The Roles of Citizen Journalists in Malaysia's Political Landscape

Haji Mohd Shahnawi Bin Haji Muhmad Pirus*
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Nor Nabilah Binti Abdullatif
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

*Corresponding email: dr_shahnawi@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

The term "citizen journalism" refers to a phenomenon in which citizens participated actively in the process of news-gathering and reporting. The advent of social media and blogging had caused the roles of citizen journalists to be more valuable than ever. This phenomenon provides invaluable information that can democratise media, as well as nations. This research aimed to understand the roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape, to ascertain the contributory factors to the rise of citizen journalists and to explore the effects of citizen journalism in Malaysia's political landscape. The research adopted qualitative approach and the sample of this study involved Malaysians, both male and female, between 23 and 40 years old who are actively using social media. NVivo 12 was used in the process of coding. The outcome of this study revealed there were two roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape; (i) the spread of fake news, and (ii) the breach of privacy. The emergence of social media, and bias reporting on mainstream media were the contributory factors to the rise of citizen journalists. The effects of citizen journalism on Malaysia's political landscape which were disclosed in the study were in terms of the accessibility of political news and the use of cybertroopers.

Keywords: *citizen journalism, social media, fake news, breach of privacy, cybertroopers*

Received: 7 July 2023 | Reviewed: 18 Aug 2023 | Accepted: 12 Sept 2023 | Published: 31 Oct 2023
DOI: https://doi.org/10.24191/FK.V18i2.2023_03

Peranan Wartawan Warga dalam Landskap Politik Malaysia

Abstrak

Istilah "kewartawanan warga" merujuk kepada fenomena di mana rakyat melibatkan diri secara aktif dalam proses pengumpulan dan pelaporan berita. Kemunculan sosial media dan blog telah menyebabkan peranan wartawan warga menjadi lebih bernilai daripada sebelumnya. Fenomena ini memberikan maklumat yang tidak ternilai yang dapat mendemokrasikan media dan juga negara. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk memahami peranan wartawan warga dalam landskap politik Malaysia, untuk mengenal pasti faktor penyumbang kepada peningkatan wartawan warga dan untuk meneroka kesan kewartawanan warga dalam landskap politik Malaysia. Penyelidikan ini dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan kaedah kualitatif dan sampel terdiri daripada lelaki dan wanita warganegara Malaysia berumur 23 hingga 40 tahun yang aktif menggunakan media sosial. NVivo 12 digunakan semasa proses pengekodan. Hasil penyelidikan ini menunjukkan terdapat dua peranan wartawan warga dalam landskap politik Malaysia; (i) penyebaran berita palsu, dan (ii) pelanggaran hak privasi. Kemunculan media sosial, dan pelaporan berat sebelah di media arus perdana menyumbang kepada peningkatan wartawan warga. Kesan kewartawanan warga terhadap landskap politik Malaysia yang dinyatakan dalam penyelidikan ini adalah dari segi akses kepada maklumat politik dan penggunaan cybertroopers.

Kata Kunci: *kewartawanan warga, media sosial, pelanggaran hak privasi, cybertroopers*

Introduction

The spread of Internet access is growing rapidly, especially in rural areas. A study reported half of Malaysia's population especially under 30 years old represent one of the highest rates of people worldwide using social networking sites as a platform to share and report news (Irene, 2017). In Malaysia, the online news portal Malaysiakini is one of the platforms that is provided for citizen journalists to publish articles, photos, and videos. Citizen journalists often works in different fields and comes from various backgrounds. They usually report on events that occur in their areas, and several issues that matter to them. Some topics covered by citizen journalists include culture, arts, health issues, politics, and sports.

Three common social networking sites which are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become sources of news and information. The features of social media allow people to receive an up-to-minute reports, especially from the citizen journalists. One of the examples of the involvement of citizen journalists can be portrayed in a protest that occurred in Istanbul. According to Saka (2018), almost every aspect of citizen journalists' role can be seen in the protest. Lack of mainstream media coverage was to be blamed on causing the citizens' participation in framing news from the outset.

New media that serves a platform for citizen journalism had broken the traditional media's monopoly in news (Leong, 2015). Citizen journalists in Malaysia can transcend ethnic and religious barriers among Malaysians. According to Swart et al. (2016) these citizen journalists can also influence community, social cohesion, and decision-making. Miller (2019) mentioned that citizen journalists are important in capturing the overall diversity of mindsets, views, and cultures that exist in the community. However, the approach of news reporting practised by citizen journalists may contradict journalistic reporting norms in certain ways (Miller, 2019).

