

Citizen Journalism in Action: Empowering the Rural Community via Citizen Journalism

Mastura Mahamed

Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
University Putra Malaysia
Email: mastura.mahamed@gmail.com

Siti Zobidah Omar, Ph.D

Institute for Social Science Studies (IPSAS), University Putra Malaysia
Email: zobidah@upm.edu.my

Ezhar Tamam, Ph.D

Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
University Putra Malaysia
Email: ezhar@upm.edu.my

Steven Eric Krauss@Abd Lateef, PhD

Faculty of Educational Studies, University Putra Malaysia
Email: lateef@upm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i11/4888>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i11/4888

Published Date: 23 November 2018

Abstract

Citizens including in rural areas have adopted the internet to create alternative space for multiple viewpoints. In many occasions, rural development received limited coverage from the mainstream media. The issue limited access to mainstream media has force rural communities seek alternative platforms showcasing rural communities and development. The information and communication technology (ICT) and digitalization innovation is providing more platforms and empower people opportunity to voice out and engage actions to issues that they felt worth advocating for and long been neglected by the mainstream media by utilizing new media platforms including among rural communities and their sustainability. Citizen journalism is making an attempt to address this problem by enabling rural communities to obtain and report news, and, to facilitate coverage of their concerns and interest, by connecting those communities and a virtual news outlets prospects to ensure their voice is also heard to initiate actions and mobilization towards a more sustainable rural community. The purpose of this paper is to analyse to what extent citizen journalism does could be a platform to empower community by exercising freedom of expression by producing

hyperlocal stories discussing local issues and interest. Based on analysing previous literatures, findings suggest rural communities around the world choose to join the growing number of citizen journalists. It is interesting to see if the primary contribution of citizen journalism potential to empower rural communities.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Empowerment, Freedom, Hyperlocal, Rural Community

Introduction

The commercialization of the internet in the 1990s has created a jumpstart for a greater platform of expression among citizens worldwide. Swift development of the internet has enabled the initiation of new media technologies and platforms. The potential of new media platform is endless. All sorts of information is now made available could reach audience worldwide with just one click. The new media is not part of broadcasting nor printed media as it is in the category of its own. It is often connected to the idea of digitization and innovation. The emergence of new media platforms has created alternative forms of media and the rapid development of the information and communication technology (ICT) has contributed to the rapid expansion of new media in Malaysia and the rest of the world which has transform our understanding of the Malaysian media landscape narrowing the information gap between urban and rural areas (Omar et al., 2011; Wok & Mohamed, 2017; Zakaria & Sulaiman, 2008). The question of penetration and spread of such technological enhancement and the internet has open the development in poor rural empower to the citizen to express and to highlight issues important to theme role of citizen journalism in a way that builds upon insights from a broader array of academic disciplines including international communications, political science, comparative politics and ICT studies. The findings for example highlighted that poor and rural areas in the Dominican Republic has demonstrated peer to peer-citizen related content to ICT further open the interrogation of its potential enabling citizen journalists to complement mainstream journalists and challenge them particularly on speed and accessibility. The study observed that peer to peer citizen content creation online via mobile phones in poor rural areas and communities' access and credibility of information and news is related to the acceptance and utilization of ICT and new media platforms. Such scenario has enable citizen to play a more significant and powerful contribution towards the society (Berdou, 2017).

Therefore the possibilities of citizen journalism do more than just information creation is the next level up within rural communities. There is a need to expand the understanding and practicing citizen journalism among rural communities. Citizen journalism, like participatory journalism, has been defined as an "act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information, in order to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide ranging and relevant information. Studies has evidently explored about the potential of citizen journalism in relation to these areas becoming more significant and relevant as more people found power and a voice that empower citizens through ICT by becoming citizen journalists (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Ceron, 2015; Deutsch & Radsch, 2012). In this paper the scope will go towards citizen journalist role in empowering rural communities using new media technologies. The objective is to explore citizen journalism as a medium of outlet for freedom of expression and the use of hyperlocal content to empower rural communities. This study attempts to provide contextual insight and contribution in ways citizen journalism empowers rural community is proposed in a

conceptual framework. The layout of exciting possibilities citizen journalism may offer in empowering rural communities. It is hope that with such effort more comprehensive theoretical approach will follow to enhance understanding of this phenomenon with optimization of technology and hyperlocal contents.

Rural Empowerment and Press Freedom

Press freedom particularly among developing countries remained a challenge more so in rural areas. The access of mainstream media reporters to rural and conflict areas were rather restricted due to various reasons with political reasons being prevalent. Besides that high cost to go to many of these places including in secluded rural areas were huge challenges. Reporters without Borders reported the Asian and African continents still obtain highly restricted media freedom and limited access to conflict and remote areas was also reported . Most of the mainstream media operated in these continents faced with high media control by the respective governments. Malaysia for example place at the position of 147 out of 180 countries and classified under the red zone. Most ASEAN countries performed better than Malaysia in the Press Freedom Index, except Singapore ranked at 153, Lao at 171 and Vietnam at 175 (Reporters Without Borders, 2015).

