



Repositioning Citizen Journalism: A Case Study in the Special Region of Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Information disruption in the Society 5.0 era has fundamentally transformed how people access, produce, and distribute information. Mainstream media no longer exclusively control the flow of information, as social media enables citizens to produce and disseminate news directly. This study examines the development of citizen journalism, particularly independent social media-based accounts in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. It explores how journalists and editorial leaders perceive their role within the contemporary media ecosystem. The study's novelty lies in distinguishing independent citizen journalism from mainstream media and proposing a collaborative model based on the perspectives of information users, journalists, and editorial leaders. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach through open-ended questionnaires for members of the public and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with senior journalists and editorial leaders representing mainstream media in Yogyakarta. The findings indicate that citizen journalism has developed into an increasingly influential source of public information and has gained recognition from formal institutions. Its strengths include speed, proximity to communities, flexibility, and public engagement, whereas mainstream media retain advantages in professional standards, verification, and credibility. The study therefore proposes a complementary collaboration model involving information and reporting cooperation, journalistic capacity building, structured content distribution through attributed reposting, and commercial content production. This model repositions independent citizen journalism from merely a source of user-generated content to a strategic partner in the public information ecosystem while preserving the verification standards and professional values of mainstream journalism.

Keywords: *Citizen Journalism, Media Social, Collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

Citizen journalism has existed in various countries since before the rise of digital platforms. Conceptually, it emerged in the late 1980s, particularly in the United States, as the public began playing a more significant role in shaping news issues and agendas.

The development of digital media subsequently enabled individuals to disseminate information without affiliation with media organizations, blurring the boundaries between professional journalists and the public in producing and distributing information (Moon et al., 2020).

In South Korea, OhmyNews, founded by Oh Yeon-ho around 2000, marked an important milestone by giving the public opportunities to participate as news producers and contributors (Nah & Chung, 2016). In the United States, weblogs in the 1990s similarly enabled individuals to produce and distribute information, ideas, and experiences independently.

Digital technology further expanded this capacity, particularly during Hurricane Katrina, when citizens documented and disseminated real-time disaster information (Salsabilla et al., 2026). Social media subsequently transformed citizens from information recipients into active producers and distributors across multiple platforms.

This development is particularly evident in Yogyakarta, where social media accounts can disseminate information faster than mainstream media. While mainstream media must undergo

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newsroom processes of selection, verification, and newsworthiness assessment, citizen journalism offers greater speed and flexibility.

Research on Yogyakarta's local media confirms that mainstream media increasingly utilize viral social media content as information sources because of its speed and timeliness ([Setiawan & Handayani, 2022](#)).

The speed of citizen journalism enables social media accounts to generate public attention around social issues. For example, a post by @Infojogja concerning a motorcyclist's arrogance on Simanjuntak Street attracted sufficient public attention to encourage the perpetrator to turn himself in.

This shows that citizen journalism accounts function not only as information disseminators but also as agents that can generate social responses. This role differs from mainstream media, which must consider newsworthiness, editorial standards, newsroom procedures, and verification protocols.

These developments have also encouraged mainstream media to strengthen their presence on social media. A case of child abuse at the Little Aresha daycare center in Yogyakarta, for instance, emerged through the @TribunJogja social media account in April 2026 and subsequently gained wider attention through community accounts such as @jogjainfo and @merapi_uncover. This illustrates an increasingly interconnected information ecosystem involving professional media, citizen journalism, digital communities, and the public.

Several previous studies have examined citizen journalism's changing role within the digital media ecosystem. Research on citizen journalism practices on TikTok shows that citizen journalists produce and distribute news, but platform logic and concerns about misinformation also shape their practices ([Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024](#)).

Other research on gatekeeping indicates that the rise of social media has shifted the gatekeeping function from professional media to a more distributed environment, involving users, platforms, and digital communities ([Bruns, 2015](#); [Lindner, 2017](#)).

In Indonesia, research on citizen journalism has also examined citizen journalism practices on Instagram and shown that locally sourced information based on geographic proximity holds significant value for the community ([Suradi et al., 2023](#)).