As previously mentioned, citizen journalists tend to report on issues that matters to them, and the news often attracts people who are like-minded. The sources of the news by citizen journalists had impacted the way the news are being portrayed and the perspectives of the news. This approach of news reporting is not practised by professional journalists in mainstream media unless there are emotional components in it. Also, often raised an issue on the credibility of the news sources.

One of the significant studies related to the research was conducted by Noor (2016). The study provided comparisons in terms of challenges faced by citizen journalists and professional journalists. The findings of the study revealed that not many challenges were posed by citizen journalists as compared to professional journalists. Professional journalists on mainstream media were claimed to enjoy more authenticity and credibility among the audience or readers because of their well-established system of functioning, which emphasizes on accuracy (Noor, 2016). Most readers or audiences would prefer news and information shared by professional journalists over the citizen journalists. Hence, the author concluded that it is a clear indication that citizen journalists will not be able to replace the roles of professional journalists on mainstream media (Noor, 2016).

The findings of the study conducted by Noor (2016) is in contrast to an earlier study by Khasib (2015) entitled "The Relationship between Citizen and Mainstream Journalism for Covering Syria News". The author claimed that the roles of citizen journalists in Syria is important because they publish videos and photos on YouTube while mainstream media made news blackout for the Syria News (Khasib, 2015). Although, the action of citizen journalists was considered dangerous and could cause harm to themselves, their main intention was to make the issue a global issue, and make the audiences feel empathetic towards the Syrian citizens. Syrian citizen journalists have covered Syrian news for 24 hours since 2011. Some of them were even killed while trying to cover stories and news on the happenings in Syria (Khasib, 2015).

When it comes to news on politics, cybertroopers are often involved. Prakash (2021) defined the term cybertroopers as the people who were hired to propagate the public on the political propaganda in the social media platforms. The term is originated from Malaysia, and it is now used globally. Bradshaw and Howard (2019) reported that 89 percent of the cybertroopers globally deploy computational propaganda to target political opponents. In Malaysia, when connecting with online users, cybertroopers employ a range of message and valence methods which are supporting, attacking and suppressing the opponents.

As it can be seen, many studies have been conducted on citizen journalism. However, one of the weaknesses that can be found in previous studies is in terms of the context of the study. The studies discussed the impact of citizen journalism on mainstream media in the context of Arabic and Western countries. These studies only provided the general impact of citizen journalism that might not be suitable and related to Malaysian context.

Literature Review

The Roles of Citizen Journalists in Malaysia's Political Landscape

Luce, Jackson, and Thorsen (2016) mentioned citizen journalists have the opportunity to educate, and inform the public. The audiences and readers used to be considered as passive receivers of media messages, and information. However, as the technology developed, they have become more active and able to express their voices and opinions publicly. They are involved in creating, sharing and commenting on the news. These sense of users' participation and active role rather than passive in the news process raises the idea of citizen journalism. There are two roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape which are discussed in this study; (i) the spread of fake news, and (ii) the breach of privacy.

The claim that citizen journalists are responsible in spreading fake news in political landscape was supported by an article written by Tandoc et al. (2018). Fake news or misinformation had existed since the evolution of writing systems. Nowadays, social media is an important tool

used by citizen journalists which is not only marked by having a mass audience, they also facilitate speedy exchange and spread of information. Unfortunately, they have also facilitated the spread of wrong information, such as fake news. Those who usually posts and shares information on their social media sites seldom verify the information. When a post is accompanied by many likes, shares, or comments, it is more likely to be accepted. Popularity on social media is thus a self-fulfilling cycle, one that blends well to the propagation of unverified information.

One of the significant comparisons between citizen journalism and traditional journalism is the accuracy of the information. In traditional journalism, editors are assigned to check for the factual accuracy of the news. However, the same rule does not apply to citizen journalism. No specific person is assigned to monitor, regulate, and check for the accuracy of the news. Citizen journalists are able to report any news even those that are not verified. In this post-truth era, fake news can easily spread in just a split second and before we even realized, it has reached to people around the world (Craigie-Williams, 2018).

Ritonga and Syahputra (2019) had indicated that fake news or misinformation caused chaos in Indonesia's political landscape. The authors mentioned that it was difficult for them to distinguish between real news and fake news that was intentionally created to delegitimise the other party that have different political opinions. Indonesia's 2019 presidential election witnessed the war of social media that had caused fake news and misinformation in the political landscape. News reported by Mokhtar (2019) supported the claim where the author mentioned that the fake news in Indonesia had worsened in the past few years, and it might be due to the rise of population who are connected to mobile phones, and Internet. Other reasons contributing to the problem are low digital literacy, and educational levels, especially in the rural areas.

