Village Voiced, Village Empowered
(A Case Study of the Citizen Journalism Practice Using New Media as a
Medium of Empowering the Villagers at Banyumas Regency in 2012-2013)[1]

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Abstract
Village is basis of the poor in Indonesia. This condition has placed Village as the main target of the poverty-eradicating program. Unfortunately, the development program that has been implemented in Village is ineffective. So far, Village is viewed more as passive object with limited authority to manage itself independently. The condition above encourages a group of community at Banyumas Regency to initiate a movement called *Gerakan Desa Membangun (Village-to-Develop Movement)*. By the utilization of Information and Communication Technology, the Movement encourages Village to develop various kinds of the internet-based media. One of the new media developed is Village Portal (Village Website). This portal gives room to inform any potentials and activities of the Village through cyber world. It is here that the Village practices Citizen Journalism. This study was a case study to reveal how new media, as new medium in the Citizen Journalism practice, become powerful weapon to reinforce the Village's representation in the discourse competition at the public sphere. The ultimate result is the increasing bargain position of the Village before various stakeholders. The finding showed that the democratization of information and communication media becomes the key factor in establishing an empowered community. By taking hold of such media, they are able to control the information. With this power, they become a community with high bargain power before the stakeholders.

Key words: citizen journalism, empowerment, new media, rural development

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Introduction

The majority of Indonesian territory is occupied by Villages. By the end of 2012, there are at least 76,800 Villages[2] in the country and also majority of poor people in Indonesia live in the villages. From the data of the Statistical Center Bureau/BPS released from 2 January 2013[3] up to September 2013, total of poor population living in the villages reaches 18.08 million people. This is the condition that makes the villages become the main target of development programs, especially those programs of eradicating poverty. Developing the villages is identical with the effort of dealing with a half of problems of poverty in Indonesia[4]. However, the development programs as implemented in the villages have so far been considered ineffective in coping with the poverty. Villages are positioned more as passive objects without sufficient competency to manage themselves.

This condition promotes a group of people at Banyumas Regency to initiate a movement called "Village-to-Develop"/*Gerakan Desa Membangun* program. This movement has been commenced at the end of 2011. It starts at Desa Melung, Kecamatan Kedung Banteng, Banyumas Regency of Central Java Province, and then it spread to the whole region of Banyumas and even to other regions. This movement emerges because the villagers are aware of their potentials to become an independent entity. So far, the village is always considered as inferior by many stakeholders, especially by the supra-village government. The village only plays a role as the receiver of development programs without any authority to fully participate in the policy making. The term "Village-to-Develop" is used to be an anti-thesis against the term 'Developing the Village' which has been usually used. In this term "Village-to-Develop", the village is positioned as the subject of development, not only as a passive object that must be helped or developed.

As a form of a 'counter-attack' against the mainstream of village development, this movement has a purpose of proving that village can hold the authority. The village networks in this movement commonly promote an awareness that they have to learn to be independent entities. Using the Information and Communication Technologies, the village networks as well as the advocating community[5] develop any kinds of internet-based media. One of new media that is developed is Village Portal/website. Village Portal is a website indented for the villages in the GDM network. This portal gives medium for the village to inform any potentials and activities through cyber world. Additionally, the presence of the portal also encourages the Village to manage information. It is here that the village practices Citizen Journalism.

Citizen Journalism is a form of people activity to report any events around to the public. This people activity is identical with the work of a journalist. The great idea that creates this concept is the people's dissatisfaction as a public against the work system of the mainstream media. The presence of the Citizen is a *counter* against the discourse developed by the mainstream media.

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[2]This number was taken from http://kodepos.nomor.net/_kodepos.php?_i=Desa-kodepos. The author was difficult to find the data about the exact number of villages from the Government's official sites.
[3] http://www.bps.go.id/brs_file/kemiskinan_02jan13.pdf
[4] http://gerbangtani.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/urgensi-uu-perDesaan.pdf
[5] In the Village-to-Develop Movement, in addition to Village, there are so many actors involved. The actors come from any levels of communities, ranging from the NGOs, academicians to the communities caring of the rural-based ICT development activities .

Such concern is also perceived by the village community. From the interviews with some Citizen Journalists, it was revealed that one of the motives that encourage them to actively learn journalist is to "fight against" the discourse developed by the mainstream media. According to the Citizen Journalists, the media tends to marginalize the Village. *First*, the media's reports are always "Jakarta-centered." This term refers to the opinion that the mass media just focus on the issues in Jakarta (The Capital City) and always related to the political aspects. Local issues have not been covered properly. *Second*, the reports of the mainstream media marginalize the presence of Village. The news coverage about Village only relates to the negative issues. Village will only be covered in the news when the media find such problems as poverty, crimes or disasters. Village is pictured as powerless community.

Both conditions encourage Village to learn journalism. In this process, the Village community learns how to voice. Doing so, they are under process to become powerful entity. This study explored how new media, as a new medium for the practice of Citizen Journalism, can become powerful weapon in reinforcing the Village representation in the discourse competition at the public area. The ending point is the improving bargain of Village before any stakeholders.

Framework of Study

This study was a case study of the practice of Citizen Journalism. The big question is how the Citizen Journalism practice can become a medium of empowering the people. To answer the question, it is necessary to firstly consider some concepts that constitute the prepositions in this study. *First*, empowerment as a paradigm in the Village development recently. The key point is on the establishment of social capital as a power in fulfilling the independence of Village. *Second*, the quick development of Citizen Journalism due to the presence of new media. These two concepts become the basis of elaboration to understand the role of the Citizen Journalism practice in empowering the community.

Empowerment as a New Spirit in Village Development
In the new paradigm, development is no longer determined by the ruling power (state). Empowerment becomes a major objective. Empowerment comes from the word *power*, which refers to at least two meanings, namely *to give or authority to* and *to give ability to or enable*. Empowerment can also be defined as a power redistribution to enable each party to be powerful or to have equal bargaining position.

Although the paradigm of empowerment is considered as an enlightment in the development process, it is not free from criticisms. In the Indonesian context, Susetyawan (Suparjan and Suyatno, 2003: 103) argues that empowerment has become a marketable good. In dealing with any weaknesses of the empowerment concept, a new concept emerges that is called Independence/self-reliance. This formula is not an anti-thesis of empowerment, but it is a reconfirmation of people repositioning at the community level as the main actor. It is based upon an assumption that development is a process of personal development in accordance with each characteristic of the people life entity (Soetomo, 2012: 8). The self-reliance concept can be paralleled with the paradigm of people centered development. According to Korten (Eko, 2006: 63), this paradigm creates certain role in an individual not as an object, but as an actor who

determines the objectives/targets, control the resources and direct the process that influences his/her life.

Role of Social Capital in the Empowerment of Villagers
In the context of village development, development is more than just dealing with poverty. One of the strategic agendas that can be implemented in the sustainable development is building social capital (Eko, 2006: 79). Field (2006) argues about the importance of manifesting social capital in the development policies. Putnam (Field, 2006: 6) describes social capital as part of social organization, like belief, norms, and network, all of which can improve the people efficiency by facilitating certain coordinated actions. Field (2011) argues that the important point of social capital is how we establish relationship with others. Field highlights at least two factors, namely (1) network, and (2) trust. It is the establishment of this social capital that becomes the key point in this study, where the practice of Citizen Journalism is a process to strengthen the capital.

New Media and Citizen Journalism
The presence of New Media obscures the dichotomy between media and audience. The existence of website challenges the paradigm of traditional media by positioning the reader to be the writer at the same time (Bentley, 2008). New Media also brings new ways in collecting and reporting any information into the newsroom. The reader plays significant role in making exchange with the journalist.

Demystification of this journalism overthrows the screen between an audience and a producer and then changes the values and norms sewed to the 'news'. This requires the need for new perception of the journalism itself (Fenton, 2010). One of the vivid implications of the paradigm change is the emerging citizen journalism[6]. The great idea behind the presence of Citizen Journalism is that someone without formal education about journalism can use modern technology especially the internet to produce messages and fact check independently or in a sharing basis with others.

