



THE ROLE AND RISK OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL DEMOCRACY ERA: A LITERATURE STUDY ON PARTICIPATION AND DISINFORMATION

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Abstract

This literature study explores the dualistic role of citizen journalism within digital democracy, focusing on its contributions, inherent risks, and necessary safeguards. By analyzing media studies and political science perspectives, the research highlights how citizen journalism democratizes information by expanding participation, monitoring power, and amplifying marginalized voices often ignored by mainstream outlets. It fosters transparency, social mobilization, and a corrective function for traditional media. However, these benefits are countered by significant challenges. The lack of professional training often leads to accuracy issues, the spread of disinformation, and increased political polarization via echo chambers. Furthermore, digital divides and commercial exploitation threaten the equity of this landscape. The study concludes that citizen journalism is a "double-edged sword." Strengthening its democratic potential requires a multilevel mitigation strategy, including enhanced media literacy, verification collaborations, ethical algorithmic governance, and legal protections for contributors. Ultimately, the health of digital democracy depends on balancing these grassroots contributions with robust frameworks for information quality.

Keywords: citizen journalism, digital democracy, social media, political participation, misinformation, media literacy, platform governance

Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed the media landscape, including who can produce and distribute information. If in the past news production could only be carried out by professional journalists working in established media organizations, today everyone with a phone and an internet connection can record events, write reports, and disseminate them to a global public. This phenomenon is known as citizen journalism. Ordinary citizens who happen to be at the scene can become the first source of information, often even preceding mainstream media. Amateur videos of disasters, demonstrations, or other significant events become highly valuable news sources. This democratization of information production brings new hope for public participation in democratic life. Theoretically, this phenomenon is closely related to the principles of organizational behavior in managing information flow and interactions between individuals (Darmawan, 2013).

Citizen journalism thrives on social media platforms and video-sharing sites such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Citizens can create accounts, record events, and upload them within minutes. Information spreads at a speed that cannot be matched by traditional media, which still undergoes verification and editing processes. This speed is invaluable in emergency situations, disasters, or rapidly evolving events. Citizen journalism also enables coverage of events ignored by mainstream media because they are deemed unimportant or too risky (Noor, 2020). Thus, citizen journalism expands the scope of events that receive public attention and gives a voice to communities that are often marginalized. The effectiveness of the messages conveyed by citizens depends heavily on an understanding of communication functions in building and maintaining the quality of relationships beyond the boundaries of traditional organizations (Gardi et al., 2021).

In the framework of digital democracy, citizen journalism is viewed as an extension of the public sphere where citizens can participate in political discourse (Wall, 2015). Participatory democracy theory emphasizes the importance of citizen involvement in public decision-making processes (Banke et al., 2017). Citizen journalism allows citizens to be not just passive consumers of news but also active producers who help shape the discourse. They can correct erroneous information

disseminated by mainstream media, voice neglected perspectives, and mobilize support for specific issues. This process is part of the formation of self-identity and individual social perception through interaction on social media in an increasingly complex digital world (Darmawan & de Jesus Isaac, 2022). In countries with limited press freedom, citizen journalism often becomes the only alternative source of information that criticizes power (Hasewinkel, 2023). Thus, citizen journalism has the potential to strengthen democracy from the grassroots level.

However, citizen journalism also brings serious challenges to the quality of information and the health of democracy (Kheny, 2019). Citizens are not trained in journalistic codes of ethics, do not have rigorous verification mechanisms, and often do not understand the consequences of what they disseminate. As a result, inaccurate, misleading information, or even hoaxes can spread rapidly. This triggers major challenges for domestic social integration, especially when citizen journalism narratives shift toward populist ethno-religious nationalism (Fariz, 2021). Citizen journalism is also vulnerable to manipulation by political or economic interests (Lai, 2011). Videos that are edited, given false contexts, or even fabricated can easily go viral. In the post-truth era where emotions are more influential than facts, citizen journalism can become a threat to democracy if it is not balanced with adequate digital literacy.