There were issues around ethics and media literacy that occurs in citizen journalism. Citizen journalists may not be aware of questions of privacy or legal restrictions (Cooper, 2015). These citizen journalists tend to post online video footage, photographs, and even comments that can cause harm towards someone's private sphere. Some people claimed citizen journalists will make the authorities, and public figures more accountable, as they can no longer assume that their conduct will remain largely insulated from public view. However, others raise concerns about the impact of some forms of citizen journalism on personal privacy.

According to Moyo (2016), the phenomenon of citizen journalism has raised concern about privacy. The author referred to the case of citizen journalists reporting the Arab Spring in Tunisia. Mohamed Bouazizi, a

street vendor had set himself on fire in 2011. His action was a protest towards the government. Citizen journalists recorded the incident, and it garnered huge attention or also known as viral that led to the ignition of the revolution that is also known as Arab Spring. However, critics had emerged because their action seemed to ignore the aspects of privacy, and values like grief, and mourning. In addition to the graphic nature of the images, a major concern for the phenomenon was the privacy of the victims and the possible use of their images. Whereas in the traditional news media, editorial guidelines require such images to be filtered before being disseminated.

The Contributory Factors to the Rise of Citizen Journalists

According to Balaraman et al. (2015), the emergence of new media such as websites and weblogs have made it easier to reach and penetrate the international community. The advent of technology has caused the increasing of citizen journalists. Thus, there were two

contributory factors discussed in this study which were the emergence of social media, and bias reporting on mainstream media.

Social media can be considered as an important tool that contributed to the rise of citizen journalists. The claim was supported by a journal article written by Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2016). The emergence of social media like Twitter, Blog, Youtube, Facebook and Instagram allows citizens to share news and information. They are free to comment or participate meaningfully in local and global debates. The participations range from the accidental journalists providing user-generated content to the social sharing practices that shaped engagement with news events either small or large.

Tandoc et al. (2018) had also indicated that social media offers a wider platform for citizen journalists because they can easily post information, photos, videos, and narratives about newsworthy events they witness first-hand. Twitter is one the social media for citizen journalists to quickly disseminate details about breaking event or news. Not only did social media change news distribution, but it has also challenged traditional beliefs of how news should look. Now, a tweet, which at most is 140 characters long, can be considered as a piece of news, especially if it comes from a person of authority.
It is undeniable that social media has changed the field of journalism. The public has the ability to create and share stories as preferred. Citizen journalism often occurs when non-professional journalists contribute stories through live tweeting events or sharing their eyewitness account of an event which is considered breaking news. When a news outlet has no correspondents in that area, they will often rely on Twitter or other social networking sites to find eyewitness accounts which is very effective in getting news out quickly (Williams, 2018).

The rise of citizen journalists had also caused by the loss of trust in mainstream media reporting. It can be proven via a poll collected by an organization in America named Gallup. It was reported that American's trust on mainstream media in reporting news had reached its lowest point in history. Only 32 percent of Americans who claimed they have a fair amount of trust on news delivered on the mainstream media (Bernstein, 2017).

Newman and Fletcher (2017) wrote a report that was intended to explore the underlying reasons for low trust in the news media across nine countries (United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Australia, France, and Greece). The authors found the concern about bias reporting on mainstream media were highest in the United States and United Kingdom which were 77 percent, and 74 percent respectively. Germany was the lowest in the ranking, which was only 51 percent. In the United States, most of the citizens who complained about political bias were likely to be on low incomes, aged over 50 and male. The worsening economic situation had caused many news organisations to be bias towards their big advertisers or powerful owners in order to survive in the industry.

Alivi et al. (2018) reported news published by mainstream media in Malaysia were bias towards the previous ruling party, Barisan Nasional. They were claimed to use media as a tool for them to maintain their power for over half a century. Since most of the mainstream media were owned by the component party of Barisan Nasional, there were minimum news reports highlighting the weaknesses of the previous

ruling party. Mainstream media in particular, New Straits Times Press, Utusan Malaysia, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), BERNAMA, and Media Prima Berhad are influenced by UMNO. In addition, an English newspaper named The Star is influenced by a component party of BN, which is Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). Bias reporting on mainstream media, especially newspapers had forced readers to look for alternative source of news.

The Effects of Citizen Journalism in Malaysia's Political Landscape

There are many ways that citizen journalism influences the current political landscape. According to an article written by Rae (2015), citizen journalism has changed the domestic

and foreign political landscape. Two effects of citizen journalism were discussed in this study and they are the accessibility of political news, and the use of cybertroopers.

Owen (2017) mentioned the new media, a platform used by citizen journalists had enhanced people's access to political news and information. The accessibility of the political news has increased people's engagement in politics. People are free to comment, share, and voice out their opinion regarding the current political landscape. According to Gecer (2017), the phenomenon of citizen journalism had changed the way people access information. All kinds of news and information can be accessed easily via social media. The news provided by citizen journalists had made it easier for us to find information anywhere. Thus, citizens do not have to only rely on political news which were published on mainstream media anymore.

