Utilization of User Generated Content (UGC)-Based Online Media by Citizen Journalists as a Development Communication Channel

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Abstract: Advances in Digital Communication Technology have significantly altered the landscape of journalism and broadcast media. Traditional boundaries of journalistic practice, once confined to established press institutions and public broadcasting, have expanded to include anyone, anywhere, anytime, through the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Originally emerging through social media, this form of journalism has been adopted by numerous online mass media via the User Generated Content (UGC) concept. While UGC has led to an overflow of information, it also offers opportunities for community-oriented individuals to disseminate information and socialize programs aimed at community empowerment. This paper proposes a detailed exploration into using UGC as a participatory extension channel to empower communities in their developmental efforts. The primary objective of this study is to design a framework for participatory extension using internet channels, enhancing the effectiveness of UGC in community development. This study adopts a qualitative research approach utilizing a phenomenological method to instrumentally describe observed phenomena and explore the expansive and beneficial potential of UGC media in development communication. The results of the study show that: (1) Citizen Journalism as a Participatory Tool: Citizen journalists represent a sector of the populace capable of actively participating in the communication of developmental processes and outcomes. This is primarily conducted through article uploads on UGC-based online media platforms. (2) UGC as an Alternative Communication Channel: UGC provides a low-cost, alternative channel for the dissemination of information and the socialization of development initiatives. Its potential to reach a broad audience makes it a valuable tool in development communication strategies.

Keywords: Development Communication; Online Media; User Generated Content

Introduction

The transformation of Digital Communication Technology (DCT) has significantly changed human civilization in terms of communication, business, learning, and other life activities. The adaptation to data-driven changes poses distinct challenges for societies in facing the 5.0 era (Ayu et al., 2022). Digital telecommunication devices, such as mobile phones, smartphones, and android devices, increasingly facilitate access to information alongside interaction. Internet-based gadgets have changed the way humans consume and absorb the myriad messages scattered across the internet, easing information retrieval but also

leading to uncontrolled use by consumers (Marpaung, 2018).

The change in the way and pattern of information consumption in the millennium era has forced conventional publishing companies like newspapers, magazines, and tabloids, as well as broadcasting institutions like radio and television, to converge towards an internet-based digital spectrum. This has given rise to multi-platform media, which are mass media available in digital forms such as e-paper, e-magazine, and streaming radio and television, without abandoning their conventional versions where these media were originally established (Gushevinalti et al., 2020). Simultaneously, online media have emerged,

managed by legally established bodies and verified by the Press Council, thus potentially representing invalid information and being counterproductive (Madonna, 2020).

A number of online media not only produce their own material (content) such as news articles, opinions, and images but also offer opportunities for their readers or visitors (visitors) to contribute by submitting articles, images, or videos. The public engagement of these users is then known by the concept of User Generated Content (UGC). This concept aligns with the phenomenon of citizen journalism that leverages social media like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc., but eventually, it may lead to the emergence of provocative journalism (Madonna, 2019).

In reality, the UGC concept has opened a space for citizen journalists to share information, but issues also arise when the information provided includes false news, hate speech, and even provocative journalism. Conversely, there is a need for guidance and empowerment of citizen journalists to spread information, socialization, and outreach related to sustainable development. Given these problems, the focus of the research is the use of online UGC-based media as a channel for developmental communication through participatory outreach by citizen journalists at Kompasiana.com. The research questions formulated are: (1) How do citizen journalists participate in conducting outreach and developmental communication? (2) How is the process of participatory outreach implemented by citizen journalists through the UGC concept?

The purpose and utility of the research aim to design a concept or model of internet-based participatory outreach, namely the use of online media that organize UGC. The practical benefits of the research provide solutions for the implementation of communication and outreach for development involving community participation. Several concepts become key elements in this research, namely: Development Communication; the fact is that the national development process will not be well implemented and receive community support without good communication from the Government. Communication is important and urgent to inform messages or development programs in the fields of agriculture, health, trade, politics, etc. The process of delivering these messages is intended to increase the public's knowledge or awareness about development, change behaviors and awareness so that they consciously or voluntarily contribute to the national development process (Amanah, 2010).