Most developing world particularly in Asia and Africa were classified under the red and black zone for media freedom which indicated the lack of freedom of the press in both continents. The classification by Reporters Without Borders. Red zone described as having difficult situation and serious situation respectively (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). Similarly In other regions such as the Balkans for example, findings by Freedman & Shafer, (2012).suggested that significant obstacles to independent , sustainable media organizations in the three Baltic nations of the former USSR: threat s against journalists; constraints on news content as well as unethical conduct by some journalists and their news organizations. Besides that other issues including legal restrictions; consolidation and conglomeration in the industry; out dated but persistent practices in the journalism profession and distrust of the press among the citizenry. Hence citizen journalism have possible prospect of to encourage public conversation within communities including for those in rural areas doing beyond countering these issues stated above. These citizen journalists used the virtual spaces to offered by the internet and new media platforms to voice their concern as it offered the alternative to the government- controlled mainstream media (Freedman & Shafer, 2012).

Other studies in the other hand noted that that similar potential can be initiated to encourage more rural community conversations and using citizen journalist concept to do so to connect with the rest of the world as well as strengthening inter-community among rural commute the resent of the mainstream communities to empower community engagement and make their voices heard and spread the latest news about rural communities all over. One key study highlighted citizens involved in citizen journalism have greater sense of the community. The comparisons made among small town local media in the US which collaborate and integrate citizen participation in creating and delivering news for these organizations with results posited citizen journalism acceptance and practice in these local media organizations have shown potential but admitted the complexity of the process in deciding newsworthiness and news framing by the citizens despite acknowledging citizen journalism practice do

empower citizens to tackle social challenges which otherwise not explored by the mainstream media. They also suggested that the future researchers would expand the examination in small communities world over hence the potential of exploration of similar outcome of citizen journalism in small communities especially in areas that have less media freedom in Asia and Africa for example (Konieczna, Hatcher, & Moore, 2017; Robinson & DeShano, 2011).

Another study that focused in small town community in rural America argued that such opportunities may not be available may not be frequently in the traditional media due to many aspects of limitation. However the internet via citizen journalism and new media offered affordable wider options and timely in real time update of the latest happenings that may not appeal to the mainstream media yet online citizen journalism opened up the possibilities for the news to reach wider audience and citizen journalism act as a vehicle of information and empowerment for rural and marginalized communities. The citizen journalism practice and dynamics on online platforms and social media amplified the news from rural communities by filling the gap left by mainstream media to a larger more audience. Nowadays news from remote communities is gaining more attention beyond their respective regions and countries to the world via citizen journalism (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Prado, 2017).

On the other hand the debate over the struggle of the mainstream media to offer more frequent rural and small communities coverage has been questionable for logistic and resources issues which prevent mainstream media take charge of rural coverage .therefore their representation in mainstream remained limited and not every region and country is fortunate enough to have their own local media platforms be it newspaper or broadcast stations. With online citizen journalism rural communities can spread their news and issues without using the mainstream media as the mediator to amplified their messages. Citizen journalists efforts served as the gateway for the rest of the world to discover about them. The online effort of the citizen journalism practice highlighting what matters to them that also interest other people in the country as well as the rest of the world and thus empower them to reach out to others without dictation and control by the mainstream media. This lead them to freedom of the press as their curate their own story and free to deliver them to the rest of the world with no restriction this also create a sense of inclusion and understanding of common good. Although the study was conducted in Australia the concept and idea presented in the study may also be applied and observed for citizen journalism practice in other parts of the world (Hess, 2017).

Therefore the prospect of citizen journalism in empowering these rural communities has possibly offered them a sense of freedom of press as they are free from the control of any media or political influence to present their news, issues and prospects to the masses. For example the prospect of citizen journalism empowering small communities in creating growing opportunities empowering rural communities in many ways as an These rural communities can benefit tremendously also in other areas than just problem and issues being highlighted but also enabled areas such as tourism, economic and cottage industry to gain the income of these rural communities both directly and indirectly.(Van de Vliert, 2011). For Example the empowerment via citizen journalism within rural communities including in counties such as in Asia such as South East Asia, India and Taiwan have shown the potential

to go beyond just delivering their voice to be heard but also empowered them in other areas in life. It also presented added cultural values which represented these rural communities that often come from diverse cultural values and tradition intertwined with technological adaptation of new media and online platforms . because of these values the extend that may varied the effectiveness of outcome in empowering rural communities(Huang, 2015; Prasad, 2018).

