

CITIZEN JOURNALISM: A STUDY OF NEW FORM OF NEWS MEDIA REPORTING

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Abstract

This paper explores the rise of participatory journalism as a new phase of media-based technology and its position in the journalism field. As a new media form, citizen journalism appeared with a lot of attraction supported by high technology that enables audiences to get fast information as well as flexibility in accessing it. It is examined by comparing citizen journalists with professional journalists in their way of gathering and reporting news. Apart from the benefits, the citizen journalists particularly those who are considered as bloggers are sometimes challenged in providing accurate and objective information without being fully influenced by their thought. It is important to note that the collaboration between the citizen and the professional journalists is very essential to maintain the news quality they produce. Bloggers who work alone and provide information just based on what they are thinking, without having any research, should be considered as a separate term from other online reporters who work based on journalism principles.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism; Traditional media; News value; Internet; Technology.

Introduction

In the past few decades, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) has connected people and places. Its potential has played a vital role in global development such that the rapid growth of new technologies and the internet has made it much easier and quicker to find information and to communicate with others. Thus, they have led to an explosion in online participants. John Mc Manus (cited in Cohen, 2002) in his book, *Market-Driven Journalism*, predicted that technology would significantly alter the news environment and the news values journalists bring to new media, in which the technological change has been realized in the convergence of print and broadcasting technology and advances in digital and interactive media. This view

is also in favor by Kovach & Rosenstiel (2001, p.18) who stated that “Technology is shaping a new economic organization of information companies, which is subsuming journalism inside it.” This change appears to be truly opening new democratic spaces in the journalism system. Bowman and Willis (cited in Good 2006) define the act of participatory journalism in the process of gathering, analyzing, reporting and propagating news as citizen journalism. Due to the expansion of technologies, citizen journalism’s tool kit is multiform, free and accessible such as blog services, photo-sharing services, digital instrument, and mobile devices. Therefore, the number of citizen journalists is increasing faster than expected. However, the long-term impact of citizen journalism is unknown. Some media experts are questioning the quality of information produced by the new media due to the subjectivity and objectivity of such news reporting. On the other hand, some others believe it is an improvement to the traditional media that create positive values in the field of journalism. This paper will examine whether citizen journalism is able to maintain the quality of reporting information and how its position in the journalism field with its strong technological base.

Literature Review

Before deeply discussing citizen journalism, it is important to understand the concept of journalism. Stovall (2005) indicates that journalism basically comes from the idea to share information both verbal and oral communication. This idea brought about the term printing and broadcasting journalism that are recognized as printed and electronic media. Journalism appeared with some basic principles which reflect its idealist, such as news values, code of ethics, and journalists’ criteria.

News values

A good creation of news reporting should be based on news values that have been commonly admitted as basic requirements in the journalism field. Schaudt & Carpenter (2009, p.18) state that historically, mainstream journalists relied on news values whether a story was worthy of publication. They expose that the emergence of the concept of “news values” come from two researchers –Johan

Galtung and Mari Ruge- who argued that journalists relied on twelve values to determine the worthiness of an event. Stoval (2005, p5-7) and Kolodzy(2006, p.59-62) presented five news values that are believed to be audience's criteria in selecting news that they are going to consume. Firstly, timeliness means that the newer the information, the better information it is. Secondly, proximity focuses on how the audiences prefer to seek information that occurs in their area. Thirdly, information has impact and relevance to audiences generally. Fourthly, information would be interesting for audiences if it is an unusual and an unexpected event. The last is prominence and celebrity, which means that audiences are interested to seek information related to famous people. Aligned with the news criteria, Deuze (2005) simplified the concept, values, and elements of journalism into one concept of journalism ideology. He categorized journalism ideology into five ideal-typical, traits or values:

- Public service: journalists become watchdogs as well as source of information for citizen;
- Objectivity: Journalists maintain credibility and reliability of their information by being neutral and impartial
- Autonomy: journalists are free and independent in doing their job
- Immediacy: Journalists attempt to bring new and immediate information to audiences
- Ethics: journalists are required to maintain ethics, validity, and legitimacy of their information.

Although news values are criticized as not truly a reflection of what people or audience want, but rather a reflection of organizational norms and journalistic training (Weaver in Schaudt& Carpenter, 2009). Journalism ideology brought us a general understanding about what journalism is and what skills journalists should have and how they perform in preparing information for the audiences. It provides the idealistic of journalism which requires high dedication as professional journalists.

