

## Citizen Journalism for Community Empowerment: A Preliminary Idea

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**Abstract:** The development of technology and the internet has strengthened the potential of citizen journalism. It allows citizen journalism to gain public attention by becoming an alternative source of information. The “issue” is then because this information is shared by common people, there will be a risk that the information is incomplete or does not meet the journalism standard. This paper attempts to make an analysis about the practice of the Community Information Group or Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat (KIM), an unit formed by the Indonesian government which is in Sleman, Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The tasks of KIM include managing and utilizing information and communication to overcome information gaps and absorb and/or channel people’s aspirations, and it consists of the common people which have no skills about journalism. Therefore, the writers then by this paper want to share experiences while giving them a series of journalism workshops or training. Based on the writers’ experience in providing training for groups of citizen journalists, the most critical things that need to be addressed in citizen journalists’ news writing are the information completeness and the writing structures (title, lead, and news structure). In addition, photography is also another aspect to be addressed. It because of some technical issue which did not know by the KIM members, such as: composition, framing, heading room proposition, focus between images and subject, and the news value many photo works taken by citizen journalist are far from ideals and contain similar news value or theme of events, namely documentation photos of events or activities.

**Keywords:** citizen journalism, empowerment, public training

### 1. Introduction

Citizen journalism has the potential to support community empowerment movements, because it enables the citizen to give news reports and publish information related to interest



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in their surroundings (Ningsih, 2017). The development of technology and the internet has strengthened the potential of citizen journalism. Based on the author's experience in providing assistance at the Mount Merapi School (Sekolah Gunung Merapi) shows that the presence of various platform of blogging and microblogging as channel for citizen journalism has given hope for the mechanism of information production and consumption that originates and leads to the public interest. Technology gives citizens opportunities to actively express their ideas and attitudes as a form of political dialectic (Minanto and Ningsih, 2018: 214). Mahamed, et.al (2018: 125-126) states that the rapid development of technological infrastructure has empowered ordinary citizens, hence able to voice their interests more intensely than before. Citizen journalism is a bridge between rural communities and the outside world. Technological developments and new media platforms allow citizen journalism to gain public attention by becoming an alternative source of information.

Research shows the unofficial social media account –means this social media is user generated content and does not belong and managed by the formal institutions such as government office, organizations, or mass media- could influenced the public perception positively, spread persuasive message to prevent Covid-19, and on several occasion it could help to release stress with the fun information. This unofficial social media account provide opportunities for the public to share information, but on the other side because this information are shared by common people, there will be risk the information are incomplete, and do not meet the journalistic standards 5W + 1H (Anggajaya and Alfinatullail, 2020; Hanief, 2020; Raza, et.al)

This paper attempts to make an analysis about the practice of the Community Information Group or Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat (KIM), a unit formed by the Indonesian government. The data is based on the author's experience in giving assistance and workshops for KIM Sleman members in October - November 2020. Sleman is a region / county in Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta province, Indonesia. Based Sleman Regent Regulation (Perbup) Number 51 of 2017 explains that KIM is a "community communication institution formed and managed from, by and for the community according to their needs, independently and creatively whose activities are to manage information and empower the community" (Article 1 verse [2]). The tasks of KIM include managing and utilizing information and communication to overcome information gaps and absorb and/or channel people's aspirations (see Sleman Regent Regulation 41/2017 article 4). The personnel of KIM Sleman come from ordinary people (see Sleman Regent Regulation 51/2017 article 7 paragraph [1]), in the sense that they are not employees who are structurally under the regency government.

In practice, KIM personnel of the Sleman Regency, who are spread across all (17) districts in the Sleman administrative area, send news or reportage information to the Regency Government, handled by the Communication and Information Office (Diskominfo). Diskominfo will then edit the news or reportage and, if declared worthy of publication, they will be uploaded on the [mediacenter.slemankab.go](http://mediacenter.slemankab.go) website. The criteria for news considered publication worthy, as stated by Diskominfo Sleman to the writers on March 16, 2020, are containing positive things, namely education (education), enlightening (inspired), empowering (movement), and nationalism.