The quality of information produced by citizen journalism varies greatly and is difficult to verify. Some citizens reporting events lack journalistic training, do not understand the principle of balance, and do not perform cross-verification. As a result, their reports are often biased, incomplete, or even incorrect. In a broader context, biased citizen reports can exacerbate inter-ethnic interactions in multicultural residential areas facing specific social dynamics (Aisyah, 2023). In conflict or disaster situations, misinformation can worsen conditions, trigger panic, or even incite violence. Mainstream media that quote citizen journalism sometimes contribute to spreading errors without adequate verification. The public is flooded with information where it is difficult to distinguish what is accurate and what is not. This information crisis erodes public trust in all news sources, including credible ones. Finding the truth amidst a flood of information is becoming increasingly difficult.

Citizen journalism is also vulnerable to co-optation by political and economic interests (SKOURI, 2022). Political parties and interest groups can pay citizens to create content that benefits them. Bots and fake accounts are used to amplify certain messages and attack opponents. This condition exacerbates the prediction economy and instrumental power, where surveillance capitalism begins to have a negative impact on autonomy and democracy (Rojak & Gardi, 2022). Engineered information is designed to influence public opinion and election results. Citizen journalism, which should be the independent voice of the people, can turn into a highly effective propaganda tool because it appears authentic and originates from "ordinary citizens" (Gevorgyan, 2022). The credibility inherent in this impression of authenticity is precisely what is exploited for manipulation. Distinguishing between sincere and manipulated citizen journalism has become a major challenge.

Indonesia will face simultaneous elections in the near future, and social media is predicted to become the primary battleground for political information (Alwatan, 2023). Citizen journalism will play a major role in disseminating information about campaigns, debates, and the voting process (Rastiya & Hendriyani, 2020). Amidst the clamor of information, every individual is required to understand decision theory in order to sort through information objectively (Mardikaningsih, 2018). On one hand, this is positive because there are more eyes monitoring the election process. On the other hand, the potential for the spread of false and provocative information is also significant. Previous election experiences show that hoaxes and hate speech spread widely through content created and shared by citizens. Understanding the dynamics of citizen journalism is crucial for anticipating and mitigating its negative impacts. Therefore, the design and implementation of appropriate communication strategies in change management are needed to face this digital transition (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). This study can provide insights for digital literacy efforts and content supervision.

The crisis of trust in mainstream media in various countries has pushed the public to seek alternatives in citizen journalism (Alwatan, 2023). Many people feel that traditional media is too close to power, too corporate, or too biased (Rastiya & Hendriyani, 2020). Citizen journalism offers perspectives that are closer to the reality of ordinary citizens. This

alternative perspective is important, given the structural inequalities that are often not captured in major issues such as climate change and political vulnerability (Gani, 2022). However, if citizen journalism itself cannot be relied upon, the public will lose their footing entirely. The consequence is a society split into groups with their own "facts" that cannot be reconciled. Polarization deepens, and rational discussion becomes increasingly difficult. Understanding how the quality of citizen journalism can be strengthened while maintaining its independence is a crucial issue for the future of democracy.

This study aims to analyze the contribution of citizen journalism to digital democracy, focusing on the expansion of public participation and the oversight of power. The research will explore how citizen journalism enables ordinary citizens to become information producers, voice marginalized perspectives, and monitor the conduct of government. Additionally, this study aims to identify the challenges and risks of citizen journalism for information quality and the health of democracy, encompassing issues of accuracy, verification, hoaxes, and political manipulation. The analysis will also examine mitigation strategies that can be developed to maximize the positive potential of citizen journalism while minimizing its risks. The theoretical contribution of this study is to present a conceptual mapping of the role of citizen journalism in digital democracy, which can serve as a foundation for future empirical research. Practically, the results of the study are expected to serve as input for citizen journalists, digital platforms, regulators, media literacy activists, and the general public in efforts to build a healthy and democratic information ecosystem. An adequate understanding of the dynamics of citizen journalism is essential to optimize its potential as a pillar of digital democracy.