In this study, citizen journalism broadly refers to citizens producing and disseminating information about events or issues of public interest outside the conventional role of professional journalists. Independent citizen journalism refers to citizen journalism activities managed by individuals or community groups outside the organizational structure of professional or mainstream media.

Meanwhile, social media-based citizen journalism refers to independent citizen journalism that primarily uses social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, X, and Threads, to produce and distribute information.

This study uses the term new citizen journalism conceptually to describe the contemporary development of citizen journalism in the digital era, characterized by independent production, rapid multiplatform distribution, direct audience interaction, and practices that increasingly resemble professional media.

However, previous research has not adequately explained how independent, social-media-based citizen journalism has been repositioned as an information actor with its own production and distribution spaces, and how it relates to mainstream media. Research at Tribun Yogyakarta shows that citizen journalism remains within mainstream media structures and is subject to editorial filtering ([Astuti, 2018](#)).

Meanwhile, [Salaudeen \(2022\)](#) highlights the increasing collaboration between professional journalists and citizens as co-creators, but the credibility of citizen journalism remains an issue.

Thus, there is still room to examine the repositioning of independent citizen journalism as a strategic partner of the mainstream media.

This research gap is becoming increasingly important because independent citizen journalism differs from citizen journalism managed by mainstream media. Independent accounts excel in their closeness to the community, speed of distribution, flexibility in covering issues, and direct interaction with the public. In contrast, mainstream media have strengths in professionalism, access to sources, investigative capacity, and verification protocols.

These differences suggest the two need not be viewed as competitors but can instead establish complementary roles. Citizen journalism is fundamentally not a threat to mainstream media, as it operates through distinct production and distribution mechanisms.

However, for information concerning the public interest, synergy between new citizen journalism and mainstream media is essential. This study examines models of synergy that can be developed, as well as how citizen journalism can be repositioned in information production and distribution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The shift from a one-to-many to a many-to-many communication model has fundamentally transformed the contemporary media landscape. Digitalization has democratized information production and distribution, fostering citizen journalism as a counterforce to mainstream media. Citizen journalism refers to citizens actively collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating information without formal professional journalistic training.

It began developing in 1988 during the U.S. presidential election, when Jay Rosen, a professor at New York University, introduced the concept to the American public ([Insaroh & Rohatayi, 2022](#)). Its development has accelerated significantly in the digital era, with research increasingly focusing not only on citizen participation but also on how citizen journalism addresses contemporary issues ([de Bruijn et al., 2025](#); [Zhou, 2025](#)).

This study examines the transformation of citizen journalism throughout the 21st century, particularly how new technologies have influenced news production, distribution, and public participation. In Indonesia, citizen journalism has also expanded rapidly, although it is often facilitated by mainstream media platforms such as *Tribun Pekanbaru*, *Kompasiana*, *BBC*, and *CNN*.

Internationally, *OhmyNews* in South Korea, established in 2000, is a prominent example, involving thousands of citizen contributors and operating alongside mainstream media. Its growth reflects public demand for alternative sources of information ([Kurniawan, 2007](#); [Insaroh & Rohayati, 2022](#)).

Public involvement in producing and distributing information is often called citizen journalism. The basic concept of citizen journalism is that ordinary people can record, publish, and voice their opinions about events in their communities.

This form of journalism takes two forms: semi-independent, which operates under media supervision, and independent, which is carried out entirely by the public without official support. Citizen journalism is an important tool for highlighting social issues, monitoring corruption, and quickly disseminating information.

Citizen journalism provides an alternative platform for disseminating information, strengthens collective awareness, and offers opportunities for media democratization. Citizens act not only as consumers but also as producers of information ([Atish, 2025](#)). Citizen engagement is evident in various contemporary events and extends beyond the local level to the national, regional, and even international levels.

For example, during the Sumatra disaster in November 2025, citizens' involvement in reporting on the disaster in Sumatra reflected their desire to participate in environmental

journalism. This aligns with the research by [Mwendwa and Meutethia \(2024\)](#). Citizen journalism is not without its challenges.

