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Alternative News Values in Community Citizen Journalism: The Case of *PeoPo* in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the news values of community citizen journalism and the behind journalistic identity. Drawing upon content analysis ($N = 400$) and semi-structured interviews ($N = 12$) with the reporters and in-house staff of a community citizen journalism platform, I argue that community citizen journalism follows alternative news values that deviate from the conventional norms and practices of mainstream media, prioritizing stories featuring ordinary people, a regional focus, and positive news. Given that community citizen journalists are most familiar with their surroundings, they can portray the reality of their community in a sensible, practical, and realistic way, using their words to serve the social empathy function and resonate with society. However, alternative news values can be seen as complementary to mainstream media rather than adversarial, providing a more comprehensive portrayal of reality. Theoretical implications of the findings are discussed.

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Introduction

News values, defined as the essential considerations that determine the criteria for newsworthiness (Caple and Bednarek 2016), are crucial to examine because "they inform the mediated world that is presented to news audiences, providing a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce to deadlines" (Harcup and O'Neill 2017, 1470). Extension of news values research to alternative forms of journalism can allow researchers to understand whether and to which extent alternative media has a different lens of portraying things (Harcup 2020). In this study, I intend to focus on the news values of community citizen journalism—that "intends to publish information that is meant to benefit and engage community" (Carpenter et al. 2015, 508).

Citizen journalism is an emerging phenomenon in which citizens use new technologies to participate in the production and dissemination of news content. In an Asian democratic society—Taiwan—where freedom of expression is encouraged, there is a lack of trust in the mainstream media, which has a 31% local trust rating, according to the

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2021 Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2021). At the same time, government policies supporting media literacy and civic education initiatives (Chen 2014) have led to citizen journalism becoming a thriving sector. Community citizen journalists, in particular, attempt to cover hyperlocal, community-oriented content that is not covered by mainstream media journalists[1] (Wall 2015), thereby addressing the gap in mainstream news coverage while fostering civic engagement among citizens (Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley 2011). But these citizens typically do not receive journalistic training (Atton 2009), and their writing style and content tend to differ from that of mainstream media. The phenomenon of citizen journalism has become prevalent and, therefore, of great significance for journalism research. Studying citizen journalism can help us understand this newer form of journalism and how it is evolving.

This study aims to comprehend the news values of community citizen journalism, specifically, what is the difference in news values between articles written by the mainstream media and community citizen journalism? What factors do community citizen journalists consider when selecting news stories, and why do they adopt these news values? Why do citizen journalists engage in news production amidst low media trust? Based on content analysis and semi-structured interviews, I argue that community citizen journalism follows alternative news values that deviate from the conventional norms and practices of mainstream media, prioritizing stories featuring ordinary people, a regional focus, and positive news. However, alternative news values can be seen as complementary to mainstream media rather than adversarial, providing a more comprehensive portrayal of reality.

This mixed-method study has several important theoretical implications. First, it provides a nuanced understanding of news coverage of community citizen journalism from the perspective of news values, offering insights into answering the question of "what makes community citizen news?". Second, the study suggests that alternative media, such as community citizen journalism, tend to adopt alternative news angles to offer alternative narratives and counterbalance the dominant, hegemonic, elite narratives of mainstream media. Third, the findings of the study have significant implications for the ongoing debate about media democratization and the future of journalism, such as how mainstream media can collaborate with alternative media to provide a more comprehensive news angle that portrays society.

News Values of Community Citizen Journalism

News values is a concept that has received attention among journalism scholars. Galtung and Ruge (1965) were the first scholars to provide a list of factors in selection, distortion, and replication during news communication. In their content analysis of four Norwegian newspapers and three international crisis papers, they summarized seventeen news factors: Frequency, Threshold, Absolute Intensity, Intensity Increase, Unambiguity, Meaningfulness, Cultural Proximity, Relevance, Consonance, Predictability, Demand, Unexpectedness, Unpredictability, Scarcity, Continuity Composition, and References to Elite Nations. This pioneering study, which served as the methodological and theoretical backbone for later news values research (e.g., Caple and Bednarek 2016; Dick 2014; Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 2017; Schulz 1982), advances our understanding of what makes news.

Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2017) revisited Galtung and Ruge's (1965) study twice, arguing that the factors in Galtung and Ruge's study did not correspond to the contemporary situation. As a result, Harcup and O'Neill (2001) developed an updated list of ten contemporary values based on the content analysis of three newspapers in the United Kingdom (i.e., *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, and *Daily Telegraph*). These factors included Power Elite, Celebrity, Entertainment, Surprise, Bad News, Good News, Magnitude, Relevance, Follow-up, and Newspaper Agenda. With the spread of the Internet, social media has provided a platform for news articles to reach a larger audience by sharing, liking, and commenting (Hermida 2010). As a result, the contemporary news values model was revisited once more, focusing not only on traditional news articles but also on social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, to determine which articles were most widely shared. The model included five new factors, in addition to Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) contemporary news values list: Exclusivity, Conflict, Surprise, Audiovisuals, Shareability, and Drama.