Method

This research is structured as a literature study with a qualitative approach. This method was chosen because the primary goal of the study is to understand and interpret the phenomenon of citizen journalism in digital democracy through an analysis of relevant literature. As explained by Walliman (2021), research is essentially a systematic process for finding answers to questions, and a literature study is an appropriate choice when

the data source originates from written documentation. The research process follows the guidelines of Snyder (2019), who emphasizes that a literature review as a method must be conducted systematically, transparently, and accountably. The initial step involved identifying and collecting relevant library materials, including textbooks, scientific journal articles, research institute reports, and previous research findings discussing citizen journalism, digital democracy, social media, political participation, and the intersection of these five areas. Data collection was performed using a structured approach with specific keywords to ensure the scope of the study remained focused on the problem formulation.

Data analysis in this study employs qualitative content analysis techniques. Gupta and Gupta (2022) assert that in library research, the researcher acts as the key instrument who interprets the texts. The data is not analyzed statistically, but rather by reading, understanding, and making sense of the arguments within the literature. This process involves data reduction selecting essential parts that answer the research questions and then organizing them into thematic categories. Mohajan (2018) explains that a qualitative approach in the social sciences aims to understand phenomena from the perspective of the idea producers, who in this study are the authors and researchers whose works are being reviewed. The researcher must be able to capture the nuances of thought and academic debate within the literature regarding citizen journalism and digital democracy. Frank and Hatak (2014) underscore that a literature review is not merely a summary, but an effort to build new arguments based on a critical evaluation of existing works. The synthesis from various sources is then compiled into a coherent analytical narrative about citizen journalism in digital democracy.

Result and Discussion

The Contribution of Citizen Journalism to Digital Democracy

Citizen journalism brings significant changes to how society participates in the democratic process. The expansion of public participation is the most fundamental contribution of citizen journalism to democracy. In the traditional media system, only a handful of professional journalists had access to producing news that was widely distributed (Anderson et al., 2016). Ordinary citizens were merely passive consumers, lacking a

voice to shape public discourse. Citizen journalism reverses this logic. Every citizen with a phone and an internet connection can become an information producer, recording events they witness and sharing them with the public. This political participation of citizens in electoral democracy becomes a driving engine for the broader dynamics of civil society movements (Rojak et al., 2021). This participation not only increases the quantity of information but also enriches perspectives. The same event can be viewed from various angles, not just through the lens of professional journalists who may have certain biases. Participatory democracy finds its concrete form in the practice of citizen journalism. Thus, citizen journalism expands the space for public participation in the formation of public discourse.

In addition to expanding participation, citizen journalism also increases oversight of power. The monitoring of power becomes more intensive with the presence of thousands of citizen eyes. Public officials who could once act relatively free from scrutiny due to the limitations of journalists must now realize that any citizen can record and report their actions (Ananny, 2018). Amateur videos of illegal levies, poor service, or inappropriate behavior by officials can go viral and trigger further investigations. The success of this collective oversight is strongly supported by organizational social capital and solid team collaboration as pillars of total quality management in society (Putra et al., 2021). Citizen journalism extends the reach of oversight to corners that mainstream media cannot reach. In countries with limited press freedom, citizen journalism often becomes the only source of critical information about the government. Power becomes more accountable because it is always under potential public spotlight. Therefore, citizen journalism plays a vital role in strengthening the accountability of power within a democratic system.

Another important contribution is the ability of citizen journalism to cover issues that are often ignored by mainstream media. The coverage of events ignored by mainstream media is another vital contribution. Traditional media have limited resources and must choose which events are newsworthy based on commercial considerations. As a result, many important events in small communities or issues that are not commercially attractive are overlooked. Citizen journalism fills this gap by covering local events, the struggles of marginalized communities, or unpopular issues

(Luce et al., 2020). These efforts often require capable communication strategies to manage conflicts within multicultural teams involved in the field (Marsal & Darmawan, 2022). Directly affected citizens can become primary sources, providing an authentic perspective that is often lost in mainstream media coverage. Citizen journalism thus expands the scope of reality that receives public attention. Consequently, citizen journalism helps ensure that various social realities find a place in public reporting.