Bowman & Willis (2003 quoted by Jack) define Citizen Journalism as a condition where the people have active role in collecting, reporting, analyzing and distributing news and information. Jay Rosen (2006, in Bruns) formulates that Citizen Journalism is directed by those persons who are known as audiences, who now play important role in the journalism process. They have their access in creating and spreading any messages and do not depend on the technology that has been 'controlled' by the mainstream media.

Citizen Journalism Practice as Media of Empowerment
Up to the present, the definition of Citizen Journalism has not been definitively determined. Some experts argue that the term 'journalism' refers only to professional activity. This argument is surfaced because the journalism activity has values and ethics that are only understood by professional journalists. However, another argument exists as well. The main purpose of journalism is supplying information

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[6] In fact, Citizen Journalism has developed before new media emerge. But the development is limited and much depends on the mainstream media. Before new media emerge, the Citizen Journalism took a form of the participation of audiences in delivering information by means of the mainstream media. And in the era of new media, the audiences are highly flexible in choosing their own media channel. In this context, the audience concept also becomes relevant. The existence of new media reinforces the position previously called audience becoming then information producers.

needed by the people so that they can be independent and self-reliance (Bowman and Willis, 2003). While, the idea upon which the Citizen Journalism is produced is to diminish the monopoly of information and knowledge that has long been in the hand of the professionals. The main concept behind the Citizen Journalism is that the *old* media is not the center of knowledge, it is the audiences who collectively have more knowledge compared to a reporter (Glaser in Allan, 2010: 578).

In connection to the ability to "fight" against the monopoly of the mainstream media, the author relates the study of Citizen Journalism to that of Alternative Media. The study of alternative media emerges as a response to the concern about the study of mainstream media that is more elitist. One of the studies caring of the presence of alternative media is what Hamilton (2008) calls as critical media study. The key point of this study is questioning the ideological basis of mass media. As a consequence of this model is that mass media should be able to produce information varieties and interpretational framework being able to understand the people condition.

Unfortunately, the presence of mass media can no longer be expected to reinforce democracy. Many interests that make the mass media cannot give ideal service to the people. As proposed by Herman and Chomsky (1988, in Atton and Hamilton, 2008: 118), both view it from the political economic point of view, that the power of mass media have marginalized ordinary people, that it does not only prevent the people from accessing the production, but also marginalize ordinary people in their reports.
This condition triggers the growth of alternative media that try to give room to the ordinary people to be able to become information producers. Additionally, alternative media can also improve the ability of ordinary people to have more accesses to any information relevant to their needs. According to Atton & Hamilton (2008: 77), the point of empowerment is the opportunity for the 'ordinary people' to tell their own stories without formal education or professional competency and also the status as the mainstream journalists. Furthermore, Clemencia Rodriguez (2001 in Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 122) argues that when people produce their own media, they can represent themselves and their communities more properly.

A study was carried out by Paschal Preston (2001 in Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 119-120) in connection to the concept of Information Community. The presence of communication technology is considered to give opportunity to any social movements to create more egalitarian community. In this context, media are not the main focus, it is democratization of media access to communicate that is more urgent, where access and participation are the key factors.

Methods

The object of this study was the Citizen Journalism activities among the villagers of Banyumas Regency of Central Java Province. The method chosen in this study was a 'single case study'. The unique and contemporary phenomenon character enabled the case study to become a powerful method in answering the problem formulation.

The case study method gave opportunity to the author to collect data from any sources of evidence. And the used sources of evidence came from various techniques of data collection. First, the FGD *(Focus Group Discussion)* with the Citizen Journalists and the advocates. Second, observation of the information production process of the

Citizen Journalists. Third, interviews with the Citizen Journalists and advocating community. Fourth, a text study of the message contents uploaded in the Village website.

Data already obtained were analyzed using the explanation building technique by considering the context of the issues surfaced. This technique was able to give clear correlation between the evidence and preposition as presented at the onset of the study (Yin, 1989). Conclusion was made carefully to avoid fallacy.

Discussion

In the practice of Citizen Journalism, Village will pass through three steps[7], namely pre-production, production and post-production (See Figure 1). These steps are illustrated to run linear, but it is most possibly that they go through a circular way. *First*, **pre-production step**. This first step refers to the preparation process before someone becoming a journalist. However, it does not mean that this process will be running in a linear way, but it is circular and at the next step, the pre-production step will be more powerful in the establishment of the journalist characters and reinforcement of the issues made surface.