Despite news values strongly relying on the "gut feeling" of the journalist (Schultz 2007), several factors influence what news is selected. Apart from event importance, as mentioned earlier, these factors include production routines, economic pressures (Strömbäck, Karlsson, and Hopmann 2012), social validation of journalists' judgments and attitudes (Donsbach 2004), and ideologies of news organizations (Thompson 1991).

Current mainstream journalism is challenging to meet the expectations of the "civil ideal" of news—that is, "accurate, sincere, objective, subject to editorial integrity and committed to truth-telling and treats its audience as comprising citizens who matter" (Harrison 2019, 31). This is primarily because of the political economy of the news organizations—the need to make money. Therefore, extending the study of news values to alternative news platforms hopes to live up to the claim of news of servicing the citizens and the public good (Harcup 2020). This includes six criteria: 1. Social surveillance on behalf of citizens; 2. Monitoring of power; 3. Recording of community action and self-activity; 4. Challenging of assumptions and stereotypes; 5. Surprise and novelty; 6. Entertainment and humor. Understanding alternative values in news reporting is not intended to abandon current journalistic ethics. Instead, it provokes thought on how alternative media focuses on different treatments, angles, and selection decisions, thereby understanding how things are portrayed differently from mainstream media (Harcup 2020).

Among all forms of alternative media, this study chooses to focus on community citizen journalism. The phenomenon of citizen journalism has emerged because, with the rise of the Internet, citizens have not only consumed news but also contributed to news collection and dissemination, which implies that news can be made by not only traditional journalists but also ordinary people. Citizens who contribute to news content typically are not aware of journalistic training, and their writing style differs from mainstream media writings. Articles published in citizen media outlets are often seen as lacking in validity, objectivity (Darbo and Skjerdal 2019), and credibility (e.g., Carr et al. 2014; Chung and Nah 2013; Swasy et al. 2015).

For professional journalists, their responsibility is to inform citizens in a way that enables them to act as citizens (Meijer 2001). Comparatively, some citizen reporters see themselves as activists and report issues of the community to influence mainstream media agendas and government policy, even though most community newspaper agencies are not concerned with readership (Hatcher and Haavik 2014). Community

citizen journalism, driven by a desire to write stories strongly linked to the community, often features writing styles that differ from those of traditional journalists, who received professional journalistic training and are taught to write neutral, objective, fair, and credible reports (Deuze 2005). Because of the journalistic ideological differences between mainstream journalists and citizen journalists, it is logical to assume there is a difference in news values between the mainstream media and community citizen journalism. Some prior literature has shown that professional journalists did not trust writings from citizen journalists due to their perceived lack of validation and neutrality (Darbo and Skjerdal 2019). However, this does not mean that stories written by citizen media are not worth reading. In fact, citizen-generated content can collectively influence traditional media and governmental policy, which then shape the traditional journalism sphere (Luo and Harrison 2019). Because of the merit of their news reporting, it is worth understanding the news values in the community citizen journalism, this can guide us further to reflect on the worthy content that the mainstream media lack paid attention to.

Having said that, news values research on citizen journalism is particularly scarce. An early one was Schaudt and Carpenter (2009), who conducted content analysis to analyze the news values on *The Arizona Republic*'s 15 community websites. Their findings showed that the articles appeared to have proximity, conflict, and human interest. A recent case would be Tse and Spiezio (2022) conducted a content analysis comparing news values between two Hong Kong media outlets, *Stand News* and *Ming Pao*. They found both outlets paid substantial attention to Common Man, which means news outlets do not only write elite stories, but rather ordinary people or organizations that cannot be defined as celebrities or as powerful or influential people can also be included in the news. They also found that the gap in news values between citizen journalism and mainstream media has narrowed. However, little is known about the distinctive news values of community citizen journalism reporting and the factors shaping them. What does community citizen journalism focus on when they write stories, and what is the journalistic identity behind it? Therefore, in this article, two research questions are proposed:

RQ1. What is the difference in news values between articles written by *SET News* (i.e., the mainstream media) and *PeoPo* (i.e., the community citizen journalism)?

RQ2. What factors do community citizen journalists consider when selecting news stories, and why do they adopt these news values?