Rural Community Expressions in Mainstream Media

To make rural and small community reporting and expressions more effective, community-focused reporting is identified as one of the *gaps left* by the mainstream media. Rural community reporting via citizen journalism may be different in developed countries and its developing countries counterparts but both offered opportunities to act upon the *declining coverage* of regional and community coverage and imbalance of reporting by the mainstream media. These studies conducted by Cloudry and Derher (2007) and Hess (2013) for instance discussed about the presented dilemma of media organizations downsizing and resources rationalized due to financial constrain and challenges in readership. The researchers debated that change in media market landscape has possibly force media companies to make the decision either to pursue or report local community news or not particularly if the news if happening far from the main cities or coverage of minority communities. Besides that, the changing nature for audience also becoming contributors of news reporting could open up a collaboration between the mainstream media or citizen journalism also have the potential to operate at a minimal cost as compared to mainstream media organizations (Couldry & Dreher, 2007; Hess, 2013) .

Additionally, there were s a study findings consolidated the idea of citizen journalism volunteers as a result responded to the to the limited rural coverage with citizen journalism initiative an practice initiated in the study serve as a tool for rural community empowerment by having members from the communities to perform citizen volunteers to report the latest happenings that happened in the communities involve in the Swara project in rural areas of India. These citizen journalist volunteers demonstrated the utilization of citizen journalist skills and new media platforms to inform other people that resulted social revolution in the agricultural rural communities participated in the citizen journalism initiative. Hence the research suggest the possibilities of join action that empower the citizens to start a non-political movement, form a citizen journalist to other citizens from these rural areas and communities to empower and mobilize change to combat widespread refusal of the mainstream society of their aspirations and news and issues surrounding them. Therefore the findings amplified the possibilities of citizens volunteering as citizen journalists to empower these communities The researcher concluded that the success of the Swara project may bring hope and of empowerment in rural communities in other parts of the world (Pain, 2017).

Interestingly, another area explored for rural empowerment s also playing a crucial role in addressing the 'democratic loop by fostering citizen participation in public life in many different ways. The potential for empowerment for these communities as the internet and social media platforms make it possible for communities to outreach to larger segments of the society even the world with the internet and its related channels. This may include the nature

of community involvements and reporting in citizen journalism aligns with 'local talk' narratives with access to local issues and interest that foster the meaning-making process at community level, playing a crucial role in recreating a public conversation and a heightened sense of citizenship which is less offered by the mainstream media as the mainstream media is lacking of critical report and outcome of issues particularly issues pertaining the everyday citizen regardless of geographical areas rural areas. The researchers notion that these ideas of enabling local talk to take place actively even within rural and small communities using the internet available in heir phone These elements presented the gaps as long as internet access and new media platforms were made available (Forde, 2011; Meadows, 2012). Though these studies did not mentioned the specific geographical and community settings, the potential of expressions for citizens are amore achievable as they no longer have to depend on mainstream media to get their voices heard.

Rural Community Empowerment and Expression with Citizen Journalism

Based on the previous section, there is a need to explore citizen journalism practice for rural empowerment. However before that is allowed to happened, the understanding of mobile and internet penetration Citizen journalism is blooming due to the changes in the internet and its related technological expansion and availability. Studies featured often focused on possibilities of empowerment of rural communities but not explaining enough specific approach or concept to be used to explained the phenomenon in rural areas. These elements has change not only is the profession of journalism looking at a dramatic change, the world of publishing is as well, through the obvious side-line of self-publishing through citizen journalism. A research based in Indonesia for example explicitly describe youth as the catalyst driving and mediating citizen journalism in Indonesia across societies and boundaries without explaining the possible differences that may occur in approaching urban and rural citizen journalism for that matter. The challenge impose arguably the greater threat to journalism, in the form that we know it, is the amount of written content that can now be accessed free of charge on the internet (Bayuni, 2017).

Hence to explore the role of internet and citizen journalism and the argument surrounding citizen *freedom of expression* and community empowerment, the examination of various elements is necessary to better understand how to maximize citizen freedom of expression in this online citizen journalism environment.. Although the study did not mentioned the location of the study possible, the study highlighted the importance of the need to explore the approaches and ways of having citizen journalism initiatives and platforms to encourage more news content and expression among those from the rural communities. The scenario somehow created more challenges to the journalism profession and as citizens including in rural communities to create content, news and all mainstream news reporting thus resulted imbalance particularly in reporting public issues and community development in a global scale regardless geographical boundaries including rural communities. Therefore rural communities find empowerment outside the mainstream media spectrum. With the availability of internet and new media platforms these communities (Murphy, 2015).

Subsequently a study research exposed the concern of mainstream journalism operations and business models were increasingly prioritized commercial feasibility to remain competitive

financially. Their cautious response to the user generated content free access form the World Wide Web continues to expand is considered reaction to the business model that is challenged by free to access user generated content that change the media landscape as we know it and these changes continue to take shape and progress as the internet and new media channels penetrate remote areas and its communities. Besides, another great challenge for media conglomerates is to stay relevant to the next generation of computer savvy youth, as they come through only to see it fall into near obsolescence due to the ruthless and savagely fickle nature that young people possessed. As the scenario is not only prevalent among urban and rural youth have access to the technology. Therefore the younger generation could be the bridge that can play a role in conveying the issues and hopes of the community and the aspirations towards a more sustainable community (Hughes, 2011).

