

Participatory News Production in Local Digital Media: Citizen Journalism and Information Credibility on Instagram @infogarut

Chotijah Fanaqi¹, Hadiati², Naila Syahira Fitri³

^{1,2,3} Communication Science, Universitas Garut

Email: chotijah@uniga.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital media has fostered the emergence of participatory journalism practices that enable communities to actively engage in the production and dissemination of information. Instagram has become one of the platforms facilitating such participation, including through the local digital media account @infogarut, which utilizes citizens' contributions in delivering public information. This study aims to analyze the forms of citizen journalism participation, editorial policies, and information credibility verification mechanisms implemented by @infogarut. A descriptive qualitative approach within a post-positivist paradigm was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving media managers and citizen journalism contributors. The analysis was guided by Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory, which examines participation in decision-making, implementation, benefit-taking, and evaluation. The findings reveal that citizen participation is manifested through the submission of information, photographs, and videos related to various events occurring within the community. To maintain information quality, @infogarut implements editorial policies through content selection, source verification, fact-checking, and information credibility assessment prior to publication. The findings further indicate that citizen journalism contributes to accelerating the dissemination of local information and increasing public engagement in the news production process. Nevertheless, this practice continues to face challenges associated with information accuracy, verification procedures, and ethical responsibilities in digital content publication. This study confirms that collaboration between citizens and local digital media has strengthened participatory news production practices while simultaneously expanding public involvement within the digital information ecosystem.

Keywords: citizen journalism, participation, local digital media; Instagram, information credibility, editorial policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the ways in which societies produce, access, and disseminate information. The rapid development of the internet and social media has enabled the public to move beyond their traditional role as information consumers and become active producers and distributors of information through various digital platforms. This phenomenon has stimulated the emergence of citizen journalism, which refers to journalistic activities conducted by individuals outside the profession of journalism (Nuri, 2023). The rise of citizen journalism reflects a significant shift in mass communication patterns, moving from a predominantly one-way communication model toward a more participatory and collaborative communication environment.

The development of citizen journalism in Indonesia gained substantial momentum following the 2004 Aceh tsunami, when documentation created by local citizens became an important source of information for both national and international media organizations (Nuri, 2023).

Along with advances in digital technology, people have gained easier access to documenting and disseminating information through smartphones and social media platforms. Within this context, citizen journalism provides opportunities for communities to communicate information directly, present diverse perspectives, and accelerate information dissemination, particularly during emergencies or unexpected events (Nuri, 2023).