Research Context

Despite Mutsvairo and Salgado (2022) arguing that citizen journalism in the Global South has been taking diverse forms to develop, recent scholars have paid relatively less attention to this phenomenon, raising the question of whether citizen journalism is actually "dead." This study focuses on Taiwan's citizen journalism environment, which operates in a context characterized by low media trust in mainstream media. This low media trust context can be understood from various perspectives. To begin with, Taiwan has a diverse media landscape where online news dominates the market, and print news is largely declining. This diverse market has resulted in over 600 TV and radio broadcasters. Despite significant pressure faced by journalists, few legal measures have been taken to enhance their editorial independence and protect them from unethical journalistic

demands. Furthermore, Taiwan is a politically polarized society where sensationalized reporting is pursued for profit (RSF n.d.). This has led to only 31% of Taiwanese citizens expressing trust in mainstream media, according to the Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2021). Interestingly, Taiwan has a "survivable" citizen journalism environment among Asian countries—giving way for citizen participation and engagement in the news, examining citizen journalism in Asia may broaden our knowledge of news values and citizen journalism in a non-western context. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors. First, the democratization of citizen journalism began in 2007 with the establishment of *PeoPo*, supported by Taiwan's public broadcaster, the *Public Television Service*, given the operation support by *Public Television Service*, turns out *PeoPo* is now Taiwan's largest community citizen journalism platform. Second, Taiwan boasts a 91% internet usage rate, providing citizens with the necessary "digital capital" for reporting. Third, the number of citizen journalists has increased drastically recently due to community college initiatives introduced by the government to encourage civic participation and by citizen reporters themselves who aim to train ordinary people to become community reporters.

This study considers *PeoPo* as community citizen journalism. As of October 2021, 162,700 citizen articles have been publicized, with 11,700 citizen reporters registered on the website. *PeoPo* offers citizen journalism workshops and online training videos and selects some of the best citizen articles for the 5-minute archive summary video on a regular basis. The citizen journalists come from a variety of backgrounds. For instance, students write citizen articles on *PeoPo* to fulfill academic course requirements, and thus the platform promotes student self-actualization (Hsu and Juang 2019). There are also ordinary citizens participating in news writing to facilitate citizen communication and participation in society, allowing social movements to enter the public sphere (Chen 2014). I use "community citizen journalism" as a better fit to describe *PeoPo* because the majority of stories on this platform are community-related, such as local, environmental issues (Tsai and Liu 2011).

On the other hand, I selected *SET News* (*Sanlih E-Television News*) as a mainstream media outlet. Ranked as the third-highest weekly use (29% weekly reach) news brand in Taiwan (Newman et al. 2021), this pan-green commercial media outlet offers diverse content, including political news, entertainment, financial news, and sports news, effectively captures the median of mainstream media use in Taiwan while reflecting the mainstream news norms and practices in Taiwan.

Study 1

Sample

To answer RQ1, content analysis, a well-established method for studying recorded human communication, such as books and magazines, is used to examine the news values in articles produced by media outlets in Taiwan. The study retrieved a total of 400 Chinese-language articles from the respective media outlets' websites, namely https://www.PeoPo.org/ for *PeoPo* and https://www.setn.com/ for *SET News*. The sample for this study was collected using simple random sampling, in which a set of random numbers of articles published between 1 January 2019, and 31 December 2020, were

generated. The total number of articles retrieved was 400, with 200 obtained from *PeoPo* and 200 from *SET News*. Two Chinese coders were trained and coded the articles independently.

Measurement of the Variables

The coding scheme is adopted from Harcup and O'Neill (2017) and Tse and Spiezio (2022), analyzes the region, topic, and news values of the sampled articles.

Region. Region refers to the geographic location where the story takes place. To comprehend the geographic notions of the associated articles, the following categories of places are coded to form the variable called region, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Europe, Americas excluding the USA and including North, Central, and South American countries, Asia-Pacific including Australia and New Zealand, USA, Africa, the Middle East including Iran, and Rest of the World (ROW), that is, all the countries that cannot be included in the other categories.

Topic. Topic refers to the dominant theme of the analyzed article. This variable consists of eight categories to understand the subject of the media publication, including Taiwan News, China News, Entertainment, Sports, Commentary, Economics, International, and Others.

News Values. Ten nominal variables adopted from Harcup and O'Neill (2017) and Galtung and Ruge (1965) are used to examine the news values that exist in each article: Surprise, AudioVisuals, Timeliness, Entertainment, Follow-up, Good News, Power Elite, Relevance, Ordinary Person, and Bad News. The definitions of the 10 key news values variables are presented in Table 1.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is "the extent to which two or more independent coders agree on the coding of the content of interest using the same coding scheme" (Lavrakas 2008, 345). In content analysis, interpreting intercoder reliability is critical since it determines whether

Table 1. Definitions of key news values variables.