Hence, the combination of internet outreach and youth savvyness could potentially create desirable push and interest to embark in conversations and reporting representing their communities in creating awareness and problem solving conversations that could lead to empowering rural communities in various ways. The introduction of new media and social media tools on online platforms with user friendly interface as well as internet penetration via mobile phones have democratized the space and allow communities including in rural areas to reach out to the masses as people use the way to exercise freedom of expression by enabling everyday people to share their experience across multiple platforms, circumventing mainstream media with voicing out beyond deficiency of democracy and opened conversations of endless possibilities (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014).

Therefore the discussion of limited coverage for rural community issues bring upfront dilemma in application of democracy reporting in mainstream media is another concern as the citizens felt that the ICT infrastructure and social media platforms provide space for communities share their stories and concerns with new ways of knowing are becoming acceptable among all the disseminators of community news wherever it may be. It is feel more so The findings also revealed that a subset of these citizens aspire to be integrated with the journalists' community in this place in several ways: as contributors in their own right, as major branded commenters on news and events, adding their interest to participate as an interpretative community as key sources of local information The situation (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). The research emphasize the need for community issues to be featured and amplified so that the authorities will take notice and aware of the issues surrounding communities including those in rural areas.

Sierra (2013) argued that he idea of citizen journalism giving more room for local news including in rural areas has showcase the willingness of members of communities to report news that matters to them and their community. Citizen journalism phenomenon has in recent years grabbed the attention by the mainstream media, online communities and general populations in both the western and eastern world. The phenomenon is also evident in developing countries. It tremendously change the way citizen's view at information distribution options, revolutionized the way people gather and share information about current global and local events and to what extend being ethical is influencing the perception of citizen journalism and the nature of its relationship with the mainstream media (Serra, 2013).

Besides that, another study analyzed the growing skepticism over mainstream reporting has been implying among the citizens particularly in developing nations with history of having régimes and media that has been controlled by the government. The skeptics were showing the need to have. Similar sentiments found among rural communities as they Professional journalists would be skeptical of a formation often directly challenging its status and authority is hardly surprising. Professional journalists have long tried to maintain their authority and jurisdiction by claiming particular practices and forms of news as their own, and by implication, excluding others. Hence the increasing skepticism over professional mass media outlets require specific approach for increase chances of effectiveness (Chadha & Steiner, 2015a).

Hyperlocal Content towards Empowerment of Rural Community Opportunities

As the demand for more localized news content increases, hyperlocal news may offer the way to go. Hyperlocal news content is a concept where communities are the focal points in addressing issues and matters. Therefore this may be also a great concept of citizen journalism to be applied in rural and marginalized communities to strengthen community bond. This could potentially gain importance in recent years. More people becoming curious of the regional events and happenings. These communities also on the other hand get better access to new media and the internet like never before and the seize the opportunity to share their happenings with the *society at large*, giving power to these communities to inform others and initiate change. The importance has gone beyond information sharing. The impartially growing effect to local economies is the establishment of such 'hyper-local news sites' and social media platforms operated by regular citizens to serve small urban and rural communities in efforts to build sustainable rural communities. These news sites serve as a representation of community voice and possible problem solving channel for more people get involved in the discussion (Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich, 2004; Huang, 2015).

Moreover, an examination of local citizen journalism sites in the position of becoming the channel to connect communities in vastly separated areas in creating communicative spaces using the technology and citizen journalism to develop the concept of glocalization. This could be the possible solution to connect with rural areas by collaborative communication sites of 'hyper-local news and information' for creating public spheres supportive of small urban and rural or marginalized community sustainability. Such ability given to rural and marginalized communities have the potential to get their news and concerns out there for others to be aware of these rural communities through citizen journalism. It can be considered as the gateway for the these communities to connect with each other and the rest of the world. The situation also allow the interaction between citizen journalists and members of the community provide *critical analysis* based on their expertise to initiate change for the betterment of these rural communities at the same time empower them (Baines, 2012).

In understanding hyperlocal and rural empowerment, understanding of citizen contributor's motivation is crucial. Among the motivation of more local people are increasingly involve in reporting hyperlocal news using user generated content are for fun in informing others of local issues are the strongest motivators to report local issues and interests. This widespread the *emphasis of local rural issues* is made as the main highlight of applying the hyperlocal concept among citizen journalist. Besides that, they view their participation to the news