The scope of development communication encompasses all activities of information exchange and interaction related to development issues in all sectors.

The main goal of development is to improve the quality of independent human life, while the function of communication, besides spreading information through personal telecommunication media, also includes mass media such as newspapers, radio, television, and new internet-based media so that it reaches many people (Irwansyah & Putra, 2020).

Participatory Outreach; the realization of development communication cannot be separated from the role of professional communication workers such as journalists in the press institutions, functional extension workers in Government institutions, and change agents from the community itself who come from communities or individuals who care about national development. Outreach itself is a manifestation of aggressive development communication because it involves spreading information and socializing development programs through individual, group, and mass approaches. In reality, development outreach in Indonesia often involves the community as participants or self-help extension workers who are actively involved directly or face-to-face or through cyber or cyber extension paths (Madonna et al., 2022).

User Generated Content (UGC); The concept of UGC has already become embedded in community activities when interacting through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. All texts, information articles, illustrations or photos, and videos created by an individual or content creator and then displayed on a website or Electronic System Organizer (PSE), at that moment, what is known as UGC occurs. The larger the number of users or participants on a social media platform, the higher the production of UGC, as occurs on TikTok, which reaches tens of thousands daily.

Over time, the concept of UGC has not only become the domain of social media but has also been applied by business and trade platform managers like Shopee.com to involve users not only as consumers but also as producers or sellers. Today, the UGC concept is also adopted by online mass media to increase content production of articles, news, and opinion. UGC has provided an opportunity for its readers to contribute to content production. The UGC concept is utilized by verified online media such as IDN Times.com, RemoTV.com, and Kompasiana.com. Indirectly, UGC-based online media encourage the emergence of professional citizen journalists who seek additional income from their work, which will be rewarded monetarily upon reaching certain points.

Referring to prior studies (State of The Art), several conceptual definitions have been developed regarding the press's contribution to national development through the development of outreach-oriented journalism. Dona Setia Umbara and colleagues (2021) examined the perceptions of extension workers on

communication strategies in the utilization of digital media in Tasikmalaya. Furthermore, Madonna and others (2022) investigated health extension workers using social media to socialize health issues, with the study titled "Popularity, Competence, and Behavior as Indicators of Influencer Credibility in Public Health Resilience Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic."

Additionally, research highlights the significant role of journalism and the press in development, specifically the phenomenon of provocative journalism in social media ahead of general elections by Madonna (2019). The practice of news reporting that is agitative, justificatory, and slanderous, and acts as a detonator exploiting SARA-related issues, potentially provokes the public to hinder or reject the democratic process. The findings emphasize the crucial role of the press and journalists in ensuring the continuity of development and democratic freedoms.

Looking at the issues highlighted by previous studies, it becomes evident that research on the implementation of outreach journalism in cyber mass media is a domain of developmental communication. The research aims not just to discuss issues within the press world but to provide solutions that enable the press to contribute to communicating development. The originality of the concept of outreach journalism and its dimensions represents a novelty in the proposed research.

Method

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach within a constructivist thinking paradigm. It employed a case study method to explore issues related to factors hindering development communication and to examine the concept of outreach journalism as a supporting factor and solution to these problems. The analytical units in this study were citizen journalists contributing to the online media platform Kompasiana. Key informants included citizen journalists and former professional journalists, supported by a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) featuring sources such as academic journalists, senior journalists, and representatives from national press agencies or associations. The research process adhered to the data analysis techniques of Miles & Huberman (1992), which include three activity streams: first, data reduction—where data selection focuses on simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw basic data collected from various field notes; second, data display—organizing the presented data to allow for conclusions to be drawn and actions to be taken; and third, conclusion drawing or verification to achieve the most comprehensive research outcomes.

Result and Discussion

Kompasiana.com is an online media platform that has been active since September 21, 2008, under the umbrella of Kompas Gramedia (KG) Group. Initially, Kompasiana.com served as a hub for journalists working at KG Group to exchange information and post specialized articles in a blog format. Besides articles from journalists, Kompasiana.com also invited, on a limited basis, celebrities, public figures, and experts to contribute to the blog. However, over time, a growing number of the public began contributing their articles to Kompasiana.com.

