

# Do's and Dont's in Citizen Journalism

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## ABSTRACT

In this digital age, it is easier for a person to express and disseminate his thoughts to the public. In addition to the free features provided by various social media platforms (blogs, microblogs, etc.), the mainstream media also provide a forum for ordinary citizen (non-journalists) to publish their thoughts. As done by Kompas Cyber Media with Kompasiana and detik.com with Pasangmata.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Democracy Index of Indonesia ranks 68<sup>th</sup> out of 167 countries assessed. Of course freedom of expression is one of the assessment barometers. The effort to open space to voice opinion is a positive action that must be improved. But on the other hand, there should be an effort to check the accuracy and ethical standards so that the published content does not contain of hate speech or hoax which can caused fatal implication.

This study focused on how the Kompasiana and Pasangmata editors filter contents uploaded by citizen journalists on their platforms. Using case study method, the researcher conducted in-depth interview to the editor of both media. The results showed each media has uniqueness. Content on Kompasiana is just a form of writing, and conversely content of Pasang Mata is photo and caption. This difference impacts on the mechanism of checking the accuracy of both platforms.

**Keywords:** citizen journalism; accuracy; journalism ethics; digital media; online media

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, news are not only produced by professional journalists. Ordinary people can also report events they were witnessing. This practice, called citizen journalism, become more and more popular, especially with the fast development of information technology. Belair-Gagnon, the director of Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication said, "In each case, a new technology prompted us to be aware that citizens can contribute journalism in certain ways. In the shift we are seeing since 2004, citizen media is becoming fully integrated to journalism." (AFP, 2016)

Citizen journalism also indicate the enforcement of democracy in the country that practices it. One of the indicators of democracy is the freedom of

expression; the freedom to voice the opinion. Citizen journalism is a form of expression from an independent ordinary society and it (should) not be influenced by any power (Lesmana & Yoanita, 2014).

In addition, citizen journalism also gives benefits to mainstream media. Having very limited human resources, it is impossible for media to cover and report all events around the world, especially unexpected tragedies such as accidents and disasters.

Major events such as 2004 tsunami, London bombing 2005, Mumbai terror attack 2008, and many more were first reported to the public by eyewitnesses, when the professional journalists could not reach the place that it happened. Richard Sambrook, Director of News Division of BBC in 2005, noted that his organization learned that "when major events occur, the public can offer us as much new information as we are able to broadcast to them."

(Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Therefore, now more and more mainstream media provide space or special rubric to accommodate the work of citizen journalists. For example, CNN, Fox and Canada's CTV have embraced user-generated news, and YouTube hopped on board a while ago. The Washington Times even devoted an entire section to articles by its citizen reporters (Hogg, 2009).

Not only that, nowadays mainstream media even develop news based on trending topic in social media. However, for all benefits of citizen media, its critics point out the downsides of this rising trend. It's been called untrustworthy, shoddy and inarticulate (Hogg, 2009). Whereas, the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Nevertheless, contents that made by citizen journalists still have to be filtered by editorial board.

In Indonesia, freedom of expression became a serious concern as it ruled by Indonesia Constitution 1945 (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945). But the implementation of the freedom has been questioned for years, especially during Soeharto's regime. According to Ariel Heryanto in Hill, in New Order Era, press became propaganda tools and have to face the risk of *press breidel* if they oppose the government (Hill, 2011).

After the regime fell down in 1998, the Parliament amended the Indonesia Constitution. One article is related with freedom of expression assurance. The amendment regulates specific norms about human rights. Article 28 F is about Indonesian citizen's right to communicate, collect, possess, keep, and publish information using any channel available.

Yet when the freedom came in, the risk is another extreme, uncontrollable implementation of it. Hoaxes and hate speeches escalated, especially since Presidential Election in 2014. The Ministry of Communication and Informatic found a number of websites and social media accounts that spread cyber-hate and hoax, and they are keep on rising since October until December 2016. The cyber-hate content including racism-religion, provocation, hate speeches. For the social media accounts, have been found more than 300 (Agung, 2016). In 2017, Indonesia Police Headquarter investigating 3325 hate speech cases, rising 44,99% from 2016 (Mediastiara, 2017).

Two mainstream media that provide official space for citizens to publish their idea to the public are Kompas and detik.com. Kompas Cyber Media (one of Kompas Gramedia Group division) founded Kompasiana in 2008. At first, kompasiana.com was created as internal blog platform for Kompas

Gramedia journalists. But then this platform evolved into blog platform and online publication (news and opinions) for Indonesian citizen (www.kompasiana.com). Kompasiana known as the first citizen journalism space which provided by media mainstream. In 2010, they won the Asian Digital Media Awards from WAN-IFRA.