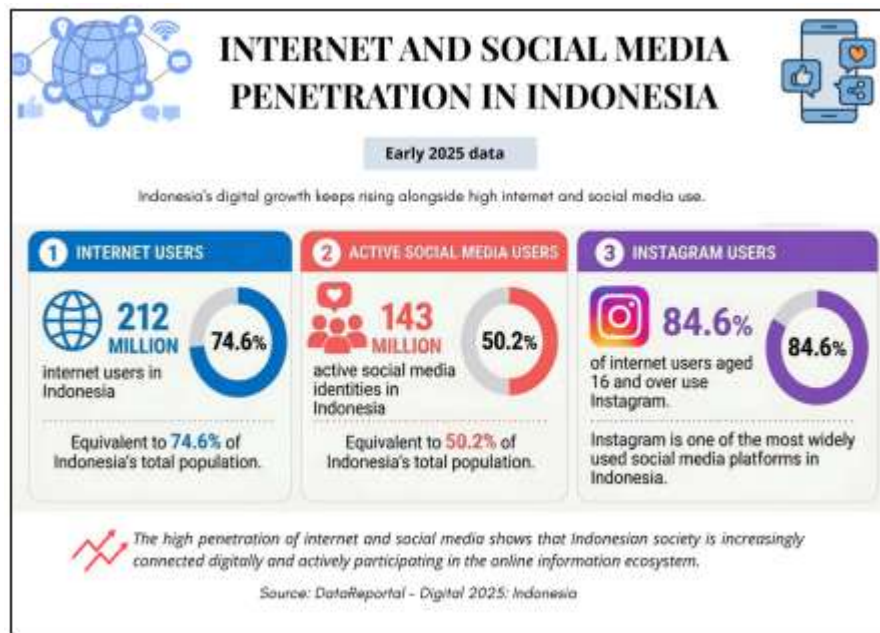


Figure 1. Internet and Social Media Penetration Rates in Indonesia

Source: DataReportal, 2025

This development is further supported by Indonesia's high internet and social media penetration rates. According to DataReportal (2025), Indonesia had approximately 212 million internet users, equivalent to 74.6% of the total population, at the beginning of 2025. During the same period, there were approximately 143 million active social media identities, representing 50.2% of the Indonesian population. Furthermore, Instagram has become one of the most widely used social media platforms in Indonesia, with a usage rate reaching 84.6% among internet users aged 16 years and older. These figures indicate that social media has evolved into a strategic digital public sphere where communities can both consume and produce information.

One example of the development of citizen journalism on social media can be observed through the Instagram account @infogarut. As a local digital media platform in Garut Regency, this account not only disseminates information obtained from internal journalists but also actively involves citizens in the news production process by encouraging them to submit photographs, videos, and reports concerning various events occurring within their communities. Such participation transforms @infogarut into a collaborative space that connects media organizations and citizens in the dissemination of local information.

From a participatory perspective, public involvement is not merely understood as participation in activities but also encompasses engagement in decision-making, implementation, benefit utilization, and evaluation processes (Dwiningrum, 2011). Participation refers to the meaningful involvement of individuals or groups in contributing ideas, information, skills, and other resources to achieve collective goals (Jalal, 2001; Sumaryadi, 2010). Therefore, Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory is relevant for explaining how citizens contribute to news production processes within local digital media

On the other hand, increasing public participation in news production also raises concerns regarding information credibility. Unlike professional journalism, which operates under established verification standards and ethical codes, citizen journalism often prioritizes the speed of information dissemination, thereby increasing the risk of inaccuracies and information validity issues (Nuri, 2023). However, one of journalism's primary functions is to provide society with accurate and trustworthy information (Muhtadi, 2016). Consequently, media organizations that rely on citizen contributions must implement adequate verification and information management mechanisms to ensure the quality of published information.

Recent scholarship on participatory journalism, citizen journalism, digital gate keeping, and information credibility highlights the increasingly important role of public participation within the digital media ecosystem. Contemporary studies suggest that audiences are no longer merely consumers of information but have become active contributors to the production and dissemination of news across various digital platforms (Poudel, 2025; Barbini, 2026). At the same time, research on digital gatekeeping emphasizes that greater public participation must be accompanied by editorial mechanisms of selection, curation, and verification to ensure information quality and maintain the accountability of the news production process (Diakopoulos, 2023; Carlson, 2022). Furthermore, studies on information credibility indicate that the trustworthiness of digital news is strongly influenced by source evaluation, information validation, and content management prior to publication (Mukherjee & Weikum, 2017; Wang, 2023).

Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused on public participation in mainstream media, national news platforms, or citizen journalism practices in general. Research specifically examining the relationship among citizen participation, information verification mechanisms, and news production practices within Instagram-based local digital media remains limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Therefore, a research gap exists concerning how local digital media organizations manage citizen contributions through editorial verification practices to preserve information credibility.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the forms of citizen journalism participation in news production on the Instagram account @infogarut, identify the information verification mechanisms implemented by media managers, and explain how information credibility is constructed within participatory news production processes. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory to understand citizen engagement within the ecosystem of local digital media.

The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of a participatory news production model within Instagram-based local digital media that integrates citizen participation with digital gatekeeping and editorial verification practices to maintain information credibility. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on levels of citizen participation or the role of social media in information dissemination, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship among public participation, verification mechanisms, and information credibility within the context of digital media.

Existing research has predominantly explored public participation, editorial verification, and information credibility as distinct areas of inquiry, leaving limited theoretical understanding of how participatory processes are connected to editorial verification in shaping the credibility of digital news. To address this theoretical gap, this study extends Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory to the field of digital journalism by integrating it with the digital gatekeeping perspective. This theoretical integration provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding participatory news production in Indonesia's local digital media ecosystem.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach within a post-positivist paradigm to explore the phenomenon of citizen journalism participation in local digital media news production. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena based on the perspectives, experiences, and meanings constructed by research participants (Moleong, 2018). The post-positivist paradigm was adopted because it views social reality as something that can be understood through empirical observation while acknowledging the existence of multiple interpretations and perspectives that influence the construction of meaning (Sugiyono, 2021).

The study was conducted on the Instagram account @infogarut, one of the local digital media platforms in Garut Regency that actively involves citizens in the production and dissemination of information. This account was selected because it provides opportunities for community members to submit information, photographs, and videos related to various events occurring in their surroundings, thereby facilitating the direct practice of citizen journalism.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby informants were chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives and data requirements (Sugiyono, 2021). The key informants consisted of @infogarut media managers who were responsible for content management, curation, and verification, as well as community members who had previously participated as information contributors through citizen journalism activities. The selection of these informants was intended to obtain comprehensive insights into the forms of citizen participation, news production processes, and information verification mechanisms implemented by the media platform (Kemp, 2025).

Below are the tables of Informants and Expert Informants:

Table 1. List of Key Informants

No.	Name	Position
1	Andri Nugraha	Research and News Development Officer
2	Harista Syafiah	Content Writer
3	Kalam	Data Content Officer

Table 2. List of Expert Informants

No.	Name	Position
1	Hanif Al Fajar, S.Kom.	Information Management Coordinator, Garut Regional Office of Communication and Information (DISKOMINFO)
2	Yan Yan Agus Supianto, S.IP., M.Si.	Senior Journalist and Junior Public Relations Officer, Garut Regional Office of Communication and Information (DISKOMINFO)

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, motivations, and perspectives regarding citizen journalism practices on the Instagram account @infogarut. Observations focused on news production activities, interactions between media managers and audiences, and information dissemination processes on Instagram. Documentation involved collecting archives of published posts, screenshots, photographs, videos, and other documents relevant to the focus of the study (Moleong, 2018).

The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles, 2014), which consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analytical process was conducted continuously from the data collection stage until the completion of the study in order to identify patterns, themes, and relationships among categories emerging from the research data.

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This technique was applied to enhance data validity and ensure the consistency of information derived from multiple sources (Sugiyono, 2021).

This study adopted Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory as its analytical framework. The theory explains that public participation can be examined through four dimensions: participation in decision-making, participation in implementation, participation in benefit-taking, and participation in evaluation ((Cohen, 1980); Dwiningrum, 2011). These four dimensions were utilized to analyze how citizens participate in the news production process on

the Instagram account @infogarut and how the media organization manages citizen contributions through verification mechanisms to maintain the credibility of published information.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Forms of Citizen Journalism Participation on Instagram @infogarut

The findings reveal that citizen journalism participation on the Instagram account @infogarut is manifested through the active involvement of community members in submitting information, photographs, videos, and reports regarding events occurring within their surrounding environment. The information is conveyed through various channels, including Instagram Direct Messages (DMs), mentions, tags, and WhatsApp services provided by the media managers. This pattern of participation demonstrates that citizens no longer function solely as consumers of information but also as producers who actively contribute to the local news production process.

This finding was further supported by Kalam, the third key informant in this study, who stated:

"The community is highly participative and actively reports a wide range of information, including public complaints and the latest updates about Garut. In terms of contribution, the people of Garut play a significant role by submitting information through direct messages (DMs), mentions, hashtags, and reposting our content. These forms of participation occur very frequently, almost every day." (Interview with Kalam, 2024).

The informant also explained that citizens of Garut actively submit information to @infogarut on an almost daily basis, including incident reports, public complaints, and updates concerning local conditions. These contributions reflect a high level of public participation in supporting local information dissemination.

Table 3. Forms of Citizen Journalism Participation on Instagram @infogarut

Participation Dimension	Research Finding
Contribution	Citizens submit information through Instagram DMs, WhatsApp, tags, mentions, and reposts.
Management	Media managers conduct checking, re-checking, verification, framing, and content curation
Role	Serving as a platform for public aspirations and local information dissemination
Motivation	Expanding information reach and increasing audience engagement

Participation Dimension	Research Finding
Responsibility	Verifying, validating, and evaluating information before publication

Source: Compiled by the researchers (2026).

These findings are consistent with Cohen and Uphoff's concept of participation, which positions citizens as active actors involved in social activities through both intellectual contributions and concrete actions (Dwiningrum, 2011). Moreover, this phenomenon reflects the growing practice of information crowdsourcing within contemporary journalism (Stewart, 2020). The utilization of multiple communication channels further reinforces the concept of social media as a participatory media platform, enabling citizens to actively engage in the news production process.

3.2 Information Management and Editorial Policies in Citizen Journalism

The findings indicate that not all information submitted by citizens is immediately published. Instead, @infogarut implements an information management process consisting of several stages, including check-and-recheck procedures, source verification, confirmation with relevant stakeholders, and newsworthiness assessment before publication.

The organization and management of information submitted by community members constitute a crucial component of @infogarut's news production process. This was explained by Informant 1, who is responsible for the news editorial division at @infogarut:

"Whenever we receive information from community members, we first verify and cross-check its accuracy and reliability. Once the information has been confirmed, it is processed into content—either as a news feed if it includes photographs or as a reel if it is in video format. As long as the information has been verified and confirmed to be accurate, it can be published as content. However, the information must have sufficient news value to warrant publication. If the information has the potential to generate negative public opinion, we postpone publication until we have obtained confirmation from the relevant parties." (Interview with Andri Nugraha, 2024).

If the information is considered to have public value and satisfies credibility standards, it is subsequently transformed into news content published in the form of Instagram feeds or reels. Conversely, information that may potentially generate negative public opinion or cannot yet be verified is temporarily withheld until official confirmation is obtained from relevant authorities. The information management process consists of four primary stages, as presented in Table 2

Table 4. Citizen Journalism Information Management Workflow

Source: Adapted from the research findings (2026).

This mechanism demonstrates that @infogarut performs a digital gatekeeping function, namely filtering and regulating information before disseminating it to the public. Such practices are particularly important because social media enables rapid information dissemination without necessarily

adequate processes. The of this model reaffirms organizations administrators within today's information-environment (2009). Careful

Stage	Activity
1	Receiving information submitted by citizens
2	Conducting check-and-recheck procedures
3	Verifying information with relevant stakeholders
4	Framing and publishing news content

guaranteeing validation implementation gatekeeping the role of media and social media as critical filters rapid and abundant (Shoemaker, verification

procedures, including confirmation with official institutions and examination of visual evidence, illustrate a strong commitment to preserving information credibility and news accuracy. In this context, information verification theory proposed by Tandoc (Tandoc, 2022) emphasizes that verification remains a fundamental element in maintaining the professionalism of citizen journalism, particularly in addressing the growing challenges of hoaxes and disinformation in the digital era.

3.3 The Role of Citizen Journalism in Local News Production

The findings indicate that citizen journalism plays a strategic role in supporting local news production. Information submitted by citizens enables media organizations to gain access to various events that professional journalists may not always be able to reach directly. Furthermore, citizen journalism transforms @infogarut into both a platform for public aspirations and a public communication space that strengthens social relationships between media institutions and their audiences.

This finding was further supported by the second key informant, Harista, who stated:

"To date, @infogarut has received a substantial amount of information contributed by community members. The submissions cover a wide range of topics, including reports of lost and found items, damaged roads, natural disasters, and the achievements of people in Garut. With more than 360,000 followers, information submitted by the public can be disseminated rapidly and reach a broad audience. In several cases, citizen-generated content has even prompted government action. For example, residents reported damaged roads in Banyuwesmi by providing complete photographic and video evidence. @infogarut curated and published the materials on its Instagram account, allowing the issue to gain public attention and eventually reach the local government, which responded promptly by repairing the road. Therefore, it can be said that @infogarut plays an important role in disseminating public information and, in certain cases, contributes to influencing government responses and decision-making." (Interview with Harista Syafiah, 2024).

These findings demonstrate that citizen participation broadens the coverage capacity of local media while simultaneously increasing the relevance of published information. As a community-based media platform, @infogarut benefits from obtaining information that is more closely aligned with local community needs. Citizens, as information sources, have become an integral component of the news ecosystem, demonstrating that their role extends beyond information consumption to active participation within news production networks (Deuze, 2021). The collaboration between media organizations and citizens, supported by the principles of transparency, accountability, and verification, represents the practical implementation of a participatory news production model that reflects a new paradigm in journalism. This finding is consistent with recent studies indicating that community-based media can strengthen public trust in local media institutions (Nguyen, 2021)

3.4 Media Motivations for Developing Citizen Journalism

The primary motivations behind @infogarut's adoption of citizen journalism is to obtain more diverse information, expand news coverage, increase audience interaction, and strengthen public involvement in the news production process. Research informants explained that information originating from citizens often provides more authentic perspectives because it is delivered directly by individuals who have experienced or witnessed specific events firsthand. Furthermore, citizen contributions help media organizations reduce reporting costs and accelerate information-gathering processes. These findings are reinforced by a key informant from the Garut Regency Office of Communication and Informatics, who stated that citizen journalism broadens the reach of local information dissemination while simultaneously strengthening relationships between media institutions and the community.

In disseminating information, @infogarut has its own motivation for promoting citizen journalism, as information submitted directly by community members constitutes an important source of news for the media. This was explained by Informant 1, Andri Nugraha, who stated:

"Information generated through citizen journalism provides more diverse perspectives because it is conveyed directly by individuals who have witnessed or experienced the events themselves."

This enriches news content and adds a stronger local dimension to news reporting." (Interview with Andri Nugraha, 2024).

In addition to media-related motivations, citizens themselves possess intrinsic motivations for participation. The primary motivations include the need to express social identity and the desire to contribute to society. This observation is consistent with communication motivation theory, which argues that participation is driven by social identity needs and the willingness to contribute to community interests (Kim, 2020).

3.5 Information Credibility and Media Responsibility

One of the major findings of this study concerns the importance of verification mechanisms in maintaining the credibility of information generated through citizen journalism. Media managers at @infogarut stated that every piece of information received must undergo validation and confirmation processes involving relevant institutions, including the police, local government agencies, and other authorized organizations before publication.

This finding is consistent with the statement of Informant 2, a Content Writer at @infogarut, who explained that the organization exercises considerable caution when disseminating information submitted by community members. A rigorous verification process is implemented through data triangulation involving relevant stakeholders, such as the police, government agencies, and other authorized institutions. Information that cannot be verified or is suspected of being misinformation is not published. Even when reports are accompanied by supporting evidence and originate from credible sources, @infogarut ensures that all information undergoes a thorough validation process before dissemination.

If information cannot be verified or is suspected to constitute misinformation, it will not be published. For sensitive issues, the media organization prefers to wait for official statements from authorized institutions before disseminating information to the public.

Table 5. Information Verification Strategies Implemented by @infogarut

Verification Type	Implemented Practices
Source verification	Contacting the information contributor
Institutional Verification	Confirming information with the police, government agencies, or relevant institutions
Evidence Verification	Examining photographs, videos, and supporting documents
Publication Evaluation	Delaying publication until information validity is confirmed

Source: Research findings (2026).

These findings indicate that citizen journalism practices at @infogarut rely not only on public participation but also on integrated editorial verification mechanisms to maintain information accuracy and credibility. Consequently, the news production model implemented by @infogarut can be understood as a form of participatory news production that combines citizen contributions with digital gatekeeping functions. This model demonstrates that the success of citizen journalism is not solely determined by high levels of public participation but also by media organizations' ability to professionally verify, validate, and manage information. This finding is consistent with Lee et al. (Lee, 2022) who argued that the success of citizen journalism in local contexts largely depends on the effectiveness of media verification processes and adherence to journalistic ethics.

The findings and discussion of this study indicate that the practice of citizen journalism on @infogarut's Instagram account is driven by the active participation of community members in submitting information, photographs, and videos related to various events occurring in Garut Regency. By providing an open platform for public contributions, @infogarut fosters a more interactive relationship between the media organization and its audience. This finding is consistent with the perspective of Expert Informant 1, Hanif Al Fajar, Information Management Coordinator at the Garut Regional Office of Communication and Information (DISKOMINFO), who emphasized that involving non-professional citizens in the news production process represents a positive initiative for empowering the public while expanding the dissemination of local information that is often overlooked by mainstream media.

The study also found that all information submitted by community members undergoes editorial screening and verification before publication. According to Expert Informant 2, Yan Yan Agus Supianto, Senior Journalist and Junior Public Relations Officer at the Garut Regional Office of Communication and Information (DISKOMINFO), maintaining news quality requires a hierarchical editorial approval process, whereby reports submitted by citizen contributors are first reviewed by junior editors before receiving final approval from senior editors. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of citizen journalism depends not only on the level of public participation but also on the implementation of gatekeeping mechanisms that ensure the accuracy and credibility of information. From the perspective of Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory, public involvement extends beyond merely contributing information; it becomes an integral component of a collaborative news production process between citizens and digital media organizations, ultimately enhancing the credibility and public value of news content.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that participatory news production on the Instagram account @infogarut is carried out through the active involvement of citizens in submitting information, photographs, and videos related to various events occurring within their communities. Such participation reflects citizen journalism practices that enable community members to function not only as consumers of information but also as contributors to the news production process. From the perspective of Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory, citizen involvement can be

observed in the processes of implementation, benefit-taking, and evaluation of information that is collaboratively produced by communities and local digital media.

The findings also indicate that a high level of public participation does not automatically guarantee information credibility. Therefore, @infogarut implements verification mechanisms through check-and-recheck procedures, confirmation with relevant sources, examination of supporting evidence, and evaluation of publication feasibility before disseminating information to the public. These practices demonstrate that digital gatekeeping remains an essential component of the participatory journalism ecosystem in maintaining the accuracy, validity, and credibility of information.

This study concludes that the news production model implemented by @infogarut represents a collaborative integration of public participation and editorial verification within local digital media. The findings contribute to the development of participatory journalism studies by demonstrating that the success of citizen journalism is determined not only by the level of public engagement but also by the media organization's ability to professionally manage, verify, and curate information. From a practical perspective, these findings may serve as a reference for local digital media organizations in developing participatory news production systems that simultaneously maintain information quality and public trust in published content.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the advancement of participation studies in the field of digital communication by demonstrating that Cohen and Uphoff's Participation Theory provides a relevant theoretical lens for understanding public engagement in the news production process within digital media. The findings further suggest that public participation in *participatory journalism* should be supported by appropriate *digital gatekeeping* mechanisms to ensure that published information meets standards of accuracy and credibility. Furthermore, this study enriches the existing literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between public participation and editorial verification processes within the digital media ecosystem.

Practical Implications: Local digital media organizations need to develop clear and systematic verification procedures for managing citizen-generated content so that public participation can be effectively integrated with the maintenance of journalistic standards and audience trust.

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