The main challenges involve source credibility, accuracy, and ethics ([Alfidyah, 2025](#); [Andini et al., 2024](#)). Citizen involvement in disseminating information sometimes involves sourcing content from social media accounts or using “parts” of news stories from mainstream media, which may potentially constitute copyright or privacy violations.

Although citizen journalism has many benefits, it also raises several concerns, such as a lack of professional training, accuracy issues, biased reporting, and the spread of misinformation. These factors undermine the credibility of citizen journalism and can fuel rumors. Therefore, those involved must act responsibly, commit to publishing reliable information, and adhere to ethical standards so this new form of journalism can be used effectively to disseminate information ([Mwendwa & Meutethia, 2024](#)).

This is consistent with the research of [Gunawan et al. \(2022\)](#). On the other hand, citizens engaged in citizen journalism also face challenges because they lack legal protection when producing and distributing information.

Mainstream media have also responded to citizen involvement in producing information for the public by providing space for citizens; some become part of the media, while others operate separately from the media but under its management. For example, El Shinta radio has involved its listeners in reporting events since 2000 ([Kurniawan, 2007](#)).

Citizen journalism faces numerous challenges, particularly regarding its classification: whether the information produced constitutes journalistic work as defined by Law No. 40 of 1999. The law imposes no restrictions on members of the public who produce information, so they are free to share it—creating the potential for fake news to spread.

So far, citizen journalism has remained mired in the classic debate over whether it qualifies as journalistic work and what legal protections apply. Citizen journalism is an empirical reality that requires a solution to ensure that producing and distributing information does not undermine the essence of the information itself, including the spread of hoaxes ([Syahriar & Bazarah, 2024](#)).

Outing, as cited in [Kurniawan \(2007\)](#), identifies the following categories of internet-based citizen journalism: (1) Websites that invite comments from readers. Readers are allowed to react—by criticizing, praising, or adding to—news stories written by professional journalists; (2) Open-source reporting, in which professional reporters collaborate with readers who are knowledgeable about a particular issue. Professional reporters still write the news;

(3) Blog platforms: Websites that invite readers to post their blogs; (4) Edited and unedited public websites featuring news from the public; (5) “Professional reporter + citizen” sites, where news from professional reporters is treated the same as news from the public; (6) Wiki Journalism, which positions readers as editors.

Several studies have identified models for developing citizen journalism managed by mainstream media ([Fauzan & Ahmadi, 2024](#)). Citizen journalism is practiced through collaboration between citizens and mainstream media—in this case, *Tribunjabar.id*—ensuring that the gatekeeping function remains intact. The research by [Assidiq et al. \(2026\)](#) also found similar patterns to those in [Fauzan & Ahmadi \(2024\)](#).

Here, the study focused on the news portal *AnalisisNews.co.id* and the citizen journalists who actively contribute to it. The researchers examined the synergy between the two. Citizen journalism has long served as a strategic partner for this news portal.

Based on this literature review, no previous study has examined the repositioning of citizen journalism that operates through social media accounts. This research shows that individuals and groups disseminating information represent a new form of citizen journalism, producing and distributing information independently through various social media platforms.

This research is novel in exploring how citizen journalism is repositioned in relation to mainstream media. Both must be viewed as a synergy between institutionalized professionalism and spontaneous mass participation, between gatekeeping and gatewatching.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within a constructivist paradigm to examine public and media practitioners' perceptions of citizen journalism and its potential synergy with mainstream media. Data were collected in two stages.

The first stage used an open-ended questionnaire developed from the research objectives and literature on citizen journalism, social media, information trust, and relationships between citizen journalism and mainstream media.

The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms using purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on four criteria: (1) residing in the Special Region of Yogyakarta; (2) actively using social media; (3) having accessed accounts that disseminate citizen journalism-based information; and (4) being willing to share their views.

Of the 100 responses received, 92 were valid, while eight were excluded as duplicate submissions. The questionnaire examined frequently accessed social media accounts, levels and reasons for trust or distrust, and perceptions of citizen journalism's role in disseminating public information.

The second stage involved a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 17 participants representing 15 mainstream media outlets, both print and online, headquartered in or with bureaus in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Participants were selected purposively based on their professional experience and involvement in news production, particularly senior journalists and editorial leaders.