The involvement of readers and the broader community in submitting their works has enhanced the value of the concept of User Generated Content (UGC), making it a significant feature of both online media and social blogging. Users who register an account and produce articles that achieve a certain number of viewers within a month receive rewards sent via e-wallet. However, not all articles are eligible for rewards; only those in specific topics and selected articles qualify. The monetization of articles is based not only on the number of viewers and page points but also on Google Analytics results, which are used as a reference by the editorial team of Kompasiana.com.

The potential for additional income has attracted freelance writers, independent journalists, and the general public to compete in creating and publishing their articles on this online platform established to commemorate Kompas's founder, PK Ojong. Observations indicate that there are also users who are not oriented towards reward acquisition or monetization but are more focused on the satisfaction derived from having their articles published widely and being useful. These non-monetization-oriented users are typically from expert circles, academics, and enthusiasts in specific fields such as hobbies and literature.

The Role of Citizen Journalists in Information Dissemination, Socialization, and Development Outreach

Online media platforms based on User Generated Content (UGC) like Kompasiana.com are selected by citizen journalists who are concerned with outreach and development communication. Contributors, or those who participate by posting their articles on Kompasiana.com, can be classified based on their orientation:

1. **Profit-Oriented Group**: This group may consist of professional writers, freelance journalists, former journalists, and novice writers who hope their articles will earn rewards. As acknowledged by OSP, a former journalist, economic needs drive productivity across various online UGC-based media. TPS, an active journalist, confirms that

income from one company alone is not sufficient to meet family needs.

2. **Non-Profit-Oriented Users**: Typically include academics, students, experts, and the general public motivated to spread their articles widely and beneficially. For example, AHP, a literary writer, feels satisfaction when his works are enjoyed by the public and simultaneously build a reputation.

Among the non-profit-oriented citizen journalists, several categories emerge: (1) Development of knowledge and science; (2) Sharing information; (3) Socializing activities or programs; (4) Showcasing works and creativity; (5) Channeling a passion for writing.

There is a consensus among informants that preserving the talent and passion for writing is the primary reason for their participation. Regardless of their motivation, all users and account holders on Kompasiana.com are regarded as citizen journalists.

Significantly, some citizen journalists use Kompasiana.com as a channel to spread information, socialize, and provide developmental outreach. They voluntarily and independently deliver educative and persuasive information, encouraging behavioral change. A small number of these journalists are concerned with resource development and improving the quality of life in areas such as health, education, and agriculture. As AHP, a social activist, has shown, many articles focus on empowering communities and development.

The care and participation of citizen journalists in disseminating information, socializing, and promoting development on Kompasiana.com are motivated by several factors:

1. Dominance of entertainment, false news, and even hate speech in online and social media.
2. A prevalence of articles chasing viral or trending topics, often overlooking their utility for the public.
3. Many community activities, both individual and communal, focus on resource empowerment, environmental conservation, or cultural issues that remain unexposed by mainstream media.
4. A strong idealism or motivation to present articles that differ from the usual offerings on Kompasiana.com and similar online media.

Choosing UGC-based online media like Kompasiana.com as channels for spreading information, socialization, and developmental outreach provides easy access and opportunities for users to upload ideas, thoughts, and information without page or time limitations, as long as they adhere to Kompasiana's editorial ethics and content guidelines. The publication of articles on Kompasiana.com has the potential to be read by a wider audience, given its large viewer base of 4,718,154. Sharing links to the articles published can also facilitate audience access to the information presented.

Based on field observations and interviews, and following data reduction and processing, it can be proposed that non-profit-oriented citizen journalists come from backgrounds as social activists, academics, experts, and students. They show a genuine concern for development and improving the quality of community life. Factually, they play a crucial and strategic role in disseminating information, socializing, and providing developmental outreach.