Kelly and colleagues (2017) reported that Malaysia is one of the countries that employ cybertroopers in political landscape. These cybertroopers are paid by the political parties in order to spread propaganda, and counter critics, or slanders from their rivals. In addition, cybertroopers are also hired to generate favourable content, and disparage the other political parties, and political figures. Other countries that uses the same technique in politics are Thailand, Ukraine, China, Egypt, and Turkey. Only 15 countries were found to not use any manipulation tactics including cybertroopers and they are Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Estonia, Georgia, Iceland, India, Japan, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe .

Hopkins (2013) reported the case of cybertroopers by the previous ruling party, UMNO. New Media Unit (NMU) was set up by UMNO in order to counter false allegations, slanders, and lies from the oppositions. The cybertroopers in NMU were among the citizen journalists who were assigned to respond and comment on online postings. The unit consists of 27 bloggers, and 1800 trained members in social media since 2010. Hopkins (2013) noted cybertroopers have also benefited the political parties in terms of shaping the public opinion. These cybertroopers could help political parties and political figures to influence voters.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research method. One of the important characteristics in qualitative research was exploratory and descriptive focus. Thus, this study was designed as qualitative research because the study was exploratory focus and, it was related to people's experience on the topic. Abakpa et al. (2017) described phenomenology approach as a method for researcher to interpret the phenomenon as accurately as possible, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remained true to the fact. This study used phenomenology approach in terms of understanding the phenomenon of citizen journalism via the personal experiences of the informants. The researchers interpreted the response of the informants and analysed the data in order to understand the roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape.

This study collected data through the method of conducting in-depth interviews. The researcher had asked questions that are related to the topic of citizen journalism. Hence, the researcher was able to explore the informants' views and perspectives on the roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape. The sample of this study involved Malaysians, both male and female, between 23 and 40 years old who are actively using social media. The basic assumption in the selection of this sample is that the citizens' age between 23 and 40 were experienced in voting, matured and observant on the Malaysia's political landscape. The needs to conduct research using the targeted informants was due to the fact that they used social media as platforms to share and deliver news.

The collected data was analysed using a software known as NVivo which was designed for qualitative research. NVivo is a software that helps researchers from time-consuming transcription and boost the accuracy and speed of the analysis process (Zamawe, 2015). Coding refers to the process of using codes in order to detect data which related to the themes. Qualitative data analysis tool such as NVivo is ideal for the task. The first process of coding involved process and initial coding techniques. Then, the data was organized into

categories by using the focused, axial, and theoretical coding techniques. In this study, the informants were addressed as CJ1 to CJ8 (Refer table 1). CJ represents the acronym of 'Citizen Journalist' in the context of this study.

The point of saturated was achieved at 6th informant. The researcher decided to stop the process of data collection entirely at 8th informant. Each interview sessions took an average duration of thirty minutes to forty-five minutes. The informants in this study originated from different states which include Kedah, Kelantan, Perak, and Selangor. They have stayed in Klang Valley for the past few years because of the location of their university, and workplace. Their professions comprised of undergraduate and postgraduate student, administrative assistant, self-employed, translator, and housewife. All of them actively participates in the process of sharing, and delivering news especially on social media.

Table 1: Informants' background

Citizen Journalist (CJ)	Gender	Age	Professions
CJ1	Female	26	Admin Assistant
CJ2	Male	23	Undergraduate Student
CJ3	Female	29	Teacher
CJ4	Female	33	Self-Employed
CJ5	Female	28	Postgraduate Student
CJ6	Female	30	Translator
CJ7	Female	36	Housewife
CJ8	Male	40	Teacher

Results and Discussion

The Phenomenon of Citizen Journalism in Malaysia's Political Landscape: The Citizen Journalists' Thoughts

This research disclosed the informants did not familiar with the term citizen journalism. Hence, it was difficult for them to understand and interpret the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Their comments were stated as follows:

> *Citizen journalism. hmm first time dengar* (CJ8, Age 40)

Translation:

> *Citizen journalism. hmm this is the first time I've heard the term* (CJ8, Age 40)

An undergraduate student commented:

> *Hmm jap [wait]. Hmm I don't think I've heard of it* (CJ2, Age 23)

An informant also mentioned that she never heard of the term citizen journalism.