Second, **Production Step**. This stage refers to a process of preparing news. There are at least five steps performed by a journalist in this step. This step is not always running in a linear way. (1) Determining the news theme; (2) Determining the source person and data source that support the theme; (3) Determining the angle of news; (4) Organizing information into ordered news or writing; and (5) news publication. *Third*, **Post-Production Step**. The activities of Citizen Journalists do not stop at the process of uploading news into the Village Website. Another important thing is how to make the news accessible and respondable by many people. In this stage, the information mainstreaming strategy is performed.
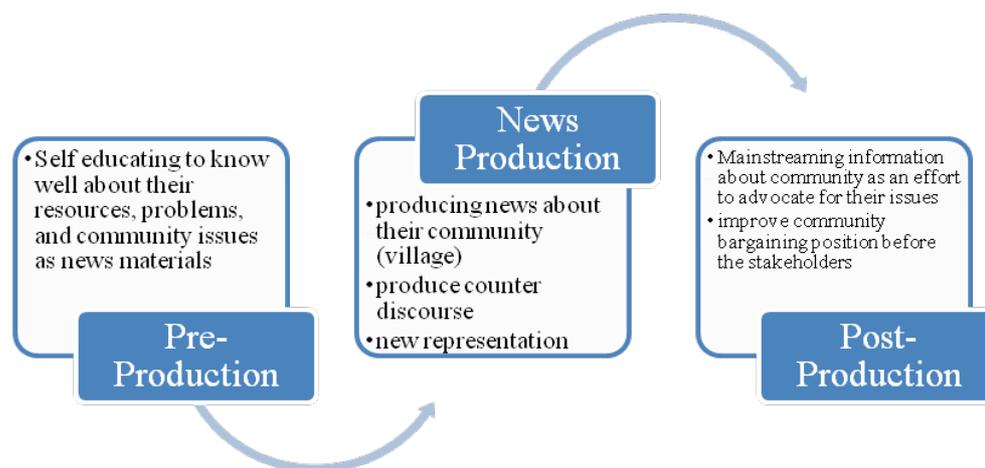
Figure 1 - Mechanisms of Citizen Journalism Practice

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[7] These steps are the result of analysis by the author upon closely observing the characters of Citizen Journalism as the community empowering media.

The three steps as mentioned above were the focus of this study, each of which containing a learning process. It is here that the process of empowerment become clear. The following is further elaboration about the empowerment mechanisms existing in the three steps.

1.   Becoming Citizen Journalist as *Self-Education*

The first step taken by a Citizen Journalist is pre-production stage (see Figure 1). It is a moment when someone learns to be a journalist. Though it is called as pre-production, the process taking place in this stage can be endless with many repetitions for the reinforcement of the characters of a Citizen Journalist. In this stage there are some points learned by a Citizen Journalist that can only be taught by the journalist alone rather than by a facilitator or another person outside the Village community. Therefore, self-educating is the exact term to name this process.

a.   Writing Competency

Writing is a basic competency that must be acquired by a journalist, particularly the online journalist who produces news in form of a written text. Writing is a result of organizing an idea used as a tool to deliver message. If the writing is poor, it is highly possible that the message will not be properly delivered.

Some Citizen Journalists commented that they gained personal benefit when they were competent in writing. First, by continuously sharpening their writing competency, self-confidence is getting increased. This self-confidence constitutes a form of self-educating to position themselves equal to the stakeholders and the super-village parties. When the citizens are confident, Village is ready to appear at public as a powerful entity.

Second, they were proud and satisfied when their news were uploaded into the Village Website. With the writing competency, they could voice their concerns, moreover, if the uploaded news were responded by the readers. They felt their aspirations were respected. This condition encourages the Citizen Journalists to be more critical against any condition relating to the development of their village.

Third, with the writing competency, they felt that they have contributed something for the progress of Village. They believed that the presence of Village Website can bring the Village to a new social condition. One real example of this writing activity was the increasing visit to UMKM[8] upon its products were reviewed in the Website.

b.   Mastery of Reporting Context

A good journalist must understand where he/she is conducting news coverage. This competency becomes important weapon to produce accurate and contextual news. Therefore, a Citizen Journalist must master any condition relating to his/her Village. To master the condition, the Citizen Journalists are encouraged to acknowledge their own Village. If they do not understand the context, it is not impossible that when they are writing about something, their perspective will not be different with that as represented by the mainstream media. Well understanding of the context will enable

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[8] Micro, Small and Middle Businesses

the Journalist to produce any information close to the reality, at least approaching to the Village's need of how it should represented.

There are some matters closely relating to the reporting context, including, first, **Village Problems**. In this process, a Citizen Journalist must explore the area condition he/she is covering. Besides being a material for news writing, close understanding of any problems and issues taking place the coverage area will be good tool to make mapping. Mapping of problems will enable the Village to find the solutions.

Second, **Village Potentials**. Better understanding of the Village potentials by mapping various existing resources. A large number of Village potentials effectively identified and voiced become a power to change the image of Village to a powerful entity. Additionally, the process of understanding the Village potentials will also be a learning process to find the solutions for the existing problems.

Third, **Policies relating to Village**. Without good understanding, it is not impossible that Village will be a playful toy for the supra-village rulers. To understand the policies relating to the Village, the role of advocating community will be larger. However, the advocating parties cannot give evaluation whatsoever because of being outsider. It is Village itself that can determine whether the policies are right or wrong. The evaluation result will be good material for news reporting and recommendation.

c. Reinforcement of Local Identity

According to the comments of the Citizen Journalists, the Village Website is not only intended for the community outside the Village, but also for the local people. Since, it must be acknowledged that there are still many villagers ignorant of their own village. The Village Website encourages the people to know and introduce their Village to the public. Meaning that before "offering" their village to the public, the people must know more about their own village. It is here that the process of reinforcing Local Identity takes places. There are two forms of reinforcements here, representation (merely to make surface the existing identity) and reconstruction (building a new local identity).

2. Village Representation in the Products of Citizen Journalism

One of the elements as the indicator of a powerful community is that the members of the community can control their self-representation before the public. The community has power to determine how they want to be look like. So far, Village is marginalized in the media reporting. Meaning that Village has not yet obtained sufficient bargain power to become valid "source" for the media. Talking about Village is still dominated by the point of view of the supra-village government. Consequently, Village is represented improperly.

The presence of mainstream media that cannot be depended on by the Marginal Community encourages the development of Citizen Journalism. The previous review demonstrated that Citizen Journalism is present as form of dissatisfaction among the community members with the reporting of mainstream media. Therefore, it is important to present something different in the products of Citizen Journalism. As a form of representation control, Village is still figured in the picture as Village wants

to. In this study, there are four matters as key points to differentiate the picture with the products of professional journalists.

First, **Objectiveness**. In the context of journalism *(*mainstream*)*, objectiveness is considered as the ethical key of a news product. However, in the context of alternative journalism, objectiveness is not relevant to the main objective of the alternative media. According to Chomsky (in Atton and Hamilton, 2008: 85), what is done by an alternative journalist is completing the story and then voice it. *Second*, **Source.** In the context of alternative journalism, the source used by the mainstream media tend to be elitist. Therefore, as alternative media, the sources used are taken more from the ordinary people.

Third, **Representation**. This relates to the second element, where the source used in the alternative media gives more rooms to the ordinary people to tell the story of their own, telling the story from their own perspectives. Even, it can be that the source of news is the journalist own self. *Fourth,* **Credibility and Reliability**. The important point in the alternative journalism practice is how different perspective is made surface, and how the relation between the audiences and producers can establish common meaning.

From the content analysis as performed, the author found various interesting tendencies. **First**, the news content tells more about the Village's potential compared to the problems. It means that there is an optimistic aspect to be presented through this people's media. **Second**, the issue of good governance dominates the discourse in the Village Website. This issue gains significant portion because it is considered as the main weapon to reach independency. **Third**, social aspect dominates the news reporting compared to other aspects such as culture, economic and politic. It is motivated by the spirit of Village independent from any interests.

Fourth, Field experience become the main source of news for the journalists. It means eyewitness report is very strong in the Citizen Journalism practice. **Fifth**, the news content of Village Website presents the perspectives of 'ordinary people' that differentiate it with the mainstream media. **Sixth**, the Villagers gain dominant place and tend to avoid any representation of the supra-village element. This indicates the power of Village as a community who want to exist. **Seventh**, though choosing the alternative journalism, it does not mean that the news contents are provocative. The Citizen Journalists in this movement try to be objective without prejudice to their advocacy function.

3.   Increasing Village's Bargaining Power through Network Development

The third stage passed by a Citizen Journalist is Post-Production. In this stage, a Citizen Journalist performs information mainstreaming that has been uploaded into the Village Website. The mainstreaming is important to attract the attentions of various stakeholders. The more the readers, the greater the effect upon the policy making it will produce. It is here that the function of advocacy is run by the Citizen Journalists.

In this Village-to-Develop movement, the presence of Village Website is supported by at least two parties. **First,** the Citizen Journalist who at the same time are the

operator of the portal. **Second,** external parties supporting the mainstreaming of issues already written in the website. In additional, these external parties also function to repeat the issues of Village to get more attention from many people.

One of the strategies effective enough for the information mainstreaming of Village is using social media, especially *Facebook* and *twitter*. Every Citizen Journalist or operator of the Website has their own account and Village's account. So do the advocates. Almost all the GDM activists are active in the social media. One of the implications of a number of new social media used in the Village-to-Develop movement is that the issues in the Village start to attract the attention of the mainstream media, particularly the local media at Banyumas region. It has been ten times that the issues on the Rural TIK have posted into printed and electronic media. Moreover, the resulting implication of the information mainstreaming is the attention from the stakeholders.

What they have done and written through the portal and assistance of the *bloggers* has attracted many parties to take action. Then, this will open wider network. This network become additional energy for the Village to build itself. The Village position become more powerful before the stakeholders.

Back to the concept of empowerment, this condition indicates the important role the social networks have played as social resource for the Village development. The wider network owned by the Village, the larger energy to develop the region and the higher self-confidence of the people. Having many caring friends (read: network), the Village become a powerful community.

Conclusion

In the Citizen Journalism practice, the people are encouraged to produce information that is then processed into news. In the process of news production, the people participating as Citizen Journalists learn to be a powerful entity. There are at least 3 (three) steps passed by the Citizen Journalists, namely pre-production, production and post-production. In each step, the empowerment process is running.

In the pre-production step, the people conduct self-educating about some aspects. Taking the journalism logic, a journalist must have proper insight about his/her environment. In addition, the writing competency is also key factor in delivering any message effectively. In the writing process, the people learn to organize their thoughts so that they will be able to perceive the situation, issues and potentials more clearly. By this resource, any individual is ready to contribute to the Village development.

In the process of news production, a journalist is faced with many choices, particularly in connection to the framework and representation. Based upon the main objective of Citizen Journalism, the Citizen Journalists can be assessed from the outputs they have produced, where the Village is positioned as point of interest. It means that counter discourse as the spirit of Citizen Journalism is manifested properly. This choice reinforces the awareness of the Journalists of the huge power of the Village.

In the post-production step, the message does not only stop when it is uploaded into the Village Website. Even, it is spread to become the mainstream discourse. It is in

this process that the Village learns to build its network, a social capital very useful for the sustainability of Village. By the network, the Village is able to attract the attention of the stakeholders. It is expected that many parties will take side to the Village. It is at this point that the bargaining position of Village will increase. With a more strategic position before the stakeholders, the Village has larger power to voice its interest. Meaning, powerful Village.

Thus the mechanisms of the Citizen Journalism practices in empowering the people. This study indicates that the democratization of information and communication media becomes the key for establishing a powerful community. By mastering the media, they will be able to take control over the information. Not only accessing the information, but also producing the information. It means that they are able to control their representation at the public area. By this power, they become powerful community before the stakeholders, particularly the policy makers. Apart from any controversy about the Citizen Journalism concept, this study affirms the importance of the competency of marginal social group to manage information as advocacy tool.

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