



Information Verification Processes In Traffic Reporting Through Citizen Journalism

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze information verification processes in traffic reporting produced through citizen journalism practices. The increasing reliance of the public on fast and real-time information highlights the need for proper verification mechanisms to ensure that disseminated information remains accurate, balanced, and ethically responsible. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using content observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation techniques. The analytical framework is based on journalistic verification principles that emphasize accuracy, completeness of information, ethical considerations, and public responsibility. The findings indicate that information verification is conducted through several stages, including checking the completeness of basic data, assessing the relevance and timeliness of events, and applying ethical judgment prior to publication. Information that does not meet verification standards tends to be excluded, even when it originates from public contributions. These results suggest that citizen journalism has strong potential as a credible source of public information when supported by consistent and responsible verification practices. This study contributes to communication studies by strengthening the understanding of verification mechanisms within citizen journalism, particularly in the context of traffic reporting.

Keywords: *Information Verification; Citizen Journalism; Traffic Reporting; Public Communication.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the ways information is produced, distributed, and consumed by the public. Digital platforms enable information to circulate faster and reach broader audiences, reshaping contemporary communication practices and public access to news (Castells, 2015; McQuail, 2010). In this environment, the demand for real-time information has increased significantly, particularly regarding public-interest issues such as traffic conditions, road accidents, and transportation safety. Along with these technological changes, citizen journalism has emerged as an important alternative source of information. Citizen journalism allows ordinary individuals to actively participate in the process of news production by reporting events they directly witness, thereby expanding the boundaries of traditional journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Bowman & Willis, 2003). This participatory model enhances the flow of local and situational information that may not always be immediately covered by professional news organizations. However, the absence of formal journalistic training among citizen contributors raises concerns regarding accuracy, completeness, and ethical standards in the information shared.

Traffic-related reporting plays a crucial role in public communication because it directly affects mobility, safety, and daily decision-making. Accurate and timely traffic information helps individuals avoid potential risks and respond appropriately to changing road conditions (Meikle & Young, 2012). Nevertheless, the speed of information dissemination in digital spaces also

increases the likelihood of misinformation, unverified claims, and the circulation of sensitive content, which may mislead the public or cause social harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). In this context, information verification becomes a central principle in ensuring the credibility of citizen-generated content. Verification refers to the systematic process of checking facts, confirming sources, and evaluating the ethical implications of information before publication. Within journalistic practice, verification is widely regarded as a defining element that distinguishes responsible journalism from rumor or speculation (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Without adequate verification mechanisms, the legitimacy of citizen journalism may be weakened, potentially undermining public trust in alternative information sources (Singer et al., 2011).

Despite the growing body of research on citizen journalism and digital news practices, studies that focus specifically on verification processes in traffic reporting remain limited. Previous research has primarily examined audience participation, news production dynamics, and media convergence, while verification practices in high-risk information contexts receive less scholarly attention (Hermida, 2012; Lewis et al., 2010). This gap indicates the need for empirical research that explores how verification is applied in practice, particularly in traffic reporting where inaccurate information may have serious consequences. Therefore, this study aims to analyze information verification processes in traffic reporting within the framework of citizen journalism. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research examines how verification principles are implemented, the criteria used to determine the eligibility of information for publication, and the ethical considerations involved in the verification process. The findings are expected to contribute to communication studies by providing deeper insights into responsible verification practices and strengthening the role of citizen journalism in the digital information environment..

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen Journalism in the Digital Era

Citizen journalism refers to the active participation of ordinary individuals in the process of collecting, producing, and disseminating news and information. The emergence of digital communication technologies has enabled citizens to report events directly from their surroundings, thereby reducing the dominance of traditional news organizations in the information ecosystem (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Allan & Thorsen, 2009). Through this participatory model, citizen journalism contributes to the diversification of perspectives and the rapid circulation of local information that may otherwise be overlooked by professional media.

Scholars argue that citizen journalism strengthens democratic communication by allowing citizens to voice their experiences and concerns in the public sphere (Hermida, 2012). However, the lack of professional journalistic training among citizen contributors often raises questions regarding news quality, objectivity, and ethical responsibility. As a result, citizen journalism exists in a tension between its potential to enhance public participation and its vulnerability to misinformation and unverified content (Singer et al., 2011).

Information Verification in Journalism

Verification is widely recognized as a core principle of journalism that ensures the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of news content. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) define verification as a disciplined process of checking facts, confirming sources, and validating information before it is published. This process distinguishes journalism from other forms of information such as rumors, propaganda, or personal opinion.

In the digital era, verification has become increasingly complex due to the speed of information dissemination and the abundance of user-generated content. Journalists and content curators are required to evaluate not only factual accuracy but also the relevance,

context, and ethical implications of information (Singer et al., 2011). The absence of verification mechanisms may lead to the spread of misinformation, which can undermine public trust and damage the credibility of information providers (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Traffic Reporting and Public Information

Traffic reporting represents a form of public-interest information that has direct implications for safety, mobility, and everyday decision-making. Accurate traffic information enables individuals to anticipate road conditions, reduce travel risks, and respond effectively to emergencies (Meikle & Young, 2012). Due to its time-sensitive nature, traffic reporting often prioritizes speed, which may increase the risk of incomplete or inaccurate information.