Variable	Definition
Surprise (NV1)	Stories that contain elements of surprise and/or contrast.
AudioVisuals (NV2)	Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio, and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.
Timeliness (NV3)	When the events took place, whether just now or however recently.
Entertainment (NV4)	Stories concerning sex, show business, sports, an unfolding drama, human interest, etc.
Follow-up (NV5)	Stories whose subjects were already in the news. In other words, new developments in previously covered events.
Good News (NV6)	Stories with particularly positive overtones, such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins, and celebrations.
Power Elite (NV7)	Stories about powerful and influential individuals, organizations, or institutions, and stories that relate to famous people in any industry (celebrity status).
Relevance (NV8)	Stories about issues, groups or nations that are perceived as relevant to the audience for any reason (e.g., geographical proximity), or stories perceived as significant because of the number of people involved or affected and/or because of the potential impact of the events.
Ordinary Person (NV9)	Stories about ordinary people or organizations that cannot be defined as celebrities, powerful or influential.
Bad News (NV10)	Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as crime, death, injury, defeat, conflict, and loss.

Table 2. Reliability coefficients for key news values variables.

Variable	Percentage Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
Surprise (NV1)	92.5%	0.806
AudioVisuals (NV2)	100%	1
Timeliness (NV3)	95%	0.875
Entertainment (NV4)	95%	0.89
Follow-up (NV5)	90%	0.78
Good News (NV6)	92.5%	0.827
Power Elite (NV7)	90%	0.787
Relevance (NV8)	87.5%	0.741
Ordinary Person (NV9)	92.5%	0.826
Bad News (NV10)	90%	0.78

the results are objective and reliable. According to O'Connor and Joffe (2020), 10% to 25% of the data units are expected to be used in a multiple coding process. Hence 10% of the sample is chosen for intercoder reliability analysis in this study.

The lowest threshold of intercoder reliability for Cohen's kappa value is 0.7 (Hayes 2020). Coders A and B were trained using the coding scheme described above, but only AudioVisuals, Timeliness, and Follow-up achieved satisfactory levels of intercoder reliability after the first round of training. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and after three more rounds of training, all key news values variables had Cohen's kappa values of more than 0.7, suggesting satisfactory intercoder reliability. Table 2 shows the total percentage agreement and Cohen's kappa for the key news value variables.

Data Analysis

To determine the relationships between categories, chi-square tests were carried out using SPSS to investigate the relationships between news values, topics, and regions discussed by the two media outlets.

Findings

RQ1 asks about the difference in news values between articles written by mainstream news outlet and community citizen journalism. Table 3 compares *PeoPo* and *SET News* in terms of regions and topics. Of the 200 articles drawn from *PeoPo*, 1.0% covered Mainland China, 95.5% covered Taiwan, 1.0% covered the Americas, 1.5% covered Asia-Pacific, and 1.0% covered the rest of the world. Of the 200 articles drawn from *SET News*, 7.5% covered Mainland China, 3.0% covered Hong Kong, 66.0% covered Taiwan, 3.0% covered Europe, 1.0% covered the Americas, 12.5% covered Asia-Pacific, and 7.0% covered USA.

Regarding topics, of the 200 articles drawn from *PeoPo*, 19.5% were Taiwan News, 0.5% were China News, 3.5% were Entertainment, 4.5% were Sports, 2.5% were Commentary, 4.0% were Economics, 1.5% were International, and 64.0% were others. Of the 200 articles drawn from *SET News*, 39.0% were Taiwan News, 5.0% were China News, 16.0% were Entertainment, 7.5% were Sports, 1.5% were Commentary, 3.0% were Economics, 15.5% were International, and 12.5% were others.

Table 4 illustrates the totals and rankings of news values identified in *PeoPo* and *SET News*. Audiovisuals is emphasized by *PeoPo*, ranking first out of ten news values,

Table 3. Comparison of regions and topics covered by *PeoPo* and *SET News*.

	PeoPo		*SET News*		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Chi-Square
Region					66.004^{***} ($df = 7$)
1. Mainland China	2	1.0%	15	7.5%	
2. Hong Kong	0	0.0%	6	3.0%	
3. Macau	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
4. Taiwan	191	95.5%	132	66.0%	
5. Europe	0	0.0%	6	3.0%	
6. Americas	2	1.0%	2	1.0%	
7. Asia-Pacific	3	1.5%	25	12.5%	
8. USA	0	0.0%	14	7.0%	
9. Africa	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
10. Middle East	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
11. ROW	2	1.0%	0	0.0%	
Topics					131.074^{***} ($df = 7$)
1. Taiwan News	39	19.5%	78	39.0%	
2. China News	1	0.5%	10	5.0%	
3. Entertainment	7	3.5%	32	16.0%	
4. Sports	9	4.5%	15	7.5%	
5. Commentary	5	2.5%	3	1.5%	
6. Economics	8	4.0%	6	3.0%	
7. International	3	1.5%	31	15.5%	
8. Others	128	64.0%	25	12.5%	

Note: $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

meaning that *PeoPo* produces stories using images, videos, and infographics. The next most-utilized news values were, in order, Ordinary Person, Timeliness, and Relevance, indicating that *PeoPo* prioritizes posting articles about ordinary people and current occurrences that are geographically relevant. Entertainment, Power Elite, and Good News came next in order. *PeoPo*, on the other hand, ranks 8th, 9th, and 10th in terms of publishing stories with follow-up, surprise, and bad news aspects.

