

# The News Values of Citizen Materials in News of Mass Media

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## Abstract

**T**his article aims to find out the news values of citizen materials in the news, how professional journalists perceive the values of citizen materials, and how or to what reasons mass media use these materials in the transitioning period of television stations to digitalize in Thailand. This study uses a qualitative research method to analyze the contents of daily news programs of three digital television stations in Thailand. A one-week observation in their newsrooms is also conducted. The study argues that professional journalists still assess the news values of citizen materials based on the conventional approach. On the contrary, only two values of citizen journalism can be found in this study. The citizen materials are mostly used in the morning news programs. Most of the news staff tend to consider citizen materials as soft news, which requires more caution. On this account, news values of citizen materials are still under professionalism.

**Keywords:** News Values, Citizen News, Citizen Material, Citizen Journalism, Thai News Media

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## Introduction

Digital Communication Technologies have a significant contribution to the change in citizen's role from the mere receivers to the content producers themselves. This unprecedented transformation has never happened in the history of communication studies. A high number of citizen stories are produced and publicized online. This expansion in both quantities and qualities of citizen narratives, to some extent, has some influences on the news orientation in society, as well as increasingly allow the citizens to interact more with professional media workers in the news production process (Scott 2009; Paromita, 2018). In some European countries and the United States of America, citizen stories have now appeared on television programs and other platforms of the mainstream media, for instance, iReports (CNN), Have you Say Your news (BBC), Your news community (CBC Canada), IK OP TV (Me on TV)" (Endemol Netherlands), The Observateurs (France 24) (Jose Alberto García-Avilés, 2010). In the same way, in Thailand, similar programs about citizen stories can be found in local programs such as Citizen Journalists on ThaiPBS (ThaiPBS, 2015) and Volunteer Journalists campaign of TNN 24 Hours channel.

From this occurrence, there are several aspects to consider. First, it reflects an increasing need for ordinary people to have more spaces for discussion in media platforms, which eventually becomes very common in society. This situation requires media organizations to have a more insightful understanding of the dynamics of the new communication behavior pattern of the citizens. Because the current media industry in Thailand has very high competition, this poses a more significant challenge for media organizations to manage in maintaining their audiences' base and how to keep

the audience using their media platforms without altering to use other media organization's platforms. Next, these narratives from citizen stories have increasingly entered into the sphere of professional media accordingly (Scott, 2009, Paromita, 2018).

These effects cause some changes to the relations between media and audience. The news media professional has been disrupted by digital communication technologies, and ever-increasing a huge of storytelling and information for ordinary people have gradually gained recognition at the same level equal to the professional journalism; the journalists might find themselves in the agitating and disruptive circumstance.

These emerging challenges lead to the purpose of this research. The study aims to understand the use of citizen materials and their news values, which are used in the three Thailand television news programs and how professional mass media perceive the news values of citizen materials.

Therefore, this article strives for the explanation using the Citizen Journalism approach, which enhancing the role of ordinary people from the mere news receiver to enthusiastic and active citizens who become the content producer and news sender. Based on the qualitative approach, this research examines the application and the news values of citizen materials used in the morning, noon, and evening news programs, as well as in other special television programs in three digital television stations, namely the PPTVHD36, NEWTV18, and Thai PBS.

## Literature Review

### **Citizen Journalism: The Power of Audience**

This article emphasizes the important change of power in the news receivers, which once used to be in the hands of professional mass media, but then it has shifted to ordinary people and transformed the people to act as the senders in the communication process. In this study, two significant conceptual frameworks relating to citizen journalism will be applied: (1) the concept of the citizen journalist, and (2) the concept of crowdsourcing. These two concepts are sharing the common ideas of promoting local participation and strengthening democracy through communication and active citizens. Details of each concept are the following (Rodriguez, 2002 as cited in Carpentier, 2011);

The citizen journalist is the concept emphasizing the media as the vital resource and tool for ordinary people or active actors in civil society to step out from the status of passive audiences to produce their own stories and address their issues through various communication platforms in mass media's sphere. This instrument also helps to portray their third voice status or providing alternative information to society. Professional media that provide their spaces for citizens to be engaged and have more participation in their media platforms may identify those citizen materials as the citizen media.