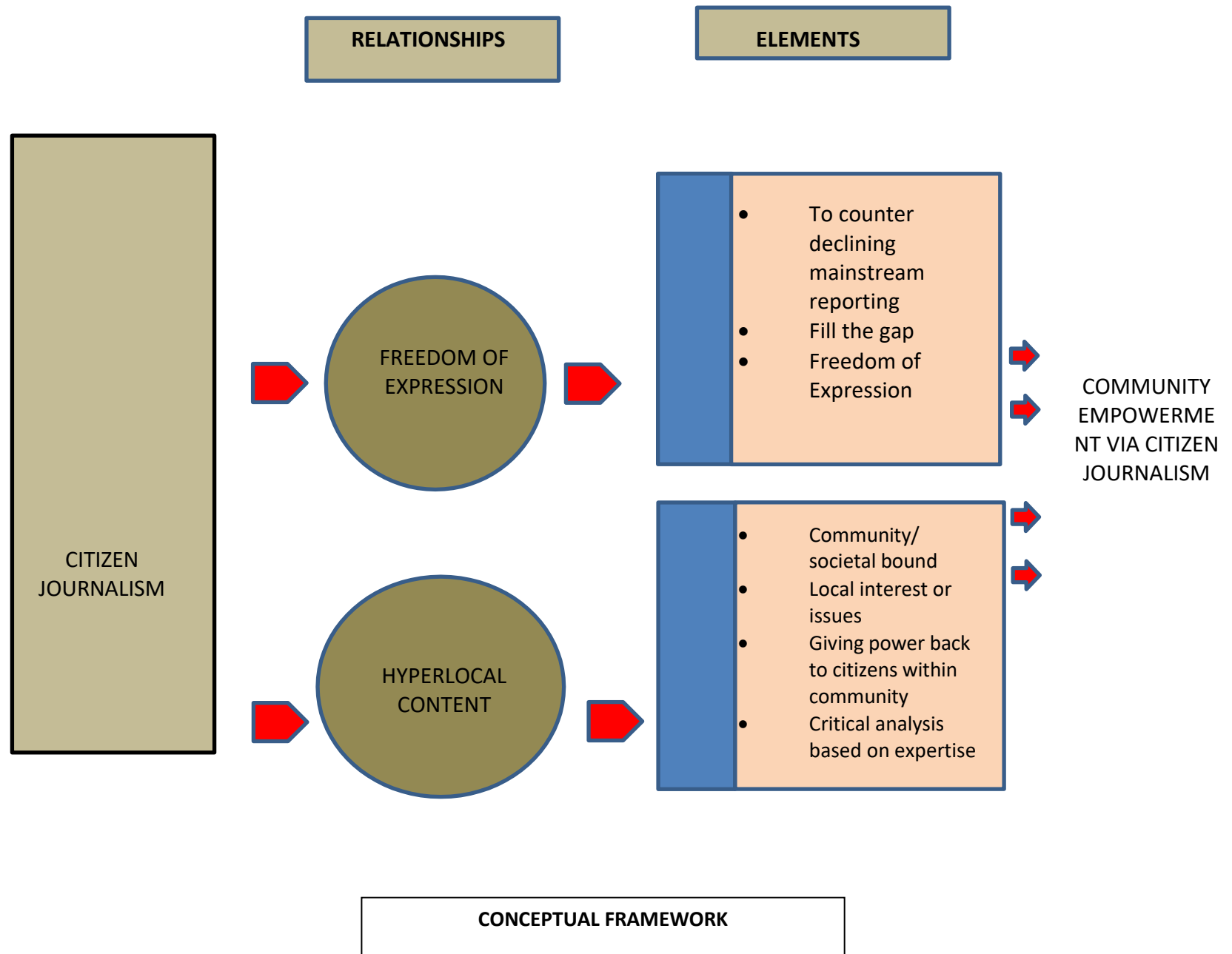
making activity and self-expression is also an important motivation (Väättäjä, Vainio, & Sirkkunen, 2012). (Roberts., & Steiner, (2012) in addition further explained the initiative is often entirely run by volunteers; sites owned and controlled by legacy organizations; hybrids of citizens supervised and/or trained by paid staffers; totally independent yet professional journalists incorporating citizen-written material, sometimes with foundation support or investors; profit and nonprofit sites begun by individuals; and community cooperatives where volunteers share decision-making, sometimes at formal meetings. In the era of social media platforms, contributions through those platforms are also considered appropriate.

Based on the comparison and explanation offered above, the highlight the potential of citizen journalism to empower rural communities is evident as it comminutes to community sustainability and in return the citizen journalists who are involved see their position as a contribution and self-expression of the society.

Framework

The objective is to explore citizen journalism as a medium of outlet for freedom of expression and the use of hyperlocal content to empower rural communities. With the review of some literatures which relates to this topic is to analyze to what extent citizen journalism does empower the community. Some literatures which relates to this topic, it has been recognized that the two main nature of relationships which have direct implication to the idea of freedom of expression through the development of the ICT and new media platforms. In empowering communities, citizen journalism is complimenting citizen journalism by highlighting community and social news, reporting hyperlocal news that not covered by mainstream media Citizen journalist also provide in-depth critical analysis in the area of their expertise. The research framework below is to explain the main concepts, the direction and flow of the study.