Criteria of Journalists

Whether or not citizens who participate in news reporting can be categorized into journalists depends on how they meet the criteria of the real journalists. Being a journalist is not simply just by sharing information to other people, but there are other complex conditions

that require special skills. Stovall (2005, p.466-467) stated that a good journalist should be honest and respectful to the audiences, as well as following professional journalism standards, such as factuality, actuality, authenticity and not referring to others without proper citation. All these criteria reflect that journalists are required to work hard in order to produce a high quality news reporting.

However, it is not easy to measure the quality of citizen journalism only based on the criteria. The varieties of citizen journalism perform differently in providing information to public. Bloggers, for example, as one manifestation of the citizen journalists, they produce information through a web page and let the audiences make their own editing though there is not any guarantee of the reliability and credibility of the editors.

Discussion

Citizen Vs Professional Journalism

Carpenter (2008) points out the differences between citizen and traditional journalists in the way of gathering information from any sources. The citizen journalists use more unofficial sources such as opinion while the traditional journalists are more rely on external sources. She also exposes criticism over the tendency of citizen journalists to write more entertaining stories with less research particularly in the terms of objectivity, thoroughness, fairness and accuracy due to their lack of journalism skill such professional journalists. This view aligns with Brown (2005) argues that real journalists have responsibility to seek accurate and authoritative information, and they have several layers of editors to check their information, whereas the citizen journalists particularly bloggers are doubtful while verifiers of the blogs are other blogs. However, Carpenter (2008) is more balance viewing the citizen journalists' value of independence in creating interesting articles.

Other criticism of the citizen journalists is that their main intent when reporting information. Instead of reporting news and accurate information, most citizen journalists publish news and information just because of their personal interest. According to Brown (2005), hundreds of people do the reporting job because they want to see their own ideas on the media. Furthermore, citizen journalists sometimes like giving their subjective opinions within stories. This argument is supported by Miller (2008) who believes that the web is

currently lack of quality control. However he seems too generalized by claiming that “everyone wants to be a star” when writing information in the Internet.

Another discredit toward citizen journalism is that they tend to be less responsible and close to manipulated information. Being responsible is one way to get people’s trust, however it is difficult to measure the citizen journalists’ responsibility when there is not a rule to regulate them. Bulkholder (2008) claims that citizen journalism is a medium of free spirits not regulated by an ethics code of journalism like traditional media which will prevent journalists to report news without considering moral values. Moreover, although the citizen journalists are capable of serving readers with the latest information, they tend to manipulate and escape from responsibility to readers because they are anonymous.

Different with the previous articles, Allan et al. (2007) appreciate the citizen journalism function in bearing a witness in unexpected incident such as violation and natural disaster. They support the opinion by presenting facts when ‘tsunami’ occurred in Sumatera – Indonesia, some citizen journalists with their technological devices such as camera and video amateurs provide contribution by recording the incident while traditional journalists lose such moment. Similarly, Johnson (cited in Miller 2008) argues that citizen journalists such as bloggers do have a special authority to exist everywhere around the world. This authority enables the web log present variety of information from different areas where traditional journalists could not usually provide so.

Apart from the heat debate over the quality of citizen journalism, when looking back to one of the basic principle of journalism as a public service, it means that public is important priority which should be consider when gathering, writing, and reporting news. However, due to the commercialization and capitalization of journalism, the function of mass media as of public service become blurs. As a result, the traditional media more and more lose the public’s trust. Here is the citizen journalists appeared to be watchdogs for the media by being producers in the same time as consumers of news. Kolodzy (2006, p.217) argues that the internet has shifted the audiences’ role from being passive to be more active audiences in consuming news. Likewise, Kovach (2001, p.24) affirm

that people or citizen are moving into a “two-way journalism” which means audiences becomes not consumers, but “pro-sumers,” a hybrid of consumer and producer. For instance, if citizens have a problem with the news, they know whom to email to correct the record (papers increasingly print e-mail addresses and websites put authors’ names in hypertext making it simple to contact writers, editors, and publishers). This facts show us other valuable side of online journalism.

