

Unbreaking News: Exploring Public Reliance on Citizen Journalism Over Traditional News Reporting Through News Characteristics as Perceived Factors

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the growing preference for citizen journalism among Filipinos and its implications for the credibility and consumption of news. Drawing on a quantitative approach, the study examined how demographic factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment influence reliance on citizen journalism versus traditional news outlets through news characteristics as perceived factors. Findings reveal that technological advancements and social media proliferation have empowered individuals to both produce and consume news outside established media channels, leading to a decline in engagement with traditional news sources. While citizen journalism offers immediacy and proximity, and diverse perspectives, it often lacks the editorial rigor and accountability of professional journalism, raising concerns about misinformation and bias. The study highlights the need for media literacy and the reinforcement of journalistic standards to ensure the public remains well-informed in an evolving media landscape.

Keywords: citizen journalism, news credibility, traditional news reporting

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital technology has profoundly transformed the field of journalism, ushering in new modes of news production, distribution, and consumption. This shift gave birth to digital journalism and, more notably, citizen journalism—where ordinary individuals, empowered by the internet and social media, report news without formal journalistic training. Citizen journalism has played a significant role in democratizing information dissemination and challenging traditional news institutions. However, while it offers immediacy and localized relevance, it also raises concerns regarding accuracy, ethics, and editorial oversight.

This shift has posed significant challenges to traditional news reporting, which has long been perceived as the standard for credibility and accountability. Public distrust in mainstream media has grown, partly due to perceptions of bias and the rigid structures of institutional journalism. At the same time, citizen journalism has surged, particularly in the Philippines where platforms like Facebook dominate news consumption. This popularity has prompted questions about credibility, misinformation, and public trust in both traditional and citizen-generated content. Recent reports suggest that although trust in news among Filipinos has slightly improved, news avoidance and reliance on alternative, sometimes non-credible sources, are also on the rise.

In light of these developments, the study seeks to explore the extent to which the public relies on citizen journalism over traditional reporting, particularly in relation to key news characteristics such as immediacy, accuracy, correctness, completeness, and proximity. It investigated how this reliance is influenced by demographic factors like age, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. Additionally, the research aims to address gaps in the literature regarding perceptions of media credibility, the societal implications of misinformation, and the motivations behind the public's shift toward citizen-led news content. Grounded in media theories such as media dependency, technological determinism, and the knowledge gap, the study underscores the importance of understanding evolving news consumption behaviors in a rapidly digitizing society.

This study, which was conducted from August to April 2025, aims to assess the public's reliance on citizen journalism over traditional news reporting and explore citizens' perceptions of media credibility. The research was carried out in selected barangays in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, it sought to determine the profile of the participants in terms of the age, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment; the level that individuals lean on citizen journalism in terms of news characteristics which include immediacy, accuracy, correctness, completeness, and proximity; and the significant difference between the respondents' reliance on citizen journalism and their demographics.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative-comparative research design. It was conducted in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, covering all 25 barangays. Cluster sampling was employed to select 10 participants per barangay, totaling 250 respondents aged 18 to 54—an age range identified as the most active on social media platforms like Facebook. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be residents of Bayombong with active Facebook accounts and regular news consumption habits. This sampling approach ensured equal geographic representation and allowed for the collection of diverse perspectives regarding media trust and credibility.

A self-made survey questionnaire that underwent pilot testing with 30 individuals from Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, and revised based on feedback to enhance clarity and reliability served as the primary data collection tool. It was structured into two sections: the first collected demographic data, while the second assessed the five news characteristics using Likert-scale items rated from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Each construct was underpinned by relevant theories: for instance, immediacy was guided by uses and gratifications and gatekeeping theory; accuracy was framed through media credibility and cognitive authority theory; and correctness was supported by media literacy theory and ethical journalism standards. This ensured the instrument's conceptual validity and theoretical alignment.