Previous studies suggest that traffic-related information shared through citizen participation can enhance situational awareness, particularly in urban environments (Liu, 2020). However, the circulation of unverified traffic reports may cause confusion, panic, or misinterpretation among audiences. This highlights the importance of verification practices that balance speed with accuracy and ethical responsibility in traffic reporting contexts (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Ethical Considerations in Citizen Journalism

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in the practice of citizen journalism, particularly in reporting sensitive events such as traffic accidents. Ethical journalism requires respect for privacy, avoidance of sensationalism, and consideration of the potential harm that published content may cause to individuals or communities (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). In digital environments, visual content such as images and videos increases the ethical complexity of news dissemination, as graphic or intrusive materials may easily spread without adequate filtering.

Research indicates that ethical judgment often relies on the discretion of content curators who act as gatekeepers in citizen journalism practices (Hermida, 2012). These gatekeepers are responsible for balancing public interest with moral responsibility, ensuring that information serves societal needs without violating ethical standards. The effectiveness of ethical verification depends on consistent guidelines and a strong commitment to journalistic values (Allan & Thorsen, 2009).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine information verification processes in traffic reporting within the framework of citizen journalism. The qualitative design was chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of verification practices, decision-making criteria, and ethical considerations applied in the selection and dissemination of traffic-related information.

This approach allows researchers to understand social phenomena within their natural context and to capture meanings derived from observed practices and participant experiences. The research subjects consisted of individuals directly involved in the verification and management of citizen-generated traffic information. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance, experience, and active role in the verification process. In addition to interviews, traffic-related reports produced through citizen participation were used as supporting data to provide contextual understanding of verification practices.

Data were collected through a combination of non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to identify patterns in traffic reporting, including the completeness of information, narrative structure, and ethical presentation of visual content. In-depth interviews were carried using semi-structured guidelines to obtain detailed explanations regarding verification procedures, standards applied before

publication, and ethical judgments involved in the decision-making process. Documentation was used to analyze archived traffic-related reports and related materials that supported the verification process.

Data analysis followed an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Relevant data were selected and organized to focus on verification practices, then categorized into thematic patterns to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring themes and relationships that addressed the research objectives and reflected verification principles in citizen journalism.

To ensure data trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by comparing information from multiple sources and methods. Member checking was conducted by confirming key findings with informants to enhance credibility and reduce potential misinterpretation. These strategies strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings and ensured that the results accurately represented verification practices in traffic reporting.

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that information verification in traffic reporting through citizen journalism is not a single-step procedure but a multi-stage process that involves assessment, selection, and ethical consideration. Traffic-related information submitted by the public is initially reviewed to determine its basic eligibility for dissemination. At this stage, information that is outdated, lacks clarity, or does not correspond to current traffic conditions is excluded. This preliminary screening demonstrates that verification serves as a gatekeeping mechanism to prevent the circulation of irrelevant or potentially misleading information.

A key finding of the study is the emphasis placed on factual completeness and clarity. Verified traffic reports consistently include essential elements such as the location of the incident, the time of occurrence, and a concise explanation of what happened. These components are considered necessary to ensure that the information can be accurately interpreted and utilized by the public. Submissions that contain vague descriptions, inconsistent details, or unclear visual documentation are subjected to further scrutiny or dismissed. This practice reflects a commitment to maintaining factual accuracy despite the fast-paced nature of traffic reporting.

The study also reveals that visual evidence plays a crucial role in the verification process. Images and videos are treated as supporting data that strengthen the credibility of traffic reports. However, visual materials are not accepted uncritically. Each visual submission is carefully reviewed to confirm that it corresponds to the reported event and does not misrepresent the situation. Visuals that are misleading, unrelated, or lack contextual clarity are not disseminated. This finding highlights the role of visual verification as an integral component of information validation in citizen journalism.

Ethical evaluation emerges as a central aspect of the verification process, particularly in cases involving traffic accidents. The findings show that information curators exercise caution when dealing with content that depicts injured individuals, fatalities, or damaged vehicles. Visual materials that may violate personal privacy, cause emotional distress, or encourage sensationalism are either modified or excluded from publication. This ethical filtering demonstrates that verification extends beyond factual correctness to include moral responsibility and social sensitivity.

Another important finding concerns the role of public participation in traffic reporting. While citizen contributions significantly enhance the availability of real-time information, not all public submissions are treated equally. The decision to publish information is based on verification standards rather than the volume of public interest or engagement. This indicates that citizen journalism operates within a controlled verification framework in which public input is valued but

not prioritized over accuracy and ethical considerations. The findings suggest that editorial discretion remains a determining factor in the dissemination of traffic-related information.

The study further reveals that verification practices contribute to consistency in traffic reporting. Published reports tend to follow a similar narrative structure, presenting information in a concise and standardized format. This consistency helps reduce ambiguity and supports public understanding of traffic situations. By applying uniform verification criteria, information curators ensure that traffic reports remain reliable and accessible to diverse audiences.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that information verification in citizen journalism-based traffic reporting involves a comprehensive process that integrates factual assessment, visual validation, ethical judgment, and editorial control. These practices enable the dissemination of traffic information that is timely, accurate, and socially responsible. The results underscore the importance of structured verification mechanisms in strengthening the credibility of citizen journalism and enhancing its role as a trusted source of public information.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that information verification in traffic reporting through citizen journalism reflects the application of fundamental journalistic principles, particularly those related to accuracy, ethical responsibility, and public interest. The multi-stage verification process identified in this research aligns with the concept of disciplined verification, which emphasizes that information should not be disseminated solely based on speed or popularity, but must undergo systematic evaluation before reaching the public. This supports the argument proposed by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) that verification is the core element that differentiates journalism from rumor or speculation.

The emphasis on factual completeness, such as clear identification of location, time, and event chronology, confirms that verification practices prioritize clarity and usability of information. In traffic reporting, incomplete or ambiguous data may lead to misinterpretation and potentially harmful decisions by the public. Therefore, the findings reinforce previous studies suggesting that accuracy and contextual clarity are essential in public-interest information, particularly in time-sensitive situations (Meikle & Young, 2012). The consistent use of basic factual elements also indicates an effort to standardize reporting practices, which enhances reliability and audience comprehension.

Visual content plays a dual role in the verification process, functioning both as supporting evidence and as a potential ethical risk. The careful review of images and videos found in this study highlights the increasing importance of visual verification in digital journalism. While visual materials can strengthen credibility and immediacy, they also carry the risk of misrepresentation or ethical violation if used irresponsibly. This finding corresponds with earlier research emphasizing that digital journalism requires not only factual verification but also contextual and visual validation to prevent misleading narratives (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Ethical considerations emerge as a significant dimension of verification, particularly in traffic accident reporting. The exclusion or modification of graphic and sensitive content reflects an awareness of the potential social and emotional impact of published information. This practice supports the principle that journalism must balance the public's right to know with respect for human dignity and privacy (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). The findings also suggest that ethical judgment functions as an internal control mechanism within citizen journalism, compensating for the lack of formal professional training among contributors.

Public participation remains a defining feature of citizen journalism; however, the study shows that participation alone does not guarantee publication. Verification standards and editorial judgment ultimately determine whether information is disseminated. This finding reinforces the argument that citizen journalism does not eliminate gatekeeping but rather transforms it into a more adaptive and context-driven process (Hermida, 2012). In this

framework, content curators act as mediators who balance openness to public contributions with responsibility for information quality and social impact.

The structured verification practices identified in this study contribute to public trust in citizen-generated traffic information. By consistently applying verification criteria, citizen journalism-based reporting can function as a credible alternative source of public information. This supports previous research indicating that credibility in digital journalism is closely linked to transparent and consistent verification practices (Singer et al., 2011). The findings also suggest that verification mechanisms can mitigate common criticisms of citizen journalism, such as susceptibility to misinformation and lack of accountability.

Overall, the discussion highlights that verification in citizen journalism-based traffic reporting is not merely a technical procedure but a normative practice shaped by journalistic values, ethical awareness, and public responsibility. The integration of factual accuracy, visual validation, and ethical judgment strengthens the role of citizen journalism within the digital information ecosystem. These findings contribute to communication studies by demonstrating that responsible verification practices are essential for sustaining the credibility and social function of citizen journalism, particularly in high-risk information contexts such as traffic reporting.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that information verification plays a critical role in ensuring the credibility and reliability of traffic reporting within the framework of citizen journalism. The findings demonstrate that verification is implemented through a structured, multi-stage process that includes factual assessment, visual validation, ethical evaluation, and editorial judgment. These practices function as a gatekeeping mechanism that filters citizen-generated information before it is disseminated to the public, thereby reducing the risk of misinformation and ethical violations.

The emphasis on factual completeness, clarity, and relevance indicates that verification standards prioritize public usability and safety, particularly in the context of time-sensitive traffic information. At the same time, ethical considerations such as protecting privacy and avoiding sensationalism highlight that verification extends beyond technical accuracy to encompass moral responsibility.

This balance between speed, accuracy, and ethics strengthens public trust in citizen journalism as a source of public-interest information. Overall, the study demonstrates that citizen journalism can serve as a credible and socially responsible form of information dissemination when supported by consistent verification practices. By integrating journalistic principles into citizen-based reporting, traffic information can be delivered in a manner that is timely, accurate, and ethically sound.

These findings contribute to communication studies by reinforcing the importance of verification as a foundational element in sustaining the legitimacy and public value of citizen journalism in the digital era.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a limited number of informants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader citizen journalism practices or different reporting contexts. Second, the analysis focused specifically on traffic reporting, which represents a high-risk and time-sensitive information category; therefore, the verification processes identified in this study may differ from those applied in other types of citizen-generated content.

Third, the study relied primarily on observation and self-reported data from individuals involved in the verification process, which may be influenced by subjective perspectives or social desirability bias. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating comparative studies across multiple information contexts, employing mixed-method approaches, or examining audience perceptions of verified citizen journalism content to provide a more comprehensive understanding of verification practices in digital communication.

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