The framework suggest the possible ways of how citizen journalism empower rural communities as a medium of expression by countering declining mainstream reporting due to various reasons. Besides that in many cases, citizen journalism also attempted to fill the gap for audiences interest to the happenings in the rural community thus this better chance achieve freedom of expression. Another aspect of citizen journalism in rural communities enabled the emphasis of the potential hyperlocal content news for the benefit of rural communities. Hyperlocal content citizen journalism increased community/ societal bound with prospects on local interest or issues. The possibilities The process enhanced the chance of freedom of expression in these rural communities by filling the gap of mainstream reporting as a response to declining reporting by mainstream media. Subsequently this could potentially installed power back to citizens within community with added value in efforts of critical analysis based on expertise. Another aspect of the concept proposed in this paper is the more effective use of hyperlocal approach to rural community news to increase community/ societal bound besides highlighting local interest or issues that profoundly has the possibility of giving power back to citizens within community . There are also more opportunities for critical analysis based on expertise on the local issues that may lead to more problem solving discussions and initiatives. All these would potentially rural communities via citizen journalism as demonstrated in the framework diagram below.



Recommendations

Based on the review of literatures, citizen journalism could potentially empower community through citizen's approach to user generated content by exercising freedom of expressions and creating hyperlocal content especially of those in rural communities and marginalized segments of the population. . However it is found that the literatures reviewed was written on the context of developed and developing counties with little focus given to the Asian countries and settings especially discussing rural communities and the prospect of empowerment via citizen journalism. Therefore the future research is hoped to study the situations in Asia and how citizen journalism has the potential to empower communities in the Asian region and the potential it has to empower communities in including rural areas (Chada, 2015;Bruns, 2011). This is also in line with (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011) research that highlighted that cultural differences and political structure heavily influence how journalism operates and how citizens react to the mainstream media through citizen journalism. With the emergence of internet and information and communication infrastructures, technologies and virtual platforms also determine the potential for citizen's actions and mobilization that resulted potential community empowerment. The concurrent theme that is reported across 18 countries interventionism, power distance and market orientations in which was highly influence by the culture of the culture journalism in general operates from .It could also influence how well the communities being empowered by citizen journalism The researchers only use China and Indonesia as a point of reference in conducting the research. Therefore it will be a recommendation expands it to other Asian countries such as Malaysia for example. Besides that results from the review also mentioned about the effectiveness of hyperlocal content to r and mobilize the community to achieve solutions and creating impact in partaking actions and solutions to local issues and promote local citizenry by encouraging local citizens contributed local news given a local perspective. This is in line with the Williams, Harte, & Turner (2015) research findings and recommendations in bringing the local back into local news through on demand user generated contents and the positive impact from local citizens contributions into local news. The effectiveness of citizen's reporting to initiate actions and problems solutions pertaining local government and social issues. They recommended the establishment of citizen journalism initiatives to encourage citizen reporting in order for them to represent what is considered important for them to be featured somehow and the internet offered the platform to implement community empowerment measures through community representation in rural areas as well as marginalized communities . This added to the limited dimension of community reporting in the mainstream media.

Conclusion

This paper showcases citizen journalism in action and the attempt to understand the possibilities of citizen journalism to empower rural communities. The emergence of rapid ICT infrastructures have enable citizens felt empowered and given a voice like never before. The citizen journalism scenario varies from cultures and countries' socio economic condition. Therefore the development of such technologies allows the citizens even among rural communities to exercise their power as citizens to empower their own community and help them showcase the their community expression and inspiration (Thomas Hanitzsch, Hanusch, & Lauerer, 2014). The emergence and empowerment of citizen journalism among rural communities is driven by many reasons and the fundamentals are the concept of putting citizen back into journalism through the ICT as well as the resistance citizens had against the

mainstream media as indication of media transparency that trigger mobilization initiative including in rural areas and remote communities. This could be coming from political and societal reasons and highly dependent on the core purpose of citizen journalism existed in a particular area including rural communities and the citizens look at it as alternative means for their stories to be heard. Political might be the initial reason behind the establishment of citizen journalism particularly in developing nations. Then, it had evolved into providing coverage on societal and local issues not covered by mainstream media.(Chadha & Steiner, 2015b; Figueiredo, Prado, Câmara, & Albuquerque, 2009; Huang, 2015) There is also discussion of having new media and ICT influence being actively utilize by citizen journalist has positively benefit them despite being geographically and socially challenge in many areas of community representation, but with citizen journalism it act like a bridge rural communities with the rest of the world . This phenomenon was described by Gillmor (2006) where the audience have left their positions as receivers of information and increasingly becoming producers of content themselves. Subsequent changes of how audience react and perceive things in this technology-driven world has open more outlets and possibilities for communities to bring forward their ideas and concerns that represent them better that what has been covered in the mainstream media.