> *Haa? Apa tu? Hmm tak pernah dengar pun* (CJ7, Age 36)

Translation:

> *Haa? What is that? Hmm never heard of it* (CJ7, Age 36)

The research evaluated the citizen journalists' understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Only some of them were able to construct the meaning of citizen journalism based on the separated term of citizen, and journalism. Their responses were stated as follows:

> *Hmm..if I'm not mistaken I rasa citizen tu die macam refer kepada orang journalism tu die macam more kepada journalist la kan tapi I rasa citizen journalism ni macam orang yang tak ada kena mengena kot dengan journalism.* (CJ3, Age 29)

Translation:

> *Hmm..if I'm not mistaken, I think the citizen refers to the journalist la kan but I think citizen journalism is like people who is not related to journalism.* (CJ3, Age 29)

One of the informants responded citizen journalist refers to citizens who involved in journalism field:

> *Okay. Citizen journalism hmm. Probably related to us, citizen but we, how do we say this? Hmm involved. Ya involved in journalism field or process.* (CJ2, Age 23)

An informant who works as a translator explained:

> *Well, I think, it is a situation where citizens actively participated in journalism processes. They report, share news to the masses. Am I right?* (CJ6, Age 30)

It was found that the informants used to share political news on their social media. The excerpts of their responses were as follows:

> *Yeah. I did. Especially during the last election. Hmm previously, I don't really share about our politics or any topics that related to it. I always avoid to talk about it because hmm it's just too what we called it? Too serious issue.* (CJ6, Age 30)

She also added:

> *Hmm but, last general election is a really important history of our nations. And now, with the scandals of the former government, I think it's really interesting. (CJ6, Age 30)*

An informant mentioned:

> *Of course, I did. I think hmm we, especially young people are hmm more aware in politics (CJ2, Age 23)*

This study also found that most informants have followed political figures on social media and shared some of their posts. Their comments were as follows:

> *Yes absolutely. Che Det and a few more includes Khairy Jamaluddin.* (CJ6, Age 30)

She also added:

> *Oohh I think I have, probably like their comment on certain issue or their response towards a problem or an issue.* (CJ6, Age 30)

An informant who works as a teacher responded:

> *Ada. Macam Tun M, memang confirm la ramai follow kan. Khairy Jamaluddin, Obama and then, sapa tu ahh yang Menteri pertahanan tu? Hmm Mat Sabu* (CJ3, Age 29)

Translation:

> *Yes, I have. Such as Tun M, confirmed followed by a lot of people kan. Khairy Jamaluddin, Obama and then, who is the Minister of Defence? Hmm Mat Sabu.* (CJ3, Age 29)

She also added:

> *ya ya. Pernah. Selalu hmm post mereka ni macam more interesting and informative la bagi I (CJ3, Age 29)*

Translation:

> *Yes, I did. Always hmm their post is more interesting and informative la for me.* (CJ3, Age 29)

The responses obtained from the informants revealed citizen journalism was a fairly new phenomenon in Malaysia and the majority of them have not heard or understand the term. They have also shared political news on their social media especially during the latest general election. It was found that the informants have followed several political figures on social media and shared their posts.

The Roles of Citizen Journalists in Malaysia's Political Landscape

Table 2: Categories and themes derived from in-depth interview with informants on the roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape.

Categories	Themes derived
The spread of fake news	Experience in spreading fake news Validity of news Reasons not to verify news Popularity of news
The breach of privacy	Sharing uncensored photos and videos Privacy of the people involved
TOTAL	**6**

a. The Spread of Fake News

The data of this study revealed that the informants have spread fake news at least once, and they did not even bother to check the validity of the news because it was too time-consuming. The following were the responses of the informants:

> *Mungkin sebab masa la. Nak check validity of the news tu macam ambik masa. Satu-satu you nak check kan. So macam I just post macam tu je la. (CJ3, Age 29)*

Translation:

> *Maybe because of time. It is time-consuming to check the validity of the news. You have to check the facts one-by-one. So, I just posted it as it is. (CJ3, Age 29)*

Some of them determined the validity of the news by its popularity as mentioned in the following excerpts*:*

> *Well, hmm I guess if the news are viral, then there are a lot of sharing, I think that they might be true. For me la. (CJ1, Age 26)*

An undergraduate student supported the claim:

> *Hmm well (pause) I guess if there are a lot of sharing about hmm the news, it's probably true. Maybe. (CJ2, Age 23)*

An informant also mentioned that they did not possess any knowledge on media ethics, and it has caused difficulty for them to verify the news.