SET News emphasizes audiovisuals as well, ranking first out of ten news values, indicating that stories published contain audiovisual elements. Following that, Timeliness, Surprise, and Power Elite were ranked as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, indicating that *SET News* prioritizes publishing timely stories and those covering powerful individuals and of surprise or contrast elements. Follow-up, Bad News, and Ordinary Person were ranked 5th, 6th, and 7th, respectively, indicating that stories about ordinary people and organizations and negative stories are a lesser but still relevant concern for *SET News*. Entertainment, Relevance and Good News stories are the least focused news values for *SET News*, ranking 8th, 9th, and 10th.

Study 2

Methodological Note

After conducting a content analysis to examine the difference in news values between mainstream media and community citizen journalism, I conducted semi-structured interviews with community citizen journalists and the in-house staff of *PeoPo*[2] during September 2022 and April 2023. I recruited 12 interviewees using purposive sampling, including 10 community citizen journalists who are currently posting content on the *P*eoPo platform and 2 in-house staff. These interviews helped us to analyze the journalistic identity

Table 4. Totals and ranking of news values identified in *PeoPo* and *SET News*.

	PeoPo			*SET News*			
News Values	Frequency of News Values	Percentage of News Values	Ranking of frequency of News Values	Frequency of News Values	Percentage of News Values	Ranking of frequency of News Values	Chi-Square
Surprise (NV1)	14	7.0%	9th	136	68.0%	3rd	158.763***
AudioVisuals (NV2)	198	99.0%	1st	199	99.5%	1st	.336
Timeliness (NV3)	134	67.0%	3rd	172	86.0%	2nd	20.081***
Entertainment (NV4)	81	40.5%	5th	78	39.0%	8th	.094
Follow-up (NV5)	50	25.0%	8th	107	53.5%	5th	34.065***
Good News (NV6)	70	35.0%	7th	41	20.5%	10th	10.487**
Power Elite (NV7)	78	39.0%	6th	133	66.5%	4th	30.342***
Relevance (NV8)	96	48.0%	4th	73	36.5%	9th	5.420*
Ordinary Person (NV9)	170	85.0%	2nd	104	52%	7th	50.469***
Bad News (NV10)	12	6.0%	10th	106	53%	6th	106.215***

Note: $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

behind alternative news values in order to answer RQ2. These semi-structured interviews were part of a project to understand the gatekeeping process of citizen journalism and how they combat misinformation. Interviewees were asked general questions such as "Does *PeoPo* represent a major change in the way news is gathered? How do you decide/judge which stories to cover? Is there a particular type of news topic/story that would be more appropriate for a citizen journalist to write?" with follow-up questions probed by the researcher. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and were conducted on the Google Meet platform because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings

When interviewees were asked what particular stories they would write, several noted that they simply reported what they saw and heard. Any subject matter that they come across and find suitable or good enough, they will write to share with the readers. "I've reported on environmentalism, agriculture, ecology, disadvantaged groups, and political stories. I haven't reported any celebrity gossip, but [other than that] I've reported about every type of news you can think of. I've reported a lot of different types of news" (Interviewee 6). The freedom of reporting cannot be achieved without the aim of the platform, that the concept behind *PeoPo* is similar to that of YouTube, allowing citizen journalists to have greater "room to play" in terms of the content they produce and upload. The freedom of the selection of stories is also partly because of the nature of citizen journalists. While some interviewees considered themselves not "professional" journalists that work in mainstream organizations and receive a salary, thus, having a specific scope of stories to report. In contrast, community citizen journalists considered themselves doing voluntary work as a hobby. According to Interviewee 8, "No burden and it's not stressful, because after all, we have our own job, so what we can do is in the evenings or during non-holiday time."

Despite the freedom, it does not mean there are no criteria in selecting what stories to report. As Interviewee 12 mentioned, "I think any subject matter is suitable, but I always look for issues that care for the disadvantaged or environmental conservation." Interviewee 8 also expressed a similar opinion, stating that "Citizen journalists … because they are amateurs, should care about the surroundings of their work, things happening in life, and things related to the community." Not only do community citizen journalists have their own angles to select stories, but also several interviewees highlighted the value of independence as they are not affiliated. "As long as you think you should report it, you should report it … I am not the so-called media 'with a boss.' I prefer to maintain my own … a kind of independence" (Interviewee 4). The claim by this interviewee showed some dissatisfaction with the current mainstream news landscape, and that community citizen journalists have their own ambition to adhere to the ideal of journalism, that is, to differentiate themselves from the mainstream, unethical journalistic norm.