PasangMata.com is a media for citizen build by detikcom in 2014. They provide place for citizen who wants to share their information such as news, photos, and videos through online platform (web and mobile apps) Pasangmata.com (www.pasangmata.detik.com).

While kompasiana.com provides media for written text, pasangmata.com prioritizes photos and videos.

This research described how Kompasiana and Pasang Mata implements journalism ethics even though their contributors are not professional journalists. We interviewed the chief editor of both platform to discover their pattern in verifying and maintaining their trustworthiness.

## 2 LITERATURE STUDY

### 2.1 Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is the activity of ordinary citizens (non-professional journalists) in gathering the facts of an event in the field. They compile, write, and report their coverage in social media. Pepih also finds that in its development, what the citizen report are not always events; they also report opinions from the society in response of an event, locally or nationally. Another important thing about citizen journalism is that the citizens are not paid. Ordinary citizens include homemakers, students, teachers or professors, as well as blue-collar workers, and they are not limited to sex, age, or groups (Nugraha, 2012).

Kovach and Rosenstiel formulated nine elements that professional journalists should obey. Later, Kovach and Rosenstiel suggested six bill of rights and responsibilities regarding citizen journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). They are: on truthfulness, on loyalty to citizens, on independence, on monitoring power, a public forum, on proportionality and engagement.

Meanwhile, the concept of public journalism has developed into the so called citizen journalism, where citizens give their contributions by means of blog and interactive online forums. A controversy has arisen whether citizens who are not employed by a news organization can be called journalists; however, this

movement is indeed a significant force in today's mass media (Rich, 2010).

## 2.2 Media Credibility and Trustworthiness

6 The essence of journalism is a discipline of verification. It is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). As Dennis McQuail also said, for many years the mainstream media have commanded a significant level of public trust. Objectivity has represented a core principle in professional journalistic practice (Gunter, 2009).

However, in the past few years, journalist (or media) are losing public's trust (Katz, 2017). Nowadays, media more and more losing their objectivity, especially when it is related to political issue. In Indonesia, some media owners are politicians. This condition of course influence the media ideology and policies regarding news they publish.

As Mark Thompson said (Maras, 2013), impartiality and objectivity are becoming rarer qualities in mainstream journalism. There are different ways of responding to these changes: 1) reapplying and coaxing more out of the objectivity norm, reaffirming the necessity of reflection and judgement, defending it in a changing world of journalism where accountability is an important problem; 2) adapting objectivity to new perspectives; 3) blogging and citizen journalism represent a challenge to the very conditions of the norm.

Therefore, in the era that information very easy to get, audiences begin to look for alternatives source, such as articles produced by other citizens. Besides, now the press is more in favor of the financiers. So media sometimes publish news that are profitable, even it doesn't really important for the community (Kasemin, 2014).

## 2.3 Freedom of expression in Indonesia

In Indonesia, freedom of expression has long been a concern by many human rights activists. Some print media must swallow the fate of being banned by the Old Regime and the New Regime for reporting news that contradicts the government. In the 1970s, the relationship between government and the press was marked by latent tensions. The situation led to disunity in 1974 and 1978, marked by mass bans by the government (Hill, 2011).

During the Old and New Order, all media in Indonesia has to get lisenca from the government, so they can publish their contents. If in the future the content bothering the people in power, the government will revoke the license. This situation certainly also suppresses individual voices. Their freedom of expression was obstructed by the authorities.

In 2000 Indonesia parliament amended the Indonesia Constitution article 28. The amendment specifically assures the Indonesian's right to collect and produce information. Not only did the media gain their freedom, but also individual voices got their voice. This progress also supported by the development of information and communication technology that allows everyone to obtain information and produce information.

However, this freedom then utilized by some irresponsible people or group to distributes fake news, hoaxes, hate speeches. This phenomena even become national concern in the time of elections. Hence, in September 2015, the Indonesia Police Chief, issued a warrant to take firm action on disseminators of fake news, hoaxes, and hate speech, especially in social media. The disseminators will be punished by Electronic Information and Transaction Law (Chief, 2015).

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This research used the qualitative method and the researchers will do case studies because according to Yin (Yin, 2013) in study cases the focus of a research will be on the contemporary phenomenon. The citizen journalism phenomenon has a rapid development in line with the growth of communication and information technology.

According to Miller, in its application, case studies generally use relatively extensive interviews, or even observations, to recognize the life (such as the development, behavior, appearance) of the researched analysis unit. In addition to interview and observation, case studies often involve idiographic interpretation which emphasizes on certain issues, such as the social actions and social relationships influenced by the existing social contexts (Pawito, 2007).