The discussion of whether citizen empowers the community and what is the motivation involve empowering the rural community via citizen journalism. There are increasing discussion of hyperlocal content from citizen journalism empowers the community particularly developed western nations, often make way for opening up discussion to problem solving and community sustainability. Citizen journalism efforts more often highlighted community and societal stories. (Vääätäjä et al., 2012)

With the emergence of ICT and new media platforms, citizen journalism could also gain importance and attention from citizens in search of alternative news as well as hyper local rural community news in the context of empowerment for the rural communities for better changes to happen in their communities and for more people to take notice. The utilization of these technologies would allow news to travel faster and the dissemination of news could achieve a more interactive nature as the response rate through these technologies is instant. The speed and nature of news have been more spontaneous contributions of citizen journalist could probably compliment the news content produce by professional journalist showcased the important connection of the ICT and the notion of putting power back into the hands of the people. The idea of combining the hyperlocal concept with citizen freedom of expression and empowerment even within rural communities as demonstrated by the framework of the study Citizen journalism provides opportunities to transform a nation and its people despite the current realities and the apparent challenges that may appear to some extent as discussed in this paper.

The framework in this paper is proposed with the intention to demonstrate and highlight citizen journalism as a medium of outlet for freedom of expression and the use of hyperlocal content to empower rural communities. The framework featured two main components of citizen journalism that likely to be useful for empowering rural communities namely the channel for freedom of expression via online citizen journalism and the use of hyperlocal content as the way to empower rural communities. This is possible as the internet and new media platforms become more accessible and affordable to rural communities. Such developments allowed citizens to practice freedom of expression in helping for the best interest of their own community and the outside world This has become increasingly important with the decline of coverage about rural communities in mainstream media. Citizen

journalism could address the gap with more active participation from rural communities to connect their communities with each other and the world.

The conceptual framework also highlight the possible utilization of hyperlocal content approach to increase community bonds, as well as creating a more focus interests and issue based reporting closer to the community conditions. Besides that members of the community can also provide more critical analysis based on their expertise. The existing knowledge of rural empowerment didn't provide much connection to the hyperlocal context of citizen journalism and empowering rural communities. Thus the current study is significant in attempting to highlight the possibilities of stronger connection to the two elements; freedom of expression and hyperlocal contents may contribute to greater sense of empowerment of rural communities via citizen journalism practice.

About the Authors

Mastura Mahamed is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, University Putra Malaysia. She can be contacted at the following email address: mastura.mahamed@gmail.com. Siti Zobidah Omar Ph.D. is an Associate Professor and Deputy Director, Institute for Social Science Studies University Putra Malaysia. Ezhar Tamam Ph.D is a Professor, Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, University Putra Malaysia. Abd. Lateef Krauss Abdullah Ph.D is an Associate Professor and Research Fellow at Institute for Social Science Studies University Putra Malaysia.

References

- Baines, D. (2012). Hyper-local news : A glue to hold rural communities together ? *Local Economy*, 27(152), 1–18. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0269094211428860>
- Bayuni, E. M. (2017). Mediating Indonesia : The Slow Emergence of a Young Nation Commentary. *International Journal of Communication*, 11(1), 1295–1305.
- Berdou, E. (2017). Open Development in Poor Communities: Opportunities, Tensions, and Dilemmas. *Information Technologies & International Development*, 13, 3. Retrived July 2nd 2018 from <https://itidjournal.org/index.php/itid/article/viewFile/1429/568>
- Bowman, B. S., & Willis, C. (2003). *We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*. Retrieved July 5th 2018 from http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf
- Brehm, Eisenhauer, B. W., & Krannich, R. S. (2004). Dimensions of Community Attachment and Their Relationship to Well-Being in the Amenity-Rich Rural West. *Rural Sociology*, 69(3), 405–429. <http://doi.org/10.1526/0036011041730545>
- Ceron, A. (2015). Internet, News, and Political Trust: The Difference Between Social Media and Online Media Outlets. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1(1), 1–17. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12129>
- Chadha, K., & Steiner, L. (2015). The Potential And Limitations Of Citizen Journalism Initiatives. *Journalism Studies*, 16(5), 706–718. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1054179>
- Couldry, N., & Dreher, T. (2007). Globalization and the public sphere: Exploring the space of community media in Sydney. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(1), 79–100. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1742766507074360>
- Deutsch, K., & Radsch, C. (2012). Adapting concepts of media freedom to a changing media

- environment: Incorporating new media and citizen journalism into the Freedom of the Press Index. *ESSACHESS. Journal for Communication Studies*, 5(1), 15–22.
- Figueiredo, M. a., Prado, P., Câmara, M. a., & Albuquerque, A. M. (2009). Empowering rural citizen journalism via web 2.0 technologies. In *C&T '09 - The Fourth International Conference On Communities And Technologies* (pp. 77–85).
<http://doi.org/10.1145/1556460.1556473>
- Forde, S. (2011). *Challenging the News: The Journalism of Alternative and Independent Media* (1st ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freedman, E., & Shafer, R. (2012). Challenges Facing Press Freedom in the Baltics Two Decades after Independence. *JRE Journal*, 2(2), 1–29.
- Gillmor, D. (2006). *We the Media Grassroots Journalism by the People for the People* (paperback). Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.
- Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., & Lauerer, C. (2016). Setting the Agenda, Influencing Public Opinion, and Advocating for Social Change. *Journalism Studies*, 17 (1).
<http://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.959815>
- Hanitzsch, T., & Mellado, C. (2011). What Shapes the News around the World? How Journalists in Eighteen Countries Perceive Influences on Their Work. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(3), 404–426. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211407334>
- Hess, K. (2013). Breaking Boundaries. *Digital Journalism*, 1(1), 48–63.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2012.714933>
- Hess, K. (2017). Shifting foundations: Journalism and the power of the 'common good.' *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 18(7), 801–816.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915627149>
- Huang, Y.-T. (2015). Participatory Design to Enhance ICT Learning and Community Attachment: A Case Study in Rural Taiwan. *Future Internet*, 7(1), 50–66.
<http://doi.org/10.3390/fi7010050>
- Hughes, W. (2011). Citizen Journalism : Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges. (Unpublished Bachelor of Arts, with Honors College Graduate Thesis). Western Kentucky University. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/305/
- Konieczna, M., Hatcher, J. A., & Moore, J. E. (2017). Citizen-Centered Journalism and Contested Boundaries. *Journalism Practice*, 12(1), 4–18.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1269292>
- Konieczna, M., & Robinson, S. (2014). Emerging news non-profits: A case study for rebuilding community trust? *Journalism*, 15(8), 968–986.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913505997>
- Lewis, S. C., Holton, A. E., & Coddington, M. (2014). Reciprocal journalism: A concept of mutual exchange between journalists and audiences. *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 29–241.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.859840>
- Meadows, M. (2012). Putting the citizen back into journalism. *Journalism*, 14(1), 43–60.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912442293>
- Murphy, A. (2015, March). The Challenge That Citizen Journalism Presents To The Future Of Commercially Driven Journalism, 1–9.
- Omar, S. Z., Hassan, M. A., Azril, H., Shaffril, M., Bolong, J., & Silva, J. L. D. (2011). Information and communication technology for fisheries industry development in Malaysia. *African Journal Of Agricultural Research*, 6(17), 4166–4176.
- Pain, P. (2017). Educate. Empower. Revolt. *Journalism Practice*, 12(7), 799–816.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1343094>

- Prado, P. (2017). Mapping citizen journalism and the promise of digital inclusion : A perspective from the Global South. *Global Media and Communication*, 13(2), 1–18. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1742766517694925>
- Prasad, K. (2018) 'Future Directions in Communication and Culture for Sustainable Development', in Prasad, K. (ed.) *Communication, Culture and Ecology: Rethinking Sustainable Development in Asia*. (pp. 189–196). Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Reporters Without Borders. (2015). World Press Freedom Index 2015: Decline On All Fronts. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from <http://en.rsf.org/world-press-freedom-index-2015-12-02-2015,47573.html>
- Roberts, J., & Steiner, L. (2012). Ethics of Citizen Journalism Sites. Digital Ethics: Research and practice. In D. In Heider & (Eds.) A.L. Massanari (Eds.), *Digital Ethics: Research and practice* (1st ed., pp. 80–99). New York: PeterLang.
- Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). "Anyone can know": Citizen journalism and the interpretive community of the mainstream press. *Journalism*, 12(8), 963–982. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911415973>
- Serra, S. (2013). Citizen Journalism. *AIP Scholaris*, 2(1), 1–16. Retrieved from <http://scholaris.vse.cz/index.php/scholaris/article/download/14/10>
- Väätäjä, H., Vainio, T., & Sirkkunen, E. (2012). Location-based crowdsourcing of hyperlocal news: dimensions of participation preferences. *Proceedings of the 17th ACM International Conference on Supporting Group Work - Group '12*, (October 2012), 85. <http://doi.org/10.1145/2389176.2389189>
- Van de Vliert, E. (2011). Bullying the media: Cultural and climato-economic readings of press repression versus press freedom. *Applied Psychology*, 60(3), 354–376. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2010.00439.x>
- Williams, A., Harte, D., & Turner, J. (2015). The Value of UK Hyperlocal Community News. *Digital Journalism*, 3(5), 680–703. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.965932>
- Wok, S. and Mohamed, S. (2017) 'Internet and Social Media in Malaysia: Development, Challenges and Potentials', in Beatriz Peña Acuña (ed.) *The Evolution of Media Communication*. (pp. 45–64) Rijeka: In Tech.
- Zakaria, N., & Sulaiman, N. (2008). Media alternatif sebagai agen perluasan ruang bersuara kajian kes pilihan raya umum ke-12. In *Prosiding, Seminar Politik Malaysia* (pp. 149–260). Shah Alam: UPENA, Universiti Teknologi Mara.