The Political Economy of Mainstream News Organizations

The interviewees criticized the journalistic practices of the mainstream media, failing to fulfill the ideal function of being a journalist, so community citizen journalists act as opinion leaders in society to voice out something valuable that the mainstream media

have missed out. Several interviewees expressed disappointment in mainstream journalism, which does not always prioritize the importance of a story and may use misleading, sensational, clickbait headlines to attract readers, urging a need for more accuracy and transparency in journalism. Mainstream news agencies often prioritize advertising revenue and social media engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares, over providing informative and accurate news and the "civil ideals" of journalism. This interview finding is similar to Harcup's (2020) political economy explanation of alternative news values. Interviewee 7 expressed similar views on this matter.

> In fact, the general commercial media, of course, need some advertising money, then of course, they will inevitably be influenced by some commercial interests, such as the consortium's news or the government's public relations fees or whatever … If the journalists think this has no commercial value, they just do not report it … [The commercial media] probably just wanted to write what they thought would attract eyeballs … just to boost the ratings. For citizen journalists, they write a real story, a truth, a very detailed story, and the motivation is quite different.

What puts further Harcup's (2020) idea in this study is that community citizen journalists aim to avoid such practices and prioritize writing something meaningful for society rather than focusing on readership, likes, shares, and comments. It can be further elaborated that community citizen journalists are motivated to complement the weaknesses of mainstream journalism. However, some community citizen journalists may choose not to follow the mainstream trend of determining what is newsworthy. As Interviewee 6 explained, for instance, during an election, he did not choose to report the power elites that the mainstream media has covered a lot. Instead, he would choose to focus on reporting on lesser-known individuals, such as ordinary candidates, because it is worthwhile to offer a new and unique perspective that is not covered by mainstream journalism, as it provides insight into the lives of common people and their experiences. This approach demonstrates that citizen journalists have their own factors in determining what is worthy of reporting, which may differ from those of mainstream media. Then the next question is, what do citizen journalists report? Interviewee 9 outlined three duties that a citizen journalist should ideally perform: "A citizen journalist since he [or she] is called a journalist, should have the following three duties. The first duty is to help disadvantaged groups speak out, such as people with disabilities or those from poorer families or with lower incomes. The second is to report the truth. The third is to expose injustice." Their distinctive line of coverage that highlights the plight of disadvantaged groups and exposes injustice sets them apart from mainstream journalism. It also reflects there is some worthy news content that has been neglected in mainstream journalism.

Solution-based Community News

Several interviewees observed that citizen journalists in *PeoPo* report on local community issues (Interviewee 2). This can be explained by the opinion that mainstream media in Taiwan do not prioritize reporting on local news (Interviewee 4). However, Interviewee 4 also demonstrated an understanding attitude towards the shortage of community, hyperlocal, and regionally-focused news, acknowledging the skewed allocation of resources towards reporting on important and power elite issues.

> It's because the structure of the media in Taiwan is actually getting tighter and tighter, so a lot of local journalists may be reporting, for instance, sources from press releases from the government, but they may not necessarily report on many situations on the ground. The other thing is that it's not easy for the media to survive these days, and they need to have a certain relationship with the government (Interviewee 4).

Similarly, another interviewee commented on the problem of the "power elites" that they are overrepresented. In fact, the elites are not getting down to the "real work."

> I have full-time work doing paddy field ecology promotion and rice farming, I just use citizen journalism as a record of my work in the paddy fields. […] Because I think we are all citizen journalists, we are on the front line, so most of the environmental protection stories that I write about are the actual work, the way we really do it. For some environmental protection stories [that are written by traditional media], they invite academics and government officials, so they may be written from an advocacy perspective (Interviewee 3).

Avoid portraying mainstream dominant voices that focus on elite stories but adopt a "down to earth" perspective, which means providing more sensible, practical, realistic, and community-oriented information that the mainstream media often ignores. Another difficulty for mainstream media in covering hyperlocal issues goes back to the old days when hardcopies of newspapers were limited to a specific area. For instance, people living in Tainan City could not read the news in Tainan "County." Today, even though readers can access local news issues through the internet, it does not necessarily mean that community issues from the capital city are adequately reported, however reporting community news can be seen as the advantage of community citizen journalism:

> If you [refer to mainstream news organizations] want to publish news, it must be something about the mayor or publish some big issues. How can news about a community like ours be reported? We have a population of 3 million in Taipei City … don't we need to care about our own community? No, so citizen journalists can report on our own community affairs so that many people who want to know can understand (Interviewee 8).