In this research, we interviewed Iskandar Zulkarnaen (Chief Operation Officer of Kompasiana). We also interviewed Ardi Cahya Rosyadi and Marwan as editors of Pasangmata. The

result of the interview will be analyzed and verified by observing those two platforms.

## **4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Media Characteristics**

Kompasiana is a blogging platform established in 2008 by Kompas Cyber Media. At first, it was made to accommodate Kompas's journalists who want to write many things aside from news. But exhausted with their daily routines, Kompas's journalists have no time to write in Kompasiana. Later on, Kompas then open that platform for public. In 2017, Kompasiana has new slogan: beyond blogging. It enhances Kompasiana position as Citizen News and Opinion Channel.

It has several themes such as: economy, fiction, lifestyle, entertainment, humanities, politics, technology, video, and tourism. There are two seasonal categories such as Kotak Suara (only during election season) and Tebak Hikmah Ramadan (only during Ramadan). In Kompasiana, member can only publish article with more than 70 words. They can share almost anything including opinion, tips, or tutorials. However, Kompasiana disallow member to use this platform for selling their products. Member also disallowed to post more than one article within an hour.

Meanwhile Pasangmata is an online platform for citizens who want to share factual events such as traffic reports, accidents, disasters. This platform established by detik.com in 2014, and can be accessed from web or mobile apps. Members can send photos or videos along with caption in 140 characters maximum. Pasangmata encourages citizen to be an active witness, that eager to share what they see or experiencing, especially when it is important for others.

Pasangmata has point reward system for their member based on contents that they send. Members can redeem their points with gifts provided in detikshop catalogue.

### **4.2 The Registering Process**

Until December 2017, Kompasiana has 355.000 members called 'Kompasianer' (Kompasiana, 2017). They categorized two kinds of membership: verified member and validated member. Verified members are member who registered and actively writing for a year, especially in special themes. Validated

members are member whose registration already checked by their citizen registration number.

Pasangmata call their citizen journalists as 'Mata-mata' (spies). To be a 'Mata-mata', citizen should register using Facebook or Twitter account. After that, user should fill online form that contain their personal data such as address and telephone number. Until February 2018, Pasangmata has 16.000 members.

In the internet era, account verification is an important thing because everybody can fake their identity. If someone can't be honest about their basic identity, then how can we be sure he/she publish the right information? Pasangmata editors usually use member's contact to confirm about important information related with photos/ videos that they post. The authenticity of identity and content is crucial because audience have the right to expect that the evidence of the integrity of the reporting be explicit. This means that the process of verification should be transparent (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

### **4.2 The Filtering Process**

Kompasiana and Pasangmata publish their "Terms and Condition" that their member must obey before they publish. Basically Kompasiana and Pasangmata has some same standard about citizen journalism. Both of them are subject to government regulations, especially Electronic Information and Transaction Law. They also publish cyber media guidelines which have user generated contents provisions, such as antiplagiarism, prohibit contents containing hate speeches, hoaxes, and blasphemies. However, still there are some members who disobey the rules, either intentionally or unintentionally. The quality of citizen journalism basically cannot be the same as that of conventional media. In this case, the most prominent factors are accuracy and subjectivity (Quinn & Lamble, 2008).

Kompasiana and Pasangmata has different treatment for members who break the rules. As Sambrook said, "As someone who supports the new direction, I don't suggest the BBC staff abdicate their responsibility for accuracy, fairness, or objectivity. As we open up to contributions from the public, we must do so in a way that is consistent with our editorial values." (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

In Kompasiana, usually 300 articles per day published by Kompasianer. All of them will be published directly without editors' intervention. Within 24 hours, 15 content reviewers will review the contents. During the review process, editors has rights to do minor editing without Kompasianer's



permission. Editors also has authority to delete inappropriate content. There are three categorized based on the review: 1) *deleted content*, for content which doesn't meet Kompasiana's standard; 2) *qualified content*, for content which feasible to publish; 3) *editor's picks*, for high quality contents which considered as significant articles needed by the society. Kompasiana ban members who five times against the rules.

Zulkarnaen admitted that the most critical period is during the election campaign period. Many members write their opinion about their choice and sometimes comparing or even revealing negative things about other candidates. To anticipate this condition, Kompasiana provides comment column in every article, but only members can give comment. If the comment given isn't pleasing the author, the author can delete or report that comment to the editors.