Another advantage of citizen journalism is seen in the speed of information delivery. The speed of information delivery in emergency situations is an advantage of citizen journalism that cannot be matched by traditional media (Thorsen, 2020). During natural disasters, accidents, or terrorist attacks, citizens at the scene can immediately record and upload the situation. The speed of access to digital information is comparable to the relevance of email marketing, which remains vital in the contemporary digital marketing communication mix (Sinambela & Darmawan, 2021). This information is invaluable for aid coordination, public safety, and situational awareness. Mainstream media often rely on citizen content for their initial coverage. In some cases, citizen videos become crucial evidence for investigations into human rights violations or war crimes. The speed of citizen journalism saves lives and aids in the enforcement of justice. Therefore, citizen journalism plays a strategic role in the rapid dissemination of information during emergency situations.

In addition, citizen journalism also functions as a correction mechanism for mainstream media. Citizen journalism serves as a corrector for mainstream media (Noor, 2017). When traditional media make mistakes or exhibit bias in reporting, citizens who possess information can provide corrections via social media. Alternative facts, different perspectives, or contradictory evidence can be disseminated to counter dominant narratives. Reflection on the truth of this information aligns with the juridical foundation in social welfare theory to support sustainable public policy (Rizky & Udjari, 2021). This corrective function is vital for maintaining media accountability and ensuring the public receives more balanced information. Citizen journalism thus becomes a mechanism of checks and balances within the overall media ecosystem. Mainstream media must be more cautious because they know their errors will be immediately corrected

by the public. Consequently, citizen journalism helps maintain the quality and accuracy of information in the public sphere.

Another significant role of citizen journalism is the empowerment of groups that have been marginalized until now. The empowerment of marginal communities is a crucial aspect of citizen journalism. Groups that previously lacked access to mainstream media, such as indigenous peoples, the urban poor, or minorities, can now voice their own aspirations and struggles. They no longer need to depend on representation by outside journalists who may not understand their context. Citizen journalism allows stories of injustice, resistance, and hope to be conveyed directly from a first-person perspective (Moyo, 2016). This demonstrates the dynamics of adaptive capacity and the transformation process within the discourse of social resilience (Oluwatosin et al., 2023). This is not only symbolically empowering but can also mobilize tangible support. Issues that have long been ignored can gain public attention because they are consistently voiced by the affected communities. Therefore, citizen journalism provides a fairer space of representation for marginalized groups in society.

The diversity of perspectives presented by citizen journalism also enriches public discussion. Citizen journalism enriches public discourse with a diversity of viewpoints. In traditional media, the dominant perspective is often that of powerful groups, both economically and politically. Citizen journalism opens up space for various alternative viewpoints that may not align with the mainstream (Tshabangu, 2019). This shift demands a balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility to maintain social solidarity in an era of individualism (Saputra & Darmawan, 2021). Public debate becomes richer because it involves more voices. Citizens are exposed to various ways of understanding an issue, rather than just one dominant narrative. Exposure to this diversity of perspectives is essential for developing critical thinking and tolerance. A healthy democracy requires citizens who are accustomed to differences of opinion. Thus, citizen journalism strengthens the quality of deliberation within the democratic public sphere.

In addition to enriching public discussion, citizen journalism also plays a role in mobilizing social movements. Social mobilization and collective movements are facilitated by citizen journalism (Pain, 2018).

Information regarding protests, campaigns, or social movements can be disseminated quickly and widely. Citizens can organize themselves without going through slow formal structures. Citizen journalism becomes a tool for spreading a vision, coordinating actions, and building solidarity. This dynamic is also influenced by worker anxiety regarding shifting roles due to artificial intelligence applications in various human resource management contexts (Mardikaningsih et al., 2023). Major movements such as the Arab Spring or Black Lives Matter relied heavily on content created and shared by citizens. Citizen journalism thus serves as the communication infrastructure for contemporary social movements. Therefore, citizen journalism plays a vital role in the dynamics of modern social movements.