Community citizen journalists have a journalistic identity that reflects the need to portray the "real" reality of the community. As a result, community news reported by citizen journalists mainly covers issues happening in their surroundings:

> I will report on the environment where I live because the environment we live in is when we have the most contact, and it is also closely related to us. For example, what kind of crisis is there in the environment we live in, or what kind of animals and plants are around me, or the stream environment … or there are some memory inheritances that are going to disappear, but this aspect is the most contacted near me, so the news I report surrounds my home, not more than 50 kilometers away, For example, if I live in Taichung, the news about Taipei will be relatively far away, and my understanding and cognition will not be so strong. It is impossible to say that in order to report Taipei news, I have to go to Taipei to do field research for a few days and then do an interview, which is too time-consuming. Therefore what I report is mainly based on my surrounding environment. (Interviewee 11)

Due to the volunteering nature of their work and limited resources compared to journalists working in mainstream organizations, community citizen journalists have a lower willingness to travel to other places to access sources of information. Another reason for reporting community news is that big, witty, sensational, non-regionally focused

headlines written by mainstream news agencies are not relevant to local Taiwanese issues and thus cannot resonate with the community. For instance, interviewee 9 highlighted that a simple rubbish issue in the community would not be reported by the mainstream media, but it is an essential concern for the Taiwanese local community.

> [For example,] our community has this garbage problem, but the way we report is after everyone reaches a consensus and solves the rubbish problem smoothly, which may also act as a "mirror" in other communities.

Citizen journalists adopt a solution-based approach that aims to engage with positive social change instead of focusing on negative elements in the community. By writing community news, they hope to "do something" for society, as reflected by the opinion of interviewee 11.

> I have come across quite a number of citizen journalists who are, in fact, very passionate, and they dig out some of the injustices in society. The views they report are actually quite in-depth. Even though Taiwan is such a small place, there are so many citizen journalists, exploring the social issues they are concerned about and the problems of their living environment. I am very impressed by their long-term concern for what they want to be concerned about. For example, I want to concern about my environment, human history, and memory heritage. When I do these things, I feel that I have done something for our society and that other citizen journalists are also doing these things in their positions.

Discussion

This paper utilizes content analysis to compare the news values of mainstream journalism and community citizen journalism in Taiwan, followed by semi-structured interviews to examine the journalistic identity behind these community citizen journalists consider when selecting news stories. By doing so, it answers the question of "what makes community citizen news?". This section discusses the theoretical implications of the findings.

Consistent with the findings of Tse and Spiezio (2022), the content analysis showed that community citizen journalism, to some extent, is closing the gap in terms of deciding what constitutes newsworthy content. This suggests the "journalistic gut feeling" is not exclusive to professional journalists but rather can also be present in community citizen journalists. This is evident in the extensive use of audiovisual elements in community citizen journalism in Taiwan, the articles still adhere to the factors of timeliness and relevance. This challenges the traditional notion that only trained journalists possess the ability to determine what is newsworthy and highlights the democratizing potential of citizen journalism in the media landscape. Nonetheless, it does not mean that community citizen journalism and mainstream journalism completely overlap with each other in terms of news coverage, there are some distinctive differences. Chi-Square tests show that community citizen journalism has its own unique values in news reporting, including more stories featuring the ordinary person, a regional focus, and more good news compared to the mainstream media in Taiwan.

First, community citizen journalism in Taiwan does not follow the negative bias trend of mainstream journalism. The "if it bleeds, it leads" principle that features stories with negative overtones does not dominate the coverage of community citizen journalism in Taiwan. Instead, the good news is given more emphasis. In fact, professional journalists

also consider positive news important because they can tell touching stories and promote social values and norms (Leung and Lee 2015). Focusing on writing about positive events further implies a journalistic role that is not only active in providing citizens with the information they need to act and participate in political life but are also active in offering positive experiences to manage and regulate emotional well-being, acting as the mood manager in everyday life (Hanitzsch and Vos 2018).

Second, community citizen journalism focuses on writing stories that are regionally focused and feature the ordinary person. This can be primarily explained by the political-economic perspective (Harcup 2020) of the mainstream media landscape in Taiwan. In the content analysis sample, the "surprise" element was found to be the third highest-ranking news factor among mainstream journalism *SET News* yet many news events themselves may not inherently contain a surprising element. Instead, these journalists often write in a way that emphasizes surprise and contrast, echoing the interviewee's claim that they manipulate headlines as a click-bait tactic, this writing style is seen as a "bad practice" of journalism from the audience's perspective, driven by advertising revenue and a focus on social media metrics. Due to tight resource allocation, mainstream media tends to focus on writing international and elite stories because these are the most worthy content that can quickly gain "shareability." This leaves behind stories that concern ordinary people and local community issues. As citizen journalism advocates for "we the media" (Gillmor 2006), community citizen journalists in different cities report their own current local happenings and produce news themselves. While enjoying the freedom to report according to their own interests, they tend not to write stories that mainstream reports have already covered but instead serve the community by writing about community issues and focusing on ordinary people that mainstream news lacks attention to. This can be seen as an advantage of community citizen journalists, as they are most familiar with their surroundings and can portray the reality of the community in a sensible, practical, and realistic way.