A semi-structured FGD guide addressed perceptions of independent social media-based citizen journalism, information credibility, relationships with mainstream media, opportunities and barriers to collaboration, and potential forms of synergy while maintaining journalistic verification principles. The discussion was moderated, documented with participants' consent, and recorded for analysis.

We analyzed questionnaire and FGD data thematically through repeated reading, initial coding, categorization, theme identification and review, and interpretation of relationships among themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We compared findings from both data sources to identify similarities and differences and to develop a synergy model between citizen journalism and mainstream media. We established data trustworthiness through source triangulation by comparing perspectives from the public, journalists, and editorial leaders and confirming findings with FGD participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The digital age has expanded the public sphere into a multiplatform digital space that enables the public to produce and distribute information on a many-to-many basis. Research findings indicate a shift in the public's role from consumers to both producers and distributors of information. This aligns with Suradi et al. (2023), who found that social media enables citizen journalism to convey local information relevant to the community.

However, this study reveals a further development: independent citizen journalism accounts in Yogyakarta not only convey local information but also perform functions similar to those of professional media, such as identifying issues, crafting narratives, attending press conferences, updating information, and redistributing mainstream media news.

These findings align with Peterson-Salahuddin (2024), who noted that citizen journalists on

TikTok have developed their own reporting practices, even though they are influenced by platform logic, personalization, and the risk of misinformation.

A questionnaire administered to 92 respondents shows that the public has fairly clear reasons for accessing information through citizen journalism accounts. Respondents consider the information easy to understand because it uses simpler language, is engaging, is accessible 24 hours a day, frequently addresses issues of public concern, and resonates emotionally with the audience.

These findings indicate that the appeal of citizen journalism lies not merely in the speed of information delivery, but also in accessible language, presentation style, and the ability to foster emotional engagement. In other words, citizen journalism accounts have advantages in terms of proximity and engagement.

This reinforces the research by [Suradi et al. \(2023\)](#), which found that local information with a sense of proximity is highly relevant to the public. At the same time, this study's findings should be interpreted critically, as ease of access and content appeal do not automatically indicate high information accuracy.

Research by [Scheffauer et al. \(2024\)](#) shows that the public's preference for news selection by professional journalists is linked to their level of trust in the news, indicating that professional gatekeeping still plays a vital role in building trust. Thus, the results reveal a paradox: the public is interested in and actively consumes citizen journalism because of its fast, accessible, and relatable nature, but verification mechanisms must complement these characteristics to ensure that engaging information remains trustworthy.

The study's findings also indicate that citizen journalism accounts in Yogyakarta have evolved beyond conventional citizen journalism patterns. For example, in April 2026, the Little Aresha daycare in Yogyakarta saw accounts *Merapi_uncover*, *Jogjainfo*, and *updatejogja24jam* actively report on developments and compete with mainstream media for public attention.

On national issues such as the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, accounts like *@infocegatanjogja.harian*, *@merapi_uncover*, and *@jogjainfo* also distributed information via Reels or reposted mainstream media coverage. This phenomenon demonstrates a two-way flow of information: citizen journalism can serve as an initial source for mainstream media. At the same time, mainstream media also serves as a content source for citizen journalism accounts.

This pattern indicates that the boundary between information producers and distributors is becoming increasingly blurred. Research on citizen journalism practices on TikTok also indicates that citizen journalism has become an important part of the news distribution ecosystem on social media. However, the practice still faces challenges related to misinformation and platform logic ([Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024](#)). Unlike studies that focus on a single platform, this research highlights multiplatform patterns and the circular relationship between independent accounts and mainstream media in Yogyakarta.

This study identifies a key issue: the imbalance between the speed of information distribution and the rigor of verification. Social media allows anyone to disseminate information without gatekeeping mechanisms as strict as those of professional media. This increases the likelihood that unverified information—or even hoaxes—will surface.