Citizen journalism also contributes to increasing the transparency of political processes. The transparency of political processes improves with the presence of citizen journalism. Citizens can cover court proceedings, council meetings, or voting processes that might not be covered by mainstream media. Amateur videos of election fraud, intimidation, or procedural violations can serve as crucial evidence to demand justice. Citizen journalism expands the reach of public oversight over political processes that determine their fate (Min, 2018). The understanding of these choices is closely related to student rationality in considering certain factors when choosing a political party (Ujianto & Darmawan, 2003). The more eyes that watch, the less room there is for manipulation and fraud. This transparency is the foundation of a healthy democracy. Thus, citizen journalism contributes to maintaining the integrity of political processes.

Overall, these various contributions demonstrate the great potential of citizen journalism in strengthening democracy. Citizen journalism has significant potential to strengthen democracy (Mahamed et al., 2018). The expansion of participation, oversight of power, coverage of neglected issues, speed of information, corrective functions, empowerment of the marginalized, diversity of perspectives, social mobilization, and political transparency are tangible contributions that have been proven in various contexts. Citizen journalism brings democracy closer to the ideal of active citizen participation and diverse information. However, this potential will only be realized if its challenges can be overcome. Consequently,

strengthening the practice of citizen journalism becomes an important step toward a participatory and transparent digital democracy.

Challenges and Risks of Citizen Journalism and Mitigation Strategies

Despite having much positive potential, citizen journalism also faces various serious challenges that can affect the quality of public information. Accuracy and verification are the most serious challenges in citizen journalism (Zeng et al., 2019). Citizens reporting events do not have training on how to verify information, check sources, or ensure balance. They may only see a fragment of an event and draw the wrong conclusion. In emotional situations, reports can become highly biased. As a result, inaccurate information can spread rapidly, causing panic, slander, or even violence. Mainstream media that quote citizen journalism without adequate verification contribute to spreading errors. This crisis of accuracy erodes public trust in all information. Mitigation requires a combination of media literacy for citizens, platforms that provide verification mechanisms, and collaboration with professional journalists to verify viral content. This mitigation step is also closely related to the realization of effective public service-oriented governance to maintain the welfare of the broader community (Rojak, 2021). Thus, increasing verification capabilities becomes an important step in maintaining the credibility of journalism.

In addition to accuracy issues, citizen journalism is also vulnerable to being exploited for the spread of hoaxes and disinformation. Hoaxes and disinformation are intentionally spread by capitalizing on the credibility of citizen journalism (Nguyen & Scifo, 2018). Malicious actors create fake content that looks like reports from ordinary citizens, complete with amateur video and an authentic impression. This phenomenon is exacerbated by a culture of utilizing authentic impressions and the commodification of parasocial bonds, which have become main pillars in today's social media ecosystem (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2022). This content is designed to influence public opinion, bring down political opponents, or create chaos. Because it appears authentic, the public is more likely to believe it. Citizen journalism, which should be an alternative source of information, instead becomes a primary vehicle for disinformation. Mitigation requires early detection by platforms, labeling

of questionable content, and public education on the characteristics of hoaxes. Collaboration with professional fact-checkers is also vital to stem the spread of disinformation. Therefore, efforts to combat hoaxes become an essential part of maintaining the integrity of citizen journalism.

Another challenge that arises is the increasing political polarization in the digital space. Political polarization is deepened by citizen journalism because social media algorithms tend to strengthen echo chambers. Citizens are more exposed to content that aligns with their own views, reinforcing existing beliefs. Information about the atrocities of opposing groups spreads widely, while information about their virtues is ignored. As a result, the chasm between groups grows deeper and more difficult to bridge. Citizen journalism, which should enrich perspectives, instead narrows insights. This condition demands an in-depth analysis of algorithmic bias and the automation of justice to guide social transformation in the era of artificial intelligence (Mardikaningsih & Oluwatoyin, 2023). Mitigation requires algorithmic interventions that encourage exposure to different perspectives, as well as public education about the dangers of echo chambers (Alatawi et al., 2021). Initiatives to bring together citizens from various backgrounds in online discussions are also important. Thus, algorithmic management and increasing public awareness become essential steps to reduce polarization.