As Luo and Harrison (2019) argued, the content generated by citizens hopes to drive change that shapes the traditional journalism sphere and governmental policy. This perhaps explains the interviewees' preference for a solution-oriented writing style that focuses on the solution rather than negatively portraying the problem, for instance, they focus on how citizens solve the rubbish issue in the city instead of reporting it as a rubbish problem or how citizens collaborate in the aftermath of a typhoon instead of reporting the figures of death and injuries caused by the typhoon. Prior focus group research has demonstrated that engaging in solution-focused journalism can enhance individuals' efficacy (Wenzel et al. 2018). Framing positive news in a solution-based style can evoke more positive affect, thereby driving positive action in the community (Baden, McIntyre, and Homberg 2019). By highlighting civic work rather than government, community citizen journalists can mobilize and provide information that news audiences can act on. This can push an issue forward or cause change that creates a better society (McIntyre and Lough 2021), thereby achieving what the interviewees said—to resonate with society.

Alternative news values represent a deviation from the conventional norms and practices of mainstream media from the perspective of news values. Mainstream news values, which are often aligned with corporate interests, prioritize sensationalism, conflict, and celebrity culture over more substantive issues. On the other hand, alternative values in

community citizen news reporting prioritize social justice, under-represented communities, and issues that are not traditionally covered by the mainstream media. However, this does not mean that these alternative news values are not worthy of reporting. They represent another angle that the mainstream media has overlooked or neglected. Interview findings from community citizen journalists suggest they avoid portraying mainstream dominant voices that focus on negative, elite, and international stories. The increased visibility of ordinary people in news reports also implies a challenge to the status quo by offering a voice to counter-hegemonic, non-elite, ordinary citizens that mainstream media news values often ignore (Turner 2010). From a journalistic role perspective, community citizen journalism goes beyond providing and analyzing information but also serves as a social empathy function that "tells people about others in their society and their world so that they can come to appreciate the viewpoints and lives of other people, especially those less advantaged than themselves" (Schudson 2008, 12). The two examined media in this study together provide a broader account of the world in terms of content, the alternative news values can be seen as not adversarial to the mainstream media but as complementary functions to the mainstream media (Lacy et al. 2010).

The limitation of this research paper is noteworthy. This case study focuses on the citizen journalism sector in Taiwan, but there is an internal variation within citizen journalism that appears in organizational form (Canter 2013; Nip 2006; Wall 2015). One of the forms is amateurs using eyewitness accounts to participate on mainstream media platforms. Another form is individuals or amateurs posting news blogs on community websites. But this study focuses on the full-fledged, platform-based participatory and collaborative news sites that invite participants to produce and disseminate news in an institutional and organizational form. Examples include *OhmyNews* in South Korea, *PeoPo* in Taiwan, and *Digg* in the United States. These institutional citizen journalism outlets provide platforms for citizen journalists to report in an open-source way and operate transparently under collective wisdom. Therefore, these citizen reporters are not solely amateur enthusiasts who "have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists and report from their position as citizens, as members of communities, as activists, or as fans" (Atton 2009, 265), rather there is some collaboration within mainstream journalism and community citizen journalists through regular journalism ethic training workshops, or even professional journalists select trendy citizen reports to broadcast in the mainstream broadcasting channel. Therefore, this study might not be generalizable to citizen journalism in other contexts and other forms of citizen journalism, such as para-citizen journalists and watchdog citizen journalists (Miller 2019).

Notes

1. According to Harcup (2014), mainstream journalism refers to "Any form of journalistic output produced or published by a hierarchically structured commercial media outlet, or by a major publicly funded media organization, and which conforms to the established norms, customs, and practices of the industry." In the content analysis part, *SET News* is adopted as a representative of mainstream media, which is, to be more precise, a commercial media outlet in Taiwan.
2. One important aspect to note is the role of the "in-house" staff employed by the parent company, *Public Television Service*. In fact, they are professionally trained journalists.

However, their role is not that of reporters or editors but rather to manage the daily administration of the platform and curate trending citizen news to be broadcast on the public broadcaster—*Public Television Service*. Operating under a gatewatching model (Bruns 2008), where content is publicized without the interference of a "gatekeeper," it is crucial for the in-house staff to moderate content in *PeoPo* when necessary. Additionally, they provide guidance and support to citizen journalists by offering workshops on news media literacy and media ethics.

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