Furthermore, the presence of citizen journalists who participate in disseminating information, socializing, and providing developmental outreach through online media can be categorized as agents of change. As applied in structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004), the success of an activity is due to continuous actions performed by agents of change, who act to create conditions that perpetuate the activity continuously (Madonna et al., 2022).

The Process of Communication and Development Outreach in UGC-Based Online Media

One method of development outreach is the use of mass communication media as channels for delivering messages to targeted audiences (Sumardjo & Mulyandari, 2010). Mass media serves as an alternative outreach channel, chosen for its broad regional reach and the ability to engage a large audience. Online media emerges as a type of mass communication channel that has developed alongside internet technology. Based on observations, online media can be categorized into:

1. **Converged Conventional Mass Media**: This includes traditional media organizations that have transitioned to digital formats in response to shifts in consumption patterns in the digital transformation era. For example, newspapers like KOMPAS and Media Indonesia have introduced electronic versions (e-papers).
2. **Online Media as Expansion**: These are extensions of existing media that aim to broaden market reach and target audiences, particularly the latest generation of digital and internet telecommunications users. Examples include Kumparan and Kompasiana.com from KG Group, medcom.id from Media Group, and okezone.com from MNC Media.
3. **Independently Published Online Media**: This category includes media created by companies, institutions, or individuals which are abundant and easily accessible on the internet, like tirto.com and others. However, many online media outlets remain unverified by the Press Council.

Several online media apply the User Generated Content (UGC) concept, such as IDN Times, Kompasiana, and Mojok. Through UGC, online media managers provide space for their readers and the

broader community to contribute by publishing their articles in provided features or columns. Besides material benefits, the UGC concept significantly enhances user engagement.

The process of communication for development in UGC-based online media, such as Kompasiana.com, can be described in several stages:

1. **Topic or Theme Selection**: Users select topics or themes for development messages based on their backgrounds, professions, institutions, or communities, aligning the topics with ongoing information or socialization programs. Social activists might choose topics related to welfare or humanity, while academics may focus on educational and innovative messages.

2. **Article Composition**: This stage involves either the creation of original works by users or the use of complete articles from activity reports, press releases, or summaries of presentation papers and regulations. The systematization of writing, language use, factual accuracy, and writing techniques are crucial and largely dependent on the editorial skills of the users, as UGC demands independence and professionalism with minimal editorial intervention.

3. **Message Broadcasting**: This stage is carried out by the users who have opened and verified accounts on Kompasiana.com. During this phase, the dissemination of information to the public occurs. Thus, the role of citizen journalists can be summarized as limited to the one-way dissemination of development messages, as conceptualized in one-way communication theories (Rahmana et al., 2021). Citizen journalists act as communicators, uploading development messages in the form of news articles, opinions, or images through the online mass media channel of Kompasiana.com, which is openly accessible to the internet-using public. The messages are then received by the community as communicants. However, UGC-based online media face limitations in determining whether there is feedback from the community, as the platform only allows limited options for commenting on the published articles.

Conclusion

Citizen journalists who participate in disseminating information, socializing, and conducting developmental outreach by publishing articles with content on literacy programs, developmental regulations, health education, family or community social issues, as well as innovation and knowledge, can be classified as agents of change. They serve a catalytic function and act as a conduit for information from the government to the public. The process of communication for development through the UGC concept on online media like Kompasiana.com is characterized as one-way communication, with citizen journalists acting as communicators. The messages conveyed are typically centered on literacy, education, and the evaluation of development programs. The internet-based online media serve as the communication channel used, and the digital device-using community accessing Kompasiana.com acts as the communicant or receiver in this one-way communication model.

However, there are shortcomings in using online media like Kompasiana.com as a channel for communication development. These limitations stem from the inability to deeply and significantly understand the audience's opinions about an article. The audience's ability to comment is restricted to predefined choices, without the capability to express more extensive thoughts and sentences as is possible on social media. Nevertheless, the availability of icons for feedback in the comment section does indicate some level of response to the messages conveyed by citizen journalists as agents of change. This suggests that while online platforms facilitate broad dissemination of information, they may not fully support interactive and engaging communication, which is essential for a comprehensive understanding and effective social change.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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