Pasangmata specifically accepts photos or videos with 140 characters for caption. In Pasangmata, members can not publish photos/videos directly. Photos/videos pictures should reviewed by the editors. Among 300-400 submissions per day from Mata-mata, usually only 150-200 published. Common problems in Pasangmata are: bad quality photos/videos; unoriginal photos/videos (members took photos/videos from another media); photos/videos from same events by different members; and unclear caption. Many times editors should contact Mata-mata to get information regarding photos/videos that they sent. If the event is important, editors report it to detik.com who will send professional journalists to follow the story up. Pasangmata also ban members who against the rules more than twice.

Both platform give opportunity for other member to report contents which considered disturbing the public. However, editors will look up to the regulations to decide wether the content should be deleted or not. Kompasiana's contents are more risky because they are subjective (opinion based). But as Zulkarnaen said, mostly Kompasiana member are smart and mature. They write because they want to share opinions or give suggestion, not to humiliate or ruin someone's reputation.

If the content doesn't break law or regulation, then editors let it remain. Editors consider disagreement among members as part of democracy and freedom of expression. If there were a law suit or criminal case for the published content in the future, either in Kompasiana or Pasangmata, the responsibility is at Kompasianer or Mata-Mata. It is

very different with professional media's policy, where the responsibility is in the chief editor.

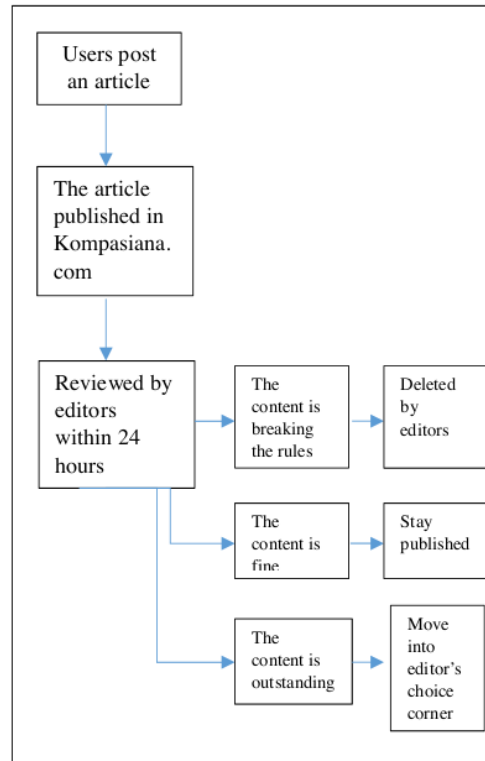


Figure 1: Kompasiana article filter step.

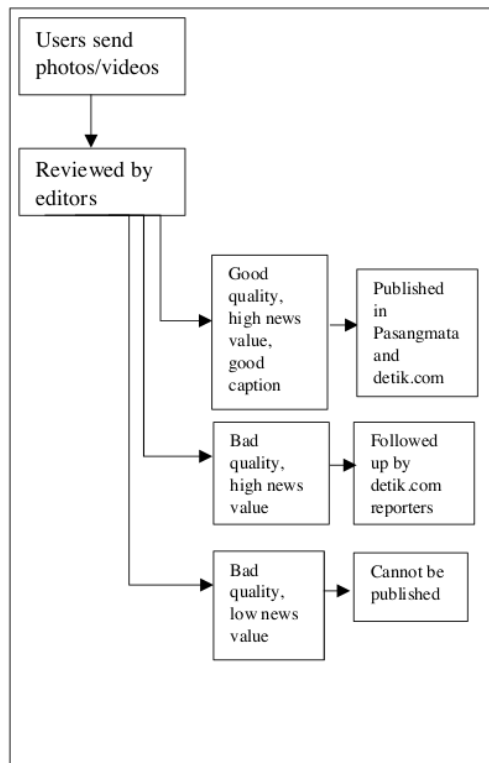


Figure 2: Pasangmata article filter step.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Kompasiana and Pasangmata has different characteristic in terms of content. As a blog platform, article in Kompasiana should written longer, compare to 140 characters maximum in Pasangmata. While Kompasiana publish all kind of writing (idea, tutorial, opinion, etc), Pasangmata focus on event reports by their member. Nevertheless, ss part of mass media that has long been a reference for society and recognized by their credibility, Kompasiana and Pasangmata put editors to review all contents from the citizen journalists. Kompasiana and Pasangmata also give opportunity to other members to give comments or report contents that considered to violate general norms in society.

Editors will delete or cancel publication of content which doesn't meet the editorial standards (including breaking journalism ethics). As a final stage of filtering, the member who disobey the rules several times will be banned from those membership.

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