Future Prediction of citizen and professional journalists

Whether or not the citizen journalists are able to maintain their news quality depends on their self awareness. The importance of news values which has been discussed earlier as audiences’ news selecting criteria shows that audiences means a lot in journalism. High quality of news reporting in newspaper, for instance, means nothing if it is fail to get readers’ attraction. A research revealed from Pew Research Centre (Schaudt& Carpenter, 2009) state that the number of consumers reading a daily print publication is decreasing. The most recent figures show readers are increasingly turning to the internet as a source for national news and information. The research which is conducted in US shows that 40 % of U.S. adults get most of their news from the Internet. Similarly, another research shows that fewer people read print newspapers, and young people who once could be expected to become newspaper readers as they matured, no longer do (Bird, 2009). Matured people might still like to consume news and information, however the way they consume the news has changed. The declining of newspaper’s audiences due to the emergence of new online media is a reality that the new form of media has been able to catch the audiences’ interest particularly in its availability to serve the media consumers with the latest information that has proved its special quality. This phenomenon has shown the powerful of online media to catch as many as audiences. That is why most of media institutions are interested to converge their form into online media. Most mainstream media - print and electronic media – have their official online sites where mostly provide page for citizen to share their information. Take for example Therefore, the traditional journalists should make self introspection of how to be more independently and bringing back the public’s trust to journalists.

Whilst citizen journalism becomes stronger, traditional journalism is predicted to survive with its own market supported by its expertise. Moreover, the existence of the new form of media will be able to support the mainstream media to improve its service to the audiences. Looking back to the history of journalism, Stovall (2005) believes that journalism has experienced revolution in every certain period of time. He claims that during the period, technology has played an important role in media revolution. The development of printing press replaced the previous news writing which was manually created by hand, following by the development of photography (chung at.al 2007). Then, the popularity of broadcasting news has been challenged by the huge advance of computer network where the internet becomes a massive media organization. Although the new media's appearance is different with the predecessors, the main content was not totally changed. Flew (2004, p.11) claims that the substance of information served by the new media such as that on world wide web was originally recombined and developed from the previous media content such as printed text, photograph, films, music, and television.

Nowadays, professional journalists use the online media as a source to get the idea of interesting topic. The online media can be a good source to measure and make a list of readers' interest. Schaudt& Carpenter (2009, p.18) give an example from '*The Arizona Republic*' a media that use online news as measurement for their main headline topic which is measured by page views compiled by a tracking company called *Ommniture, Inc.* This system enabled news producers and editors to receive detailed reports about the number of readers' interest in a particular topic. In addition, most of media has been integrated into online news which each of the media has been available to access online without losing its traditional audiences. The new digital environment has pushed traditional journalism out of its conservative complacency, in which news operations are much more responsive to their empowered and engaged audiences (Bird, 2009). Furthermore, most broadcasting news institution such as television station has also involved public to be a reporter by presenting video amateur to support their information. Nip (2006) pointed out that the citizen journalists can be a news contributor or expert commentator for professional media regarding event and

activities in their local area. However, although the participatory journalism has proved its speeding quality, people will still question its reliability which can be convinced after being investigated and reported by professional journalist. These facts described that both participatory and professional journalists should collaborate in order to produce high quality of news reporting. Thus, the rise of citizen journalism as the impact of technological advance should not be a treat for traditional journalism in undergoing their professional jobs. Indeed, it is suggested that both citizen and professional journalists should realize that what they are presenting will be able to influence audiences so objectivity, accuracy, as well as factuality and actuality should be absolutely their main concern.

Conclusion

Journalism evolves naturally as the change of period. It is also dynamic so it is possible to revolute according to its era. Technology which is appeared in the form of the Internet and mobile devices as the basic instruments of citizen journalists has made a huge change in news media revolution. The above discussion has highlighted how the new form of news media reporting changes the way people act regarding reporting and consuming information. Citizen journalism is beneficial in satisfying journalism news values in term of timelines. It also supports mainstream journalism in keeping the news up to date by involving citizens for their flexibility and availability in catching and reporting information anytime and anywhere. Moreover, topics that are catching most attention by participatory journalists can be used as headlines topic in mainstream journalism. On the other side, citizen journalism needs professional media in order to have acknowledgment and editing process to produce a good quality of news reporting in term of the accuracy and objectivity. This phenomenon brings interdependency between Citizen and professional journalism. Thus, professional journalists should realize that citizen journalists appeared to prove that audiences are not passive but active in consuming information reported by the media. This

fact describes that the media consumers are becoming more intelligent which in turn become big challenges for the mass media to produce better information. It is predicted that citizen journalism will be developing stronger as the advance of information and communication technology, though it will not diminish traditional journalists with its expertise in the journalism field.

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