Making news under the crowdsourcing concept is the mean of people to come for share both knowledge and opinions without borders. It can be applied when reporting the exclusive news or investigative report. The crowdsourcing then became the instrumental approach that journalists can work together with the citizens. It is the tool that helps professional journalists to do the investigative report

more effectively and to have well-rounded perspectives on the subject and situation correctly. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee the ultimate success of media when applying the crowdsourcing concept in their organizations since many of the case studies are still in the pilot-project or trial period. (Briggs, 2013).

### **The Use of Citizen Materials in News of Mass Media**

The world's original public media organization, like BBC, defines citizen materials as the variety of the contents that are created by BBC's audiences through the selection, inspection, and edition process in order to ensure the accuracy, copyrights, and technical standard of the organization. BBC policy has its clear mandate that any uses or editing the citizen materials for the BBC programs would need to have prior consent from the owners (BBC, 2015).

Since 2008, CNN has opened its media platforms for the citizen materials produced by the people. There are two classifications of the citizen materials used on its platforms. For the first category, citizens will use provided media platforms of CNN freely without any correction or editing process from a professional team. Another category is the citizen materials, which will be assessed and approved by professional media staff before using it in their news. Nevertheless, the owners of these materials will be informed to give his or her consent for any uses or editing by CNN's professional staff (CNN 2015).

For Thai public media, the Thai PBS channel defines citizen journalists as audience-oriented news, which allows more interaction from the audiences to be engaged in deciding the issues, setting agenda, and on-aired timing (Somkiat Jantarasima 2008). Thai PBS

provides both television channels and its website Citizenthaipbs.net as the platforms for citizen materials. The citizen journalists will send their materials to the organization, and those materials will go through various examination process depending on how those materials will be used. The materials which will be broadcasted on the news television program would require more close inspection process than those publicized on the website.

In this article, we define the meaning of citizen materials as video clips, photo, sound, text, and so on of information or the content produced by ordinary people that are publicized online independently without receiving any payment from a media organization.

### News Values

The fundamental question that all journalists must understand before starting their career is what the news is? Furthermore, what stories or contents could be called news? The body of knowledge in news values has its essential function in creating the set of standard criteria that news pieces to be broadcasted. The basic principles that journalists will use to assess the news values in any contents or materials will have at least one of these attributes (Evangelical Press Association, 2017):

1. Timeliness: the representation of the freshness or up-to-date situation.
2. Proximity: the relevance and emotional connection of the audiences to the specific situation rendering them to feel close to them.
3. Impact and consequence: how the issue or content makes changes for the people in the society.
4. Novelty or Rarity: the content or issue that project abnormality, irregularity, or the rare and bizarre events.

5. Conflict: the stories or contents about the disagreement between two parties or more, it could represent the conflict at the social structural level, government policies.

6. Human Interest: the contents which probably not given many significant impacts to the audiences or society but are something people want to know.

7. Prominence: this attribute of news values is part of human interest but more focus on celebrities: rich, famous, and popular people.

According to these news values components, the particular issue or content may have several attributes that will have more news values than the piece that has only one attribute (The Evangelical Press Association 2017). These principles become the criteria that journalists have in mind and instinctively use to assess the news values on the reporting pieces. However, it is less likely that these values will be reexamined whether they are appropriate for a particular social context, giving any impacts to audiences, or triggering the paradigm shift in citizen communication. Therefore, the re-conceptualization of values in the news has become essential (Sermisiri Nildam, 2012, 7-9). Notably, the citizen materials should also have the assessment framework for citizen news values that conforms to the citizen communication concept. The fundamental of the concept is to create democratic communication that can enhance the communication power and open the space for ordinary people to express their voices on their own. The citizen's voices may display dissimilar aspects from the authorities' perspectives. Comprehend the values in the news, and there are 3 approaches which should be considered are;

Firstly, to understand the structural, functional view, which considers media as the social institution that has the function to protect the society. Therefore, the role of media must not infringe on any social values and norms of the society. The values in the news from this approach signify the empirical facts and functioning to maintain a social system.