A study by [Peterson-Salahuddin \(2024\)](#) shows that citizen journalists recognize the problem of misinformation in their reporting practices, while research on *@prfmnews* indicates that public information needs selection and verification before publication. Thus, the findings reinforce previous research that the main issue in citizen journalism is not merely the ability to produce information, but ensuring its accuracy and credibility.

The FGD results show that senior journalists and editorial leaders in Yogyakarta do not view citizen journalism accounts as a threat. Instead, they see these accounts as advantageous for speed, proximity to communities, flexibility, and public engagement, and they may sometimes identify

information of public interest before mainstream media.

Mainstream media then monitor, verify, and edit this information before publication. This indicates a complementary division of strengths: citizen journalism provides speed and immediacy, while mainstream media contribute professional verification and editorial capacity.

These findings differ from [Dewi's \(2020\)](#) collaboration model at Hipwee, which operated within the same media structure and platform through content production, channel development, and contributor training. In contrast, this study proposes collaboration between independent citizen journalism accounts operating outside media organizations and mainstream media as professional institutions.

Based on these findings, the proposed collaboration model consists of four forms: information and reporting collaboration; journalistic capacity building; structured content distribution through reposts or attributed links; and commercial content production, such as advertisements.

This model repositions independent citizen journalism from merely a source of user-generated content to a strategic partner within the public information ecosystem, while mainstream media function as verifiers and credibility enhancers. Collaboration builds on each actor's strengths without blurring the distinction between citizen and professional journalism.

Conceptually, this relationship can be understood as "complementary journalism," combining the speed, immediacy, and community proximity of citizen-generated information with the verification standards and professional practices of mainstream media. This model matters because previous research shows that citizen journalism can expand public participation and provide community-related information, but it faces challenges in verification and credibility ([Srikandi, 2023](#); [Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024](#)).

This study extends the discussion by empirically demonstrating, from the perspectives of information users and media practitioners in Yogyakarta, how independent citizen journalism and mainstream media can form a concrete collaborative framework. Thus, the study contributes not only by recognizing the growing role of citizen journalism but also by proposing a repositioning and collaboration model that preserves its participatory and rapid characteristics while maintaining the core values of professional journalism, particularly verification, accuracy, and public trust.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, the study achieved its objectives: to identify the role of new citizen journalism and define its synergies with mainstream media. Citizen journalism has evolved into a form of information production and distribution through social media that increasingly resembles mainstream media, although it operates without equivalent gatekeeping and verification mechanisms.

The findings suggest that independent citizen journalism should not be positioned as a competitor but as a partner in the public information ecosystem through journalism training, collaborative reporting, attributed news reposting, and public service announcements. Its presence also encourages mainstream media to maintain accuracy, verification, professionalism, and public trust.

This study's academic contribution is to reposition citizen journalism beyond conventional public participation or user-generated content. Independent citizen journalism can function as an information actor with its own production and distribution capabilities and as a strategic partner for mainstream media.

The proposed collaboration model combines citizen journalism's speed, community proximity, and public engagement with mainstream media's verification, professionalism, and credibility. This contributes to journalism scholarship by conceptualizing the relationship between

independent citizen journalism and mainstream media as complementary rather than competitive. The model also highlights the importance of journalistic literacy, transparent collaboration mechanisms, clear attribution, and preserving verification standards in an increasingly interconnected public information ecosystem.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations to consider when interpreting the findings. First, the research focused on the citizen journalism ecosystem in the Special Region of Yogyakarta; consequently, local social and media characteristics may have influenced the findings and limited their transferability to other regions.

Second, while the qualitative approach—utilizing open-ended questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)—provided deep insight into participant perceptions, it did not allow for quantitative testing of relationships between variables or the effectiveness of the proposed collaboration model.

Third, the FGD participants comprised 17 senior journalists and editors-in-chief from 15 media outlets, meaning the study did not fully represent the perspectives of citizen journalism account managers, citizen journalists, and the broader audience.

Future research could expand upon these findings through inter-regional comparative studies to test the model's transferability; quantitative research to examine the relationships among citizen journalism credibility, public trust, social media usage, and acceptance of collaboration; and studies involving citizen journalism managers, professional journalists, and audiences simultaneously to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed collaboration model.

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