> *Hmm actually as citizen journalist myself, I hope I can inform and provide news for other people but we can't also deny the fact that we don't have any knowledge on the media ethics. (CJ6, Age 30)*

She also added:

> *We probably aware that we should check the validity of the news before sharing it but we just don't know how. (CJ6, Age 30)*

In sum, the informants' responses have proved that citizen journalists were responsible for spreading fake news. However, they also mentioned that they were lack of knowledge and did not really know the right way or medium to verify the news.

b. The Breach of Privacy

In this study, the informants mentioned that they tend to ignore the privacy of the people involved in the news, photos, or videos that they shared. They have stated that privacy issues are a small matter, and they never thought that it could cause harm to the people involved. The following excerpts were the data obtained from the informants:

> *Probably because hmm it is too, hmm complicated. Ya lah, before you post, you have to edit la apa [whatnot] la and actually.*
> *sometimes I don't even notice or realized that.* (CJ2, Age 23)

An informant added:

> *Hmmm I don't think so sebab sometimes I tak perasan pun benda macam tu*. (CJ3, Age 29)

Translation:

> *Hmmm I don't think so because sometimes I don't even realised that*. (CJ3, Age 29)

Another informant also mentioned:

> *Hmm I don't think that hmm it's really important and it will become a big issue.* (CJ1, Age 26)

One of the reasons of the breach of privacy that was identified from this study was the informants wanted the readers or viewers to be able to understand the whole story without anything blurred or edited.

> *…because in my opinion, people deserve to know the truth…If you blurred their names or photos. I'm afraid that these people might not get the real picture of the news* (CJ 5, Age 28)

It can be seen that the informants have involved in the breach of privacy and most of them did not even aware that their actions could be dangerous or caused harm to other people. Some informants also intended to convey the whole story without anything censored.

The Contributory Factors to the Rise of Citizen Journalists

Table 3: Categories and themes derived from in-depth interview with informants on the contributory factors to the rise of citizen journalists

Categories	Themes derived
The emergence of social media	Types of social media used Reasons for their preference
Bias reporting on mainstream media	Trusted platform for political news Bias reports on mainstream media
TOTAL	**4**

a. The Emergence of Social Media

The outcome of the study revealed that social media had made it easier and convenient for the informants to share and delivering news. Facebook, and Twitter were the common preferred social media platforms. Other than that, social media was not just as a medium of communication, it was also a source of news. The following excerpt showed the informants' responses:

> *Hmm so based on that social media, I think the most I used is probably. Probably Twitter.* (CJ1, Age 26)

She also added:

> *…because for me, Twitter is more up to date than the others social media like Facebook because hmm you can get more update and the most new update ahh over there and what you just need is repost the info and news hmm that's easy.* (CJ1, Age 26)

One of the informants had preferred Facebook in delivering news. He stated his reason as follows:

> *...hmm other than the fact that it is easy, convenient. Hmm I think that it can reach to the masses. A lot of young people, like myself (giggles) we are always on social media. it is not just a medium of communication, but also hmm source of news.* (CJ2, Age 23)

The emergence of social media has not just functioned as a medium of communication. It is also a medium for citizen journalists to share and deliver news to the masses. This study also identified Facebook and Twitter as the common preferred social media in the process of news sharing and delivering.

b. Bias Reporting on Mainstream Media

In terms of political news, most informants trusted news delivered by citizen journalists on social media to be compared with news delivered by mainstream media due to bias reporting. They mentioned that Utusan Malaysia and TV3 have reported one-sided story especially in the latest general election as described in the following excerpts:

> *Oohhhh okay in terms of political news, I would say not all TV and newspapers hmm media being fair towards all parties, political parties and figures. So, I'm, we need to look for other source of news like social media.* (CJ2, Age 23)

He also added:

> *… obvious one like hmm (pause) TV3. They used to be pro-government for hmm BN. So, the news that on-air was all hmm about BN. That is very bias, in my opinion.* (CJ2, Age 23)

An informant also mentioned that the news that were delivered by Utusan Malaysia and TV3 were vague:

> *Hmm as in a previous election, if you see the news, we can see that certain TV and newspaper such as Utusan was for me la, for me bias towards the BN, the party BN, so the news that they delivered might be vague. So, but some of them la*. (CJ1, Age 26)

An informant who works as a teacher stated:

> *Okay for example macam dulu la kita tengok hmm TV3 hmm macam Buletin Utama dia banyak keluarkan berita-berita yang menyokong satu pihak aja… so hmm hmm jadi berita tu kalau untuk mendapatkan berita yang tak bias tu I akan pergi ke social media la.* (CJ3, Age 26)

Translation:

> *Okay as example, we can see hmm TV3 hmm such as Buletin Utama. They always delivered one-sided news…so hmm in order to get unbias political news, I will refer to social media*. (CJ3. Age 26)

As a result, bias reporting on mainstream media had contributed to the rise of citizen journalists. The informant preferred political news on social media as a source of news as opposed to the news on mainstream media. They mentioned Utusan Malaysia and TV3 as some of the examples of mainstream media in Malaysia with bias reporting.