Secondly, the critical view, which considers media as an instrument of the ideology apparatus of elitists that focuses on the social class with the belief that whoever can control the mean of production, that group will be able to produce the news. Under this aspect, the news becomes the commodity and manipulating tool of the mean of production's controller who will try to control other people's thoughts and think for their benefits. Besides, they also function as the discourse created by the ruling class. Therefore, 'news' is a product that is controlled and decided by only a few powerful people groups.

Lastly, the cultural studies approach has the presupposition that the truth is not out there to be discovered as empiricism. Nevertheless, the truth can be found through human interpretation, expressive connotation, as well as the power of media. People generally accept the function of media in this aspect, because of media has its status of the social institution and their credibility. Nevertheless, what presented in the news is not the whole incident, only a part of what happened. Thus, the news is the social construction of reality. The news value of this approach then suggests only truth in some aspects (Semsiri Nildam, 2012).

From these three approaches, the values in the news can be defined, and value depends on each philosophical strand of epistemology. The further question that we should ask is how

professional media organizations comprehend the values in citizen journalism.

## Research Method

This study follows the qualitative approach to research. The researcher conducted formal and informal interviews on 3rd to 21st July 2017 with 15 professional news media staff from various positions; 3 news executive editors, 6 editors, and 6 reporters. Moreover, the one-week non-participant observation in the newsroom and editorial meetings of each station. These data were conducted in the same period that mentions above. Those data collection was done through the content analysis by using coding sheets to record research information from three sessions of the daily news programs - morning news, noon news, and evening news of selected three television stations from 21st to 31st August 2017.

The unit of analysis was done by purposive sampling technique based on the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC)'s criteria into three clusters. For the general media, the cluster is a PPTVHD36 television station. News and knowledge media cluster is the NEWTV18 television station, and the public media cluster is the Thai PBS television station. These three stations are similarly using citizen materials in their morning news, noon news, and evening news programs. Most importantly, they granted their permission for research conducting to the researchers.

## Research Results

### Exploring Citizen Materials in Television News Programs

According to the news's content analysis of three stations, there are 168 pieces of citizen

materials used in daily news programs. Citizen materials are used at most in the morning news programs (87 pieces), noon news programs (50 pieces), and evening news program (31 pieces), respectively. When comparing the proportion of the application of citizen materials among these television stations; PPTVHD36 station uses the materials at the highest level (87 pieces), then Thai PBS (47 pieces) and the NEWTV18 (34 pieces) and each station have used the citizens materials at most for the morning news programs, likewise.

Regarding the sources in which all three television stations have selected the pieces of citizen materials the most are from social media, especially, Facebook page marks the highest rate (101 times), and then from the YouTube (27 times). Most of these selected pieces which are used by the stations are searched and found by the reporters (163 pieces), and only a few of them are sent directly from the citizen to the newsroom (5 pieces). The video or motion picture is the most form is used (75 pieces), then picture which captures from a screen is used (55 pieces) consecutively. The criminal and political story is used the most. Nevertheless, data reveals some differences when scrutinizing each station. The PPTVHD36 has selectively used criminal stories most frequently, and secondly, general news. On the other hand, the NEWTV18 and Thai PBS have used citizen materials that were a political story, then the criminal story at second.

The observations in newsrooms also conform to results from the content analysis. Citizen materials produced by citizens are used in news coverage not less than 40 to 50 percentage, of which this trend has been increasingly applied by three media. Apart from the regular practice of using these materials in daily news program in the morning, noon,

and evening news programs, the three media are likely to use these citizen materials for some other news programs. The evidence from Thai PBS demonstrates that they are using the citizen materials that available on social media platforms as the primary source of contents in their program, such as in Roo-Tao-Roo-Tan (Cognizance) program, Sathanee Prachachon (People's station) program, and Nak Khaw Ponlamuang (Citizen Journalist) program. The study also has shown that all or three stations use citizen materials in all daily news program. The citizen materials are increasing influent on newsgathering, news agenda setting, program creation, and production in mass media. The perception of news staffs on citizen materials as a news source, material for news production with no-cost that could get more audience attention, and increasing their program rating under highly competitive of digital TV circumstance. Not surprisingly, the story of citizen materials which are selected mostly is soft news.

The causes of using citizen materials tend to increase in the news of mass media can be elaborated here:

1. Citizen materials could get more eyeballs and ratings so that the materials have crucial for news program survival in intensity competition situations. As a result, the materials that have been selected are such a colorful, timely, dramatic, and proximate story that the reporter may not reach or do well by themselves.

2. Citizen materials are instant and easy for taking and using with low-cost and obtainable for 24 hours and comparing to news staffs who have more limit on news production such as quantity, time-restriction, cost, and source reachability, especially for breaking news.

3. Materials from citizen are becoming a new source or reference in the news story, which help the reporters could better sharp and develop their news story.

4. Citizen materials could help to minimize some limitations on news staff and production costs. The study has shown that one reason that media organizations use citizen materials to solve the lack of reporters where the area of news happened. Furthermore, some stations use citizen materials as same as their reporter. For example, the media follow a social media of citizens who are activists of a social movement and report the videos, images, and story from the citizens on news program without further investigation or additional interviews from other sources.

As reasons above, there is concrete evidence to confirm that the citizen materials more crucial forward to the working process of reporter and news production in mass media. The easily, accessibility, low-cost, and popularity guaranteed to use the materials such that are the causes of more use increasingly significant, especially in commercial media. So, no surprise why the mass media use the citizen materials in their news stories and programs, even though they sometimes encounter the dilemma of using the "low quality" materials. (Chulaporn Saensila, personal communication, July 18, 2017)

#### **Utilization of Citizen Materials by Television News Programs**

The study found that the attitude of journalists and news staffs of mass media still consider citizen materials like the soft news that need to be careful because "they are not the fact, but only the opinion" or "the information is incorrect" and "they must always be verified prior the using." These

perspectives reflect that citizen materials are assessed under the discourse of professional journalism framework. Professional media still need to maintain their power of being professional through the inspection of filtered information. These reactions represent their superior status in holding on power. Even though, in practice in each news program of each television station has different intensity levels - no verify till firmly on the citizen materials verification process.

The result from the content analysis also indicates that the news programs of mass media usually re-report without further verification of the information nor development of the news agenda. There are 85 times that citizen materials are informed to the audiences through the talk news or just echo the story forms by the news anchors. Follow by used as part of investigative reports and professional media reporters sought additional interviews to get a well-rounded news angle from informants (45 and 44 times, respectively) from the citizen materials are used, a total of 216 times.

When investigating each station, the analysis shows some different results among the three of them. The PPTVHD36 station using citizen materials through explanatory style at most (51 times); secondly, the issue or content in citizen materials is facilitated to further interviews with relevant resource persons by professional journalists (27 times). While the NEWTV18 also mostly use in explanation style (13 times), secondly, some contents or images from the citizen materials be a part of an investigative report (8 times). In contrast, Thai PBS station mostly uses in its investigative news (13 times), and develop some of their news agenda based on the citizen materials for their news programs through additional interviews with the information sources at the following (8

times). The finding from the newsroom observation show that similarly using citizen materials as part of their news story, developed their news issues, and as a news source for journalists.

Besides the daily news programs, citizen materials are also used in other programs of the station, especially Thai PBS station which utilizes citizen materials on their programs more than PPTVHD36 and NEWTV 18 stations. Thai PBS uses citizen materials to reflect the identical image of a public service media organization and reflect the value of citizenry correspondingly.

#### **News Values in Citizen Materials Still Relied on Professional Frame**

The result indicated there are all 220 times of citizen materials selected, and the mass media gave values based on the standard of professional news values. The pieces that most selectively reported attain to the value of human interest (80 times). Following the impact or consequence of the incidents (64 times). Next is the conflictual value (23 times), the novelty or rarity (17 times), proximity (16 times), and timeliness (7 times). When considering citizen journalism's news value principles, the study reveals the in-depth information is valued the most (13 times), then its value of being the third voice or third parties that could balance angle the news story is projected only three times. Observing the news value of citizen journalism for changing and being the original voices of citizen have not been found in this study.

The above information exhibits that all three stations still select citizen materials based on the news values of the professional media approach. The human interest and impact of the news are the utmost. The results conform to the attitudes and perception of staff in media organizations that often

perceive the contents in citizen materials generally as the soft news, and they tend to see citizen materials with less significance compared to the story produced by the professionals. This stereotype may affect some high-quality citizen materials or those pieces which are potentially considered as the hard news based on the citizen journalism concept. This bias may limit the citizen materials to be further evolved or selected for the broadcasting. Taking into account this, mass media would lose the opportunity to make use of those particular materials, which could help improving the news production process and skills of their journalists who should be able to collaborate with the citizens profoundly and wisely. More importantly, this would mean losing the opportunity to help to strengthen active citizens of society.

However, if we look at the news reporting by using the citizen materials of Thai PBS's People Station Program and Citizen Journalist Program, these programs emphasize more on the citizen journalism's news values than the human interest or the impact values. The programs focus on the values of the content ownership, the citizens, and voices of minority people so that these people can address their issues and communicate to the public or stakeholders of the relating concerns.

## **Conclusions**

### **News Values of Citizen Journalism in the Old Frame**

Using the news values of the professional framework to select citizen materials in television programs and also characterized the materials into two types of news are the soft news and the hard news. Mass media are still prioritizing the values on human interest, impact and conflictual issues, the



rarity or some stories that touch the feeling of people on social media, for instance, people's quarrels or funny stories. The perception of seeing citizen materials like soft news affects how the media will use the low-valued pieces of citizen materials rather than the hard news of citizen materials to be on-air. In some cases in which the hard news of citizen materials is selected to be used in the news program of the station, they will be devalued to just a hint or starting point of news. Moreover, the citizen who owns the material may not be acknowledged or credited in the news. In the study of main daily news programs of all three stations, not found the collaborative making news between professional journalists and citizens journalists or audiences.

Although the collaboration making news between professional journalists and citizens which is the citizen journalism approach cannot be found in this study. We cannot make the conclusion assuming that news pieces produced by local citizens are all 'soft news' based on professional perspectives. Because when we look at the application of the news values from specific program like as citizen journalist program and the people station program from Thai PBS station, there are different news values framed and the program does not classify the materials from citizen as hard news or soft news that based on the usual professional practices in daily news program. These two programs have a distinct classification of the news values on the materials, for instance, the value of being the voice of a powerless group of people so that ordinary people can express their either information and opinion on their own, and building understands each other in the society. This finding demonstrates the news values mentioned above have relevant to citizenry according to the citizen journalism approach. (Ruggiero, 2000)

On this account, to attempt to create the standard of news values based on citizen journalism approach in the newsroom of the professional media which has the conventional framework in news values then signifies the encounter between the practices, value framework, and norms of the professionals and the new perspectives and actions of ordinary people who once used to be passive audience only.

The installation of citizen journalism's news values may not be accomplished under the conditions of high professionalism and rigid practices in the newsroom-the subordination of citizen materials in power of relation, which is curbed and suppressed under the discourses of the soft news, colorful, unreliable, and news from social media. The projection in the citizen materials then seems to signify the insignificant stories of ordinary people. Even if these stories may attract the interest of the public, professional media tend to label them as unreliable pieces (in terms of production and other qualities). Contents in the materials may be shortened, or professional media staff may choose to use these materials in news programs during the particular section that has fewer audiences.

The news program which adopted the citizen journalism approach, audiences who also owned the citizen materials, would have more power to manage, control, and negotiate with the media organization. As a result, the news values that are applied in the news programs also reflect the values of citizenship. Citizen communication under this concept gives more value to the communication power of the audiences than the professional media's news values. If using the lens of critical theory to understand this phenomenon, media platforms are the public space of the middle-class people who

owned the mean of production (Sermsiri Nildam, 2012, pp. 5-7). They have the capacity to produce news as both their commodity and the discourse of the dominant class. From the critical perspective, the values of selected and censored news contents publicized to the public became the fact which has a business-oriented purpose and political-hidden meanings. The foray of citizen news of the lower class, marginalized groups, and deprived people in the society addressing social issues or delivering the materials which are not considered as the 'soft news' need intensively negotiate with the middle-class ideology and their benefit incentives. In summary, the new values of the citizen news then based on their ownership of stories, issues, narratives, and facts that they wanted to inform the public to make significant changes to the society.

On the other hand, in the specific programs of public service media which adopted the citizen journalism approach, the power of citizens whose own materials have more than in daily news programs the citizen could control, manage, and negotiate with mass media or professional media. There are the key factors for news values along with citizen journalism more than professional framed using the lens of critical theory to understand this phenomenon, and media platforms are the public space of the middle-class and watchdog of elites (Sermsiri Nildam, 2012, Williams, Harte, & Turner, 2015). They have the capacity to produce news as both their commodity and the discourse of the dominant class. For this angle, the values of news have been determined and publicized by the elite class or owner to maintain their status quo. The invaded of hard news form citizens that so call news from a lower class, minority, and voiceless people have to face intensely resist and negotiate for

remaining their ideology and interest in the field of professional news. In short, the news values of citizen news should base on the owner of the story, narration, and truth of ordinary people's views for changing their society.

#### **Crowdsourcing in Newsroom: The Potential Transforms Soft News to Hard News**

When media organizations develop news topics or further news reporting based on the issues from citizens, the reporters will have more trust and select the issues from the famous person or pages. Therefore, the selected materials from the social media used by the media organization are one of the primary conditions for lifting up the citizen materials to go beyond being the soft news to the hard news. Interestingly, Thai PBS station the study finds the similar conceptual thinking in the station's two programs; the citizen the study confirms that the citizen news materials are raising on the news production process of news organizations, and more values of news such as to give a voice to historically marginalized communities. Unfortunately, the mainstream media still framed by their old values and perception instead of assigning an intrinsic value for its own sake. (Paromita, 2018, Konieczna, Hatcher, & Moore, 2018)

Journalist program, and the people station program. The first program has received more materials from citizen than the latter; this kind of the news program demonstrates the role of the media organization to promote democratic communication of ordinary people by providing them the communication space to address their issues and emphasizing on the opportunities for citizen communication. This is the common practice of some media organizations in the other countries which attempt to develop news production skills of

their audiences and the materials, likewise. Nevertheless, the production process of the citizen journalist program conducts separately from the production process of daily news programs. As a result, the contents used in citizen journalist program are limitedly used by only the programs produced by the same department in the organization. This might be one of the factors which constrain the issues sent by a citizen to have more exposure to the public.

On the one hand, the production process of the people station program using the swarm intelligence method. The program communicates with its audiences and persuades those who are facing some hardship of their well-being, abusive threats from influential or mistreatment by the government agencies or private sector to submit their complaints and information to the program. Then, these issues will be further explored and mediated in the program among local stakeholders in order to achieve a certain degree of solution. Both programs of Thai PBS station can be the role model for the television program if the programs could develop and transform the citizen story from their audiences to the public issue. It shows that citizen journalism can do well not only in professional values frames but also in critical public-interest investigations watchdog, mediator or representative of communities, and as an advocate of the public campaign. (Williams, Harte, & Turner, 2015)

If the professional media use the crowdsourcing journalism in their news reporting process, starting from their interest to investigate for more information and at the same time open the space for ordinary people to share their information, make the news report, or even express their opinions; the use of citizen materials by media organization will not merely to fill up the purpose of having colorful

stories or just a source of information. Media organizations can gain more advantage in using citizen materials in terms of improving the news quality, building the capacity of ordinary people, and developing media literacy of their audiences.

## Recommendation for Media

### Organization

1. Media organizations should take into consideration the news values of citizen materials that go beyond the values of human interest, colorful stories, or exciting subjects. Good use of citizen materials can be done through the investigation or exploring more information from the audiences who have in-depth information and expertise in the specific subjects. The different aspects and variety of information from citizens can be used for the in-depth or investigative news process of the mass media.

2. Assigned job responsibility and a person in charge of overseeing the citizen materials by public media organization can help the channel to have the advantage in producing more interesting and various contents; however, the working process, knowledge sharing, and practical skills relating to citizen materials should be shared to other departments of the organization.

3. The role of mass media then should not only as of the copycat where merely use the information from social media. They should be able to use their professional media skills and their potentials to advance the opportunities and benefits from such situations at the utmost for the profession, organization, and the citizens.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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