Media Center Sleman has enabled the public to communicate and exchange information related to various strategic or local issues of public institutions. Media Center aims at supporting the implementation of local government tasks, particularly in disseminating information for

public needs and accommodating development information submitted by the public for redistribution (<https://mediacenter.slemankab.go.id/apakah-media-center-itu/>). In 2019, the website [mediacenter.slemankab.go.id](https://mediacenter.slemankab.go.id) Media Center Sleman was ranked in the top 10 of the most active Media Center category in the category of posting photos throughout Indonesia (<https://kominfo.slemankab.go.id/media-center-sleman-raih-dua-penghargaan-dari-kementerian-kominfo-ri/>).

The problem statement on these articles came by comparing with the previous works discussing the citizen journalism held by the non-state actors (Minanto and Ningsih, 2018 ; Mahamed, et.al., 2014), how about the citizen journalism powered by the government body? If there was some risk in citizen journalism held by common people (Anggajaya and Alfinatullail, 2020; Hanief, 2020; Raza, et.al, 2020), could it be avoided when the citizen journalism was held by the government ?

## 2. Literature Review

The uniqueness of citizen journalism is that anyone is able to produce news, regardless of whether or not he/she has journalistic backgrounds. The key word of citizen journalism is participation in producing and sharing information with others which enables citizen journalists to produce information related to interests in their surrounding (Ningsih, 2017: 73-74).

Information completeness is indeed one of the issues that needs to be addressed with regard to citizen journalism, because in reporting, observation techniques are the most dominant (sometimes combined with interviews), and sometimes citizen reporters add to their own opinion in the news (Lindawati, 2014: 148). With an emphasis on territoriality, the following is the definition of citizen journalism that may represent them: “any person...to report and write online as part of a local blog, website, or forum imparting information about the geographic community” (Greenwood and Thomas, 2015 : 617).

There are several previous studies related to KIM. In Bandung Regency (West Java, Indonesia), most of the KIM members already have a fairly good understanding of journalism practices, knowledge of 5W + 1H of journalism, and understanding of news value. In practice, however, the dissemination of information in the form of writing or video still does not meet journalistic standards. In other words, some of them may have understood standards,, but in practice they haven't been successful in presenting a story in accordance with their knowledge about journalism standards (Saefullah and Rustandi, 2019: 45). The development of online media which has an impact on the massive dissemination of journalistic contents that has been posted by the 20 blog and social media managers, KIM Pasuruan (East Java, Indonesia) has shown its positioning as an information agent who has an influential contribution in disseminating information to the millennial community. This way, KIM Pasuruan synergy with the Communication and Information Office (Diskominfo) of the Pasuruan Regency on all lines can be well held (Ulfa, 2018: 431-432). With improved journalistic skills, KIM would be able to act as an information agent, government dialogue partner, information platform, regional potential promotion partner, and a driver of social solidarity. Wiranti (2019: 27) wrote about the role of KIM in the Surabaya City such as government dialogue partner in ensuring the information dissemination to Surabaya resident; as information forum by improving information literacy; promoting the local business, tourism, and environment; and drive social solidarity

### 3. Method

This research is based on author experience in giving workshops for the members of KIM Sleman, from October – November 2020. The data gained from semi-structural conversation between author and KIM Sleman member and structured interview with the member of Department of Communication and Informatics (Dinas Komuniaksi dan Informatika) Sleman Region.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The uniqueness of citizen journalism is that anyone is able to produce news, regardless of whether or not he/she has journalistic backgrounds. The key word of citizen journalism is participation in producing and sharing information with others which enables citizen journalists to produce information related to interests in their surrounding (Ningsih, 2017: 73-74). KIM Sleman actually has the potential to present relevant news for the community because KIM personnel have a close relationship with the community where they live. However, such a potential has not been completed by the ability to determine good news themes and photography skills. On participation, the training participants sent information based on events that occurred in their surroundings which in terms of value were not considered newsworthy by the mainstream mass media.

