of Intervention and Intimidation

According to PPMI report for the period of 2020–2021, the perpetrators of intervention and intimidation against student press organizations consisted of university bureaucrats (48 cases), students (16 cases), Student Executive Bodies/Student Representative Councils (12 cases), state security officers (police/military) (five cases), community organizations (three cases), and unidentified individuals (three cases) (PPMI, 2022).



Picture 2 Perpetrators of Intervention and Intimidation Against the Student Press in Indonesia

Source: (Hasan, 2022)

The report data reflects PPMI's view that cases of intervention and intimidation against student press are predominantly perpetrated by individuals in positions of authority. Beyond the statistical findings, PPMI also revealed that most perpetrators originate from within the university environment, intervening and intimidating when student journalists publish sensitive reports that are perceived as potentially damaging to the institution's reputation (Interview with Informants, 13 December 2024). What about perpetrators from outside the university? According to Salsabila (2025), whose research explores the perspectives of student journalists regarding intervention and intimidation, actors from outside the academic environment tend to respond defensively, particularly during the coverage of demonstrations or in conflict-prone areas.

In contrast, AJI and the Press Council primarily focus on perpetrators within the university structure. According to both associations, internal actors particularly those from the rectorate often perceive student press organizations as student activity units that should operate under administrative directives. In this context, student press is frequently equated with public relations units expected to uphold and enhance the university's image (Interview with Informants, 15 January 2025). Such practices are recurrent in intervention and intimidation cases involving the student press, as university authorities often feel entitled to control the editorial direction of student media (Dayton & Tarhan, 2021). Interventions are carried out either directly, such as summoning student journalists or symbolically, through the presence of advisors who impose excessive oversight (Shine, 2021).

These actions subject student journalists to a dual pressure, both from within and outside the academic institution. This duality exacerbates the complexity of the issues facing student press, which is further compounded by the absence of legal standing. Consequently, the problem extends beyond legal frameworks into broader institutional and structural concerns. Although the Press Council acknowledges student press as part of the "second quadrant" media, their position remains legally ambiguous due to the constraints imposed by the current Press Law (Dewan Pers, 2024).

Conclusion

This study reveals that intervention and intimidation against student press represent a serious issue that not only concerns freedom of expression, but also relates closely to the absence of clear regulation and power relations between student journalists and the perpetrators. The lack of legal standing for student press remains the root cause of weak legal protection, a condition further exacerbated by the prevailing anti-critical culture within university environments.

Journalist associations such as the Press Council, AJI, and PPMI acknowledge this gap. However, their limited authority, particularly the Press Council's lack of judicial power means that protective efforts often take the form of moral force, such as advocacy and mediation. Moreover, internal campus power dynamics render student journalists increasingly vulnerable to symbolic and structural forms of repression. Therefore, strengthening the role of journalist associations in advocacy, along with the active involvement of policymakers in drafting regulations for student press protection, is crucial.

For future research, it is recommended to examine the issue of student press through a multidimensional lens, including the analysis of regulatory frameworks concerning recognition and protection, and an in-depth exploration of power relations and symbolic violence, which often manifest in cases of intervention and intimidation. Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize the role of journalist associations in pushing more assertively for regulatory strengthening and recognition of student press. The vulnerability of student journalists is intrinsically tied to the ambiguity surrounding their status as members of the media. Thus, journalist associations should collaborate with relevant stakeholders—such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to formulate a shared solution that acknowledges student press as an alternative media operating within higher education institutions.

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