The Effects of Citizen Journalism in Malaysia's Political Landscape

Table 4: Categories and themes derived from in-depth interview with informants on the effects of citizen journalism in Malaysia's political landscape

Categories	Themes derived
The Accessibility of Political News	Options in choosing selected political news Easily accessible news
The Use of Cybertroopers	Used cybertroopers
TOTAL	**3**

a. The Accessibility of Political News

The phenomenon of citizen journalism had changed the way people access information. All kinds of news and information can be accessed easily via social media. The news provided by citizen journalists had made it easier for us to find information anywhere. Thus, citizens do not have to only rely on political news which were published on mainstream media anymore. The informants' statements were as follows:

> *Hmm I think that citizen journalism has helped us in hmm giving us news and information. Sometimes we are too busy to watch TV or even read newspapers. So, hmm these people help us to gain news on social media. (CJ2, Age 23)*

One of the informants made a comparison with the political landscape before the arising of the citizen journalism:

> *I think that now we have variety of news to choose from. If years ago, people only rely on one type of media to get the news especially the political news la. But now, we can choose hmm which type of media that we want*. (CJ6, Age 30)

Citizen journalism was claimed by the informants to provide more access to the political news. It could be compared with the condition before the phenomenon of citizen journalism in which citizens have to only rely on limited sources of news.

b. The Use of Cybertroopers

Cybertroopers were hired by political parties to promote their propaganda and counter false allegations from the opponents. The technique used in order to gain voters and influence the citizens. Some informants mentioned that citizen journalism has affected Malaysia's political landscape in terms of the use of cybertroopers. The cybertroopers are used to propagate the false allegations and fake news to the voters. Voters will have to choose which source of news that is suitable to their liking.

> *I rasa memang citizen journalism ni memang membantu kita la untuk mendapatkan banyak maklumat especially regarding politics kan… sometimes ada juga some people yang saja create the fake news untuk kepentingan diri sendiri atau parti pilihan mereka macam cybertroopers la.* (CJ3. Age 26)

Translation:

> *I think that citizen journalism is helping us to get a lot of information especially regarding politics…sometimes there are some people who intentionally created fake news for their own benefit or the political party that they chose, just like cybertroopers* (CJ3, Age 26)

Another informant responded:

> *Hmmm with the citizen journalism and social media, I think hmm we as voters have opinion in choosing the source of the news. Political figures and parties also worked with this people in campaign and gain voters.* (CJ1, Age 26)

In sum, it was proven in this study that political parties and political figures had hired cybertroopers among the citizen journalists to gain more supporters. These cybertroopers were hired because they can influence and shape public opinion by their comments, and news that they shared on social media.

Conclusion

The outcome of this study revealed that there were two roles of citizen journalists in Malaysia's political landscape, which were the spread of fake news, and the breach of privacy. The informants mentioned that they were responsible in spreading fake news, and they did not check the validity of the news before sharing it on their social media. The reason of their action was because the process of validating the news is too time-consuming. The validity of the news was influenced by the popularity of the news. The finding of the study disclosed that citizen journalists tend to ignore the privacy of the people involved in the news, photos, or videos that they shared because they did not aware that it could cause harm to the people. Another reason of their action was that they want their followers or readers to be able to understand the whole story without anything censored.

The study reported that there were two contributory factors to the rise of citizen journalists, which were the emergence of social media, and bias reporting on mainstream media. Citizen journalists used social media as a medium to share news because it is user-friendly. Facebook and Twitter were among the common preferred social media used by citizen journalists. Another factor contributed to the rise of citizen journalists was bias reporting on the mainstream media. Referring to the latest general election, citizen journalists mentioned there were some news delivered on mainstream media that were bias. They tend to report a one-sided story. The citizen journalists in this study mentioned Utusan Malaysia and TV3 as examples of mainstream media that published one-sided news.

The phenomenon of citizen journalism had also affected the Malaysia's political landscape. Voters would have more options in choosing the political news because they have more access to the political news. Without citizen journalists, voters have to rely on news on mainstream media since the sources of news are limited. Other than that, political parties and figures also hire cybertroopers for the purpose of influencing and shaping public opinion, and countering fake news and accusations from their rivals

References

Alivi, M. A., Ghazali, A. H. A., Tamam, E., & Osman, M. N. (2018). A Review of New Media in Malaysia: Issues Affecting Society. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 8(2). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v8-i2/3849

Balaraman, R., Hashim, H., Hasno, H., Ibrahim, F., & Arokiasmy, L. (2015). New Media: Online Citizen Journalism and Political Issues in Malaysia. Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum, 23, 143–154.

Benjamin Ogbole Abakpa, Abel Okoh Agbo-Egwu, & Joshua Abah Abah. (2017). Emphasizing phenomenology as a research paradigm for interpreting growth and development in mathematics education. Abacus, 42(1), 391–405.