Citizen journalism also risks being manipulated by certain political and economic interests. Manipulation by political and economic interests is a major risk. Political parties, candidate leaders, and interest groups can pay citizens to create content that benefits them (Dalton, 2018). Fake accounts and bots are used to amplify specific messages and attack opponents. Citizen journalism that appears independent turns out to be part of an organized campaign. The public is manipulated by content designed to influence their opinions. Such manipulation has the potential to cause social exclusion and the marginalization of vulnerable groups within existing social structures (Hartono, 2021). Mitigation requires transparency regarding content sponsorship, law enforcement against manipulative practices, and public education about propaganda techniques. Platforms also need to improve detection of fake accounts and inauthentic behavior. Therefore, transparency and oversight are key to preventing manipulation in the practice of citizen journalism.

Furthermore, the aspects of security and privacy for citizen journalists are also a significant concern. The protection of privacy and security for citizen journalists is often neglected. Citizens who record sensitive events, such as human rights violations or corruption, can become targets of intimidation, violence, or legal action. Their identities can be easily traced through metadata or facial recognition (Dubberley et al., 2020). Unlike professional journalists who have protection from media organizations and professional associations, citizen journalists work alone without protection. In facing legal cases related to speech in the digital space, the implementation of restorative justice can serve as a normative solution based on the ITE Law and the Criminal Code (Darmawan & Negara, 2023). Mitigation requires education on digital security, guidance on how to protect identity, and legal support for citizen journalists under threat. In addition to legal protection, attention to the well-being of individuals who volunteer also impacts the performance of public organizations in providing services to the community (Gautama, et al., 2021). Platforms also need to provide emergency reporting mechanisms and content protection. Thus, security protection becomes a vital factor in maintaining the sustainability of citizen journalism.

Another challenge relates to the digital divide that affects representation in citizen journalism. The digital divide and unequal representation are also issues. Citizen journalism is dominated by those who have access to technology and digital skills, typically the urban middle class. The voices of the poor, remote, or less educated communities remain marginalized. Citizen journalism does not automatically create diverse representation; instead, it can reinforce the dominance of certain groups. Mitigation requires specific efforts to empower marginalized communities to use technology, providing access to devices and the internet, and supporting platforms that are user-friendly for those with limited skills (Komi et al., 2021). Digital inclusion is a prerequisite for truly representative citizen journalism. Therefore, the equalization of technological access becomes an important step in creating more inclusive participation.

In addition to the issue of representation, citizen journalism also faces the issue of economic exploitation by digital platforms. The commercial exploitation of citizen content by digital platforms is also an

issue. Social media platforms reap huge profits from content created by citizens, while the content creators themselves receive no compensation (Kopf, 2020). Viral content generates advertising revenue enjoyed by the platform, not the creator. This business model creates a new inequality where the economic value of content is taken over by corporations. Mitigation requires a fairer revenue-sharing model, donation or crowdfunding mechanisms for citizen journalists, and support for non-commercial platforms. Citizen journalism must not become a new source of exploitation. Thus, a fairer digital economic system is needed for citizen content creators.

Another challenge arises from the side of regulation governing the practice of citizen journalism. Inappropriate regulation can silence citizen journalism while also protecting against negative impacts (Roberts, 2019). On one hand, regulation is necessary to crack down on hoaxes, hate speech, and other illegal content. On the other hand, regulations that are too broad or unclear can be misused to silence criticism and opinions disliked by those in power. Citizen journalism that is critical of the government can be criminalized under accusations of spreading false information. Mitigation requires targeted regulation, with clear definitions and protection for freedom of expression. Public participation in the formulation of regulation and independent oversight of its enforcement is very important. Therefore, balanced regulation is highly necessary so that citizen journalism remains free yet responsible.

Low levels of digital literacy among the public also exacerbate the various risks in the practice of citizen journalism. Low digital literacy among the public worsens all the risks mentioned above. Citizens who do not understand how algorithms work, cannot distinguish hoaxes, and are unaware of their own biases will continue to be victims of manipulation. Citizen journalism will become a source of disinformation rather than quality information. Long-term mitigation is comprehensive digital literacy education, starting from elementary school to the general public (Lev-On et al., 2021). The curriculum needs to cover the ability to search for, evaluate, and produce digital information ethically. Public campaigns on digital literacy need to be promoted massively. Thus, increasing digital literacy becomes an essential foundation for the quality of information in the era of citizen journalism.

Overall, these various challenges show that citizen journalism requires serious management so that its positive potential can be maximized. Through the analysis of the challenges and risks of citizen journalism, it is found that its positive potential is balanced by serious risks. Accuracy, hoaxes, polarization, political manipulation, journalist security, gaps in representation, commercial exploitation, inappropriate regulation, and low literacy are challenges that must be faced (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). Mitigation requires a multilevel approach involving individuals, communities, platforms, regulators, and civil society. There is no single solution, but rather a combination of complementary strategies. Citizen journalism will never be perfect, but its quality can be improved. Consequently, collaborative efforts from various parties are highly necessary to ensure that citizen journalism can develop in a healthy and responsible manner.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed citizen journalism in digital democracy by tracing its contributions, challenges, and mitigation strategies. Citizen journalism contributes significantly to digital democracy through various mechanisms. The expansion of participation allows ordinary citizens to become producers of information rather than merely passive consumers. Monitoring of power becomes more intensive with thousands of eyes recording and reporting the actions of officials. Coverage of events ignored by mainstream media gives a voice to marginalized communities and local issues. The speed of information in emergency situations saves lives and assists in aid coordination. The corrective function maintains the accountability of mainstream media. Empowering marginalized communities enables them to voice their own aspirations and struggles. A diversity of perspectives enriches public discourse and develops critical thinking. Social mobilization is facilitated by the rapid dissemination of information. Transparency in political processes increases with citizen coverage. However, this potential is balanced by serious challenges. Accuracy and verification become problematic due to the lack of journalistic training. Hoaxes and disinformation are deliberately spread by exploiting the credibility of citizen journalism. Political polarization is deepened by algorithmic echo chambers. Manipulation by political and

economic interests undermines independence. Privacy protection and the safety of citizen journalists are often neglected. The digital divide leads to uneven representation. Commercial exploitation of citizen content creates new inequalities. Inappropriate regulation can silence freedom of expression. Low digital literacy exacerbates all risks. Mitigation requires a multilevel approach: media literacy, collaborative verification, targeted regulation, protection of citizen journalists, algorithmic ethics, and empowerment of marginalized communities. Citizen journalism is a double-edged sword that can strengthen or weaken democracy depending on how it is managed.

The findings of this study imply the need for an ecosystem approach to develop healthy citizen journalism. Digital literacy education must become a national priority, starting from school curricula to general public training. Social media platforms need to take greater responsibility for verifying viral content, providing context, and limiting the spread of hoaxes. Regulation needs to be carefully designed to crack down on illegal content without silencing freedom of expression. Collaboration between professional journalists and citizen journalists needs to be facilitated, for example, through mentoring programs or collaborative platforms. Legal protection for citizen journalists covering sensitive issues needs to be strengthened. Civil society needs to continue advocating for transparency in algorithms and platform business models. Funding for independent and high-quality citizen journalism initiatives needs to be provided. Citizen journalism cannot be left to develop on its own; it requires systemic support to maximize its positive potential.

Further research is suggested to conduct empirical studies on the practice of citizen journalism in Indonesia, including motivations, challenges, and its impact on political participation. Comparative studies between platforms and between countries will provide insight into the factors that influence the quality of citizen journalism. Research on the effectiveness of various digital literacy interventions to improve the quality of citizen content needs to be carried out. For policymakers, it is recommended to formulate regulations that protect freedom of expression while cracking down on hoaxes and hate speech with clear definitions. Social media platforms need to develop features that facilitate verification, such as labeling unverified content and partnering

with fact-checkers. Journalist organizations need to develop training and mentoring programs for citizen journalists. Schools and universities need to integrate digital literacy into the curriculum. Civil society needs to build content monitoring networks to detect and report hoaxes. The public needs to be educated to always verify before sharing and not to easily trust content that triggers emotions.

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