Another keyword relevant to the condition of the trainees is the unequal journalistic skill, because once again citizen journalism never put any emphasis on journalistic abilities. However, such condition have resulted, firstly, in news that is not newsworthy, i.e. irrelevant to the general public, for example ceremonial events (e.g. the inauguration of administrators at the village or sub-district level, aid delivery) or information that is intended to be reportage about Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), but the sentences used are too promotional; secondly, the information in the news is incomplete, the data source only comes from observation and does not involve any interviews. For the record, these conditions do not represent general conditions for participants as a whole.

Information completeness is indeed one of the issues that needs to be addressed with regard to citizen journalism, because in reporting, observation techniques are the most dominant (sometimes combined with interviews), and sometimes citizen reporters add to their own opinion in the news (Lindawati, 2014: 148). On the one hand, this is indeed the uniqueness of citizen journalism, but on the other hand, this method can make information less objective.

The lack of understanding, particularly about the value of news, have made KIM Sleman less optimal in presenting information, so mostly their reportage is events reporting. In fact, KIM has the possibility to play more important roles. In preventing Covid-19, for example, the news in KIM Sleman for the period April to June 2020 prioritizes experiences from residents as the main issue/topic to be reported so that the context of proximity is clearly shown in the news. However, such prioritization has resulted in the lack of information on invitations to implement health protocols (Ningsih and Prastya, 2020: 272).

In the matter of presenting information in the form of visuals (photos or videos), citizen journalists' capacity should be taken into account. The "citizen photographers" even mentioned by Stuart Allan (2015: 458) have caused concerns among professional photographers (journalists),

because the citizen photographers are everywhere and can be anyone at the scene at the very moment the incident happens. Regardless of the quality of photos taken by citizen photographers, mostly below those taken by professional photographers, they would be at the scene of the incident before any professional journalist photographer. By using their phone to capture and directly upload any event on social networks, photos from citizen journalists will be the first reportage (of any event) that may easily spread widely to the community.

Although most citizen photographers would use simpler tools (compared to professional photographers or journalists), technological developments have made these simple tools (such as cell phone cameras) capable of producing images that meet the minimum journalistic standards. The problem for citizen journalists is the lack of journalistic skills, both in terms of technique and ethics, so that the photos they circulate may trigger unrest in the community.

This raises an argument for the importance of photography training for citizen journalists. The Community Information Group (KIM) of Sleman Regency are citizen journalists – in the sense that they are not professionals in the field of journalism and are not formally employees of the Sleman Diskominfo. KIM Sleman whose members spread across all (17) districts in Sleman. With an emphasis on territoriality, the following is the definition of citizen journalism that may represent them: *“any person...to report and write online as part of a local blog, website, or forum imparting information about the geographic community”* (Greenwood and Thomas, 2015 : 617).

However, the members of KIM Sleman experience problems in taking photos of an incident to be used as the news illustration of the event/incident. According to Burzynsky, photography is a product of the press that is parallel to the written word (Burzynsky, 1958 in Szylo-Kwas, 2019: 99). Journalistic material needs to be equipped with specific evidence, namely the presence of visual displays of events, problems, or people who become the focus of the problem (Szylo-Kwas, 2019: 117).

## 5. Conclusion

Citizen journalism may provide a means for community empowerment activities. In order to achieve the empowerment goal, a number of things need to be addressed, particularly related to the technical capabilities and knowledge of the citizen journalists. Based on the writers' experience in providing training for groups of citizen journalists, the most critical things that need to be addressed in citizen journalists' news writing are the information completeness and the writing structures (title, lead, and news structure). The goal is to produce news that is more easily understood by readers. The most important thing is the completeness of facts, because it is evident that citizen journalists mostly rely on observation as a data source. However, it is important to note that an observation that is not accompanied by an interview would be less objective. In addition, photography is another aspect to be addressed because in terms of technical, composition, coloring, framing, heading room proposition, focus between images and subject, and the news value many photo works taken by citizen journalist are far from ideals and contain similar news value or theme of events, namely documentation photos of events or activities.

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