Cooper, G. (2015, July 14). Does mainstream media have a moral obligation towards citizen journalists? The Conversation. http://theconversation.com/amp/does-mainstream-media-have-amoralobligation-towards-citizen-journalists-43359

Craigie-Williams, G. (2018, January 7). The Rise of Citizen Journalism and Fake News. Medium. http://www.medium.com/@journalismblog/theriseof-citizen-journalism-and-fake-news-a643b318591c

GEÇER, E. (2017). Political communication, citizen journalism and cyber-societies: A faster way towards democracy? Akademik Yaklaşimlar Dergİsİ Journal of Academic Approaches, 8(2), 125–142. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/395504

Group, L. B., Sinclair Broadcast. (2017, February 14). Poll: Mainstream media continues to lose the public's trust. WJLA. https://wjla.com/news/nation-world/main-stream-media-continue-to-lose-the-publics-trust

Hopkins, J. (2014). Cybertroopers and tea parties: government use of the Internet in Malaysia. Asian Journal of Communication, 24(1), 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2013.851721

Irene. (2017, October 1). Citizen journalism brings diversity to media in Malaysia – Decoding Digital Activism. Decoding Digital Activism. https://wpmu.mah.se/nmict172group6/2017/10/01/citizen-journalism-brings-diversity-to-media-in-malaysia/

Kelly, S., Truong, M., Shahbaz, A., Earp, M., White, J., & Dlougatch, R. (2017). Manipulating social media to undermine democracy . In FREEDOM ON THE NET 2017. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FOTN_2017_Final_compressed.pdf

Khasib, N. (2015). The Relationship between Citizen and Mainstream Journalism for Covering Syria News [Review of The Relationship between Citizen and Mainstream Journalism for Covering Syria News]. http://i-rep.emu.edu.tr:8080/jspui/bitstream/11129/2604/1/khanas.pdf

Leong, P. P. Y. (2015). Political Communication in Malaysia: A study on the Use of New Media in Politics. JeDEM - EJournal of EDemocracy and Open Government, 7(1), 46–71. https://doi.org/10.29379/jedem.v7i1.372

Luce, A., Jackson, D., & Thorsen, E. (2016). Citizen Journalism at The Margins. Journalism Practice, 11(2-3), 266–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1222883

Miller, S. (2019). Citizen Journalism. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.786

Mokhtar, F. (2019, April 14). Fake news causing confusion in Indonesia presidential election. TODAY. https://www.todayonline.com/getting-people-wise-fake-news-ongoing-battle-indonesia

Moyo, L. (2016). Crossing Taboo Lines: Citizen Journalism Ethics in Political Crisis Settings. Palgrave Macmillan UK EBooks, 34–58. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137554505_3

Newman, N., & Fletcher, R. (2017, February 25). Bias, bullshit and lies: Audience perspectives on low trust in the media. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/bias-bullshit-and-lies-audience-perspectives-low-trust-media

Noor, R. (2016). Citizen Journalism vs. Mainstream Journalism: A Study on Challenges Posed by Amateurs. Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications, 3(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.30958/ajmmc.3.1.4

Owen, D. (2018). The age of perplexity: Rethinking the world we knew.

Prakash, G. (2021, January 14). Report: Malaysian cybertrooper teams employ full-time staff, used by politicians and businesses alike | Malay Mail. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/01/14/report-malaysian-cybertrooper-teams-employ-full-time-staff-used-by-politici/1940305

Rae, M. (2015, August 19). Citizen Journalism in the Post-Modern World. CGCS Media Wire: http://global.asc.upenn.edu/citizen-journalism-inthepost-modern-world/

Saka, E. (2017). The role of social media-based citizen journalism practices in the formation of contemporary protest movements. Rethinking Ideology in the Age of Global Discontent, 48–66. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315109008-4

Swart, J., Peters, C., & Broersma, M. (2016). Repositioning news and public connection in everyday life: a user-oriented perspective on inclusiveness, engagement, relevance, and constructiveness. Media, Culture & Society, 39(6), 902–918. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716679034

Syahputra, I., & Ritonga, R. (2019). Citizen Journalism and Public Participation in the Era of New Media in Indonesia: From Street to Tweet. Media and Communication, 7(3), 79. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i3.2094

Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “Fake News.” Digital Journalism, 6(2), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Wahl-Jorgensen, K., Williams, A., Sambrook, R., Harris, J., Garcia-Blanco, I., Dencik, L., Cushion, S., Carter, C., & Allan, S. (2016). The Future of Journalism. Digital Journalism, 4(7), 809–815. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1199469

Zamawe, F. (2015). The implication of using nvivo software in qualitative data analysis: Evidence-Based reflections. Malawi Medical Journal, 27(1), 13. https://doi.org/10.4314/mmj.v27i1.4