Data gathering followed a systematic and ethically sound procedure. Ethical approval was obtained from the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Office. Coordination with barangay officials facilitated the identification of participants, who were approached personally and provided with informed consent forms. Surveys were conducted face-to-face, typically during home visits or community gatherings, and responses were coded for anonymity. The questionnaire was administered in printed form, taking no more than 10 minutes to complete, and was collected on the same day. All responses were stored securely, and only the researchers had access to the data. All raw data was scheduled for secure disposal six months post-study to ensure privacy compliance.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic profiles and measure average reliance on citizen journalism. The five-point Likert scale was interpreted using predefined ranges to categorize levels of reliance (e.g., "Often" or "Neutral"). To determine whether reliance varied significantly by demographics, a one-way ANOVA was conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Participants in Terms of Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Educational Attainment

The respondents in the study were fairly distributed across age groups, with the majority aged 41–54 (35.2%), followed closely by those aged 18–25 (34.8%) and 26–40 (30.0%). This balance reflects a wide range of generational perspectives, useful for analyzing

differences in news consumption behavior between digital-native and traditional-media-reliant age groups.

In terms of monthly income, over half of the respondents (54.4%) earned less than Php 9,100, identifying them as low-income earners. Another 28.8% earned between Php 9,100–18,200, indicating that the sample is largely composed of economically marginalized individuals. This financial profile suggests a tendency toward free, accessible sources of news, such as social media–based citizen journalism.

Regarding educational attainment, most respondents had at least some formal education, with 26.8% being college graduates and 24.0% having completed high school. This level of education supports a basic degree of media literacy, enabling critical engagement with both citizen and traditional journalism. Overall, the demographic data highlights a young to middle-aged, low-income population with varied educational backgrounds—making them an important group in understanding reliance on non-traditional news sources.

Table 2

Respondent Reliance on Citizen Journalism based on News Characteristics as Perceived Factors

News Characteristic	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Immediacy	3.99	0.84	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism over traditional reporting to a high extent
Accuracy	2.71	1.03	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism and traditional reporting at an equal extent
Completeness	2.74	1.05	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism and traditional reporting at an equal extent
Correctness	2.56	0.91	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism and traditional reporting at an equal extent
Proximity	3.86	0.84	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism over traditional reporting to a high extent
Overall Average	3.18	0.62	Exemplify reliance on citizen journalism and traditional reporting at an equal extent

Table 2 illustrates the level of public reliance on citizen journalism in relation to five key news characteristics: immediacy, accuracy, correctness, completeness, and proximity. The overall mean score of 3.18 (SD = 0.62) indicates a moderate or neutral reliance, meaning that respondents trust both citizen journalism and traditional reporting almost equally, though their preference varies depending on the specific quality being evaluated.

Immediacy emerged as the most valued characteristic, with the highest mean score of 3.99, showing that respondents highly appreciate the speed at which citizen journalism delivers news. This supports the idea that in today’s fast-moving digital world, audiences are drawn to real-time updates, which citizen journalists—particularly those active on social media—are quick to provide. This aligns with Hermida’s concept of “ambient journalism,” where users are constantly updated through decentralized platforms.

Proximity, with a close mean score of 3.86, was also a strong factor, suggesting that the public relies on citizen journalism for local or personally relevant news. The ability of citizen journalists to report on events from within their communities gives them an edge in delivering hyperlocal content that mainstream media may overlook. This strength of localized reporting highlights the participatory and community-driven nature of citizen journalism.

On the other hand, completeness (2.74) and accuracy (2.71) received moderate ratings, indicating that while the public sees citizen journalism as informative, they are less confident in its ability to provide comprehensive and factually precise news. These scores reflect skepticism about the unfiltered and often unverified nature of citizen reporting, especially when compared to the structured fact-checking of traditional media.

Correctness was rated the lowest among all characteristics, suggesting concerns about ethical standards, grammar, and professional structure in citizen-reported content. This implies that respondents are cautious about the quality and credibility of information when it lacks editorial oversight.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 shows the difference between Public Reliance on citizen journalism based The study used one-way ANOVA to analyze whether respondents' reliance on citizen journalism differed significantly based on their age, monthly income, and educational attainment, focusing on five news characteristics—immediacy, accuracy, correctness, completeness, and proximity—and an overall composite score.

Table 3*Difference Between Public Reliance on Citizen Journalism Based on Age*

Age Groups		Immediacy	Accuracy	Correctness	Completeness	Proximity	Overall
18-25	f	87	87	87	87	87	87
	Mean	3.87 ^B	2.30 ^C	2.71	2.48	3.89	3.05
	SD	0.88	0.92	0.98	0.87	0.78	0.62
26-40	f	75	75	75	75	75	75
	Mean	3.93 ^B	2.74 ^B	2.57	2.43	3.87	3.11
	SD	0.86	0.88	1.07	0.93	0.79	0.61
41-54	f	88	88	88	88	88	88
	Mean	4.17 ^A	3.10 ^A	2.93	2.74	3.84	3.35
	SD	0.77	1.09	1.07	0.91	0.95	0.59
	F-value	3.134	14.701	2.449	2.918	0.079	6.149
	p-value	0.045	0.001	0.088	0.056	0.924	0.002

Age emerged as a statistically significant factor in shaping perceptions of citizen journalism. Notably, respondents aged 41–54 showed higher reliance on citizen journalism in terms of immediacy ($p = 0.045$), accuracy ($p = 0.001$), and overall trust ($p = 0.002$) compared to younger age groups. This suggests that older individuals place greater value on prompt and trustworthy information, possibly because of their increased engagement with social, political, or health-related concerns, as also supported by Tandoc and Maitra (2018).

Table 4*Difference Between Public Reliance on Citizen Journalism Based on Monthly Income*

Monthly Income		Immediacy	Accuracy	Correctness	Completeness	Proximity	Overall
Mas mababa sa Php 9,100	f	136	136	136	136	136	136
	Mean	4.08	2.75	2.90	2.68	3.93	3.27
	SD	0.78	1.06	1.05	0.89	0.85	0.60
Php 9,100-18,200	f	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Mean	3.94	2.65	2.56	2.39	3.75	3.06
	SD	0.87	0.93	1.03	0.87	0.87	0.63
Php 18,200- 36,400	f	29	29	29	29	29	29
	Mean	3.78	2.57	2.52	2.49	3.90	3.07
	SD	0.98	1.02	1.09	0.99	0.70	0.66
Php 36,400- 63,700	f	7	7	7	7	7	7
	Mean	3.66	3.03	2.71	2.00	3.84	3.05
	SD	0.95	1.28	1.08	0.77	1.14	0.75
Php 63,700 109,200	f	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Mean	4.15	2.98	2.62	2.73	3.58	3.17
	SD	1.02	1.24	0.93	1.16	0.73	0.39
	F-value	1.258	0.512	1.653	2.079	0.725	1.677

p-value 0.287 0.727 0.162 0.084 0.575 0.156

On the other hand, monthly income did not yield any statistically significant differences across any of the news characteristics or the overall reliance score. Although those in the lowest income group (< Php 9,100) had slightly higher mean scores, the results suggest that socioeconomic status does not strongly influence trust in or use of citizen journalism. This supports existing research (e.g., Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020) showing that mobile and digital access have helped close the information gap across income brackets.

Table 5*Difference Between Public Reliance on Citizen Journalism Based on Educational Attainment*

Educational Attainment		Immediacy	Accuracy	Correctness	Completeness	Proximity	Overall
Hindi natapos ang elementarya	f	25	25	25	25	25	25
	Mean	4.03	2.81	2.45	2.66	3.62 ^c	3.11
	SD	0.78	1.13	1.01	1.02	0.83	0.37
Nakapagtapos ng elementarya	f	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Mean	4.09	2.78	2.48	2.58	3.46 ^c	3.08
	SD	0.83	1.03	0.78	0.97	0.94	0.52
Hindi natapos ang sekondarya	f	29	29	29	29	29	29
	Mean	4.01	2.58	2.56	2.57	3.78 ^B	3.10
	SD	1.00	0.99	0.98	0.84	0.93	0.68
Nakapagtapos ng sekondarya	f	60	60	60	60	60	60
	Mean	4.07	2.47	2.96	2.53	4.14	3.23
	SD	0.70	0.99	0.97	0.81	0.69	0.58
Hindi natapos ang kolehiyo	f	37	37	37	37	37	37
	Mean	3.88	2.85	2.80	2.72	4.10	3.26
	SD	0.85	0.96	1.22	1.06	0.82	0.72
Nakatapos sa kolehiyo	f	67	67	67	67	67	67
	Mean	3.92	2.85	2.84	2.44	3.81	3.18
	SD	0.92	1.06	1.14	0.87	0.80	0.70
	F-value	0.432	1.213	1.622	0.543	4.075	0.540
	p-value	0.826	0.304	0.155	0.743	0.001	0.746

Regarding educational attainment, a significant difference was observed only in the proximity dimension ($p = 0.001$). Respondents with moderate educational backgrounds—particularly high school graduates and those with some college education—were more likely to find citizen journalism relevant to their local context. This indicates that individuals with at least a basic level of education may be more engaged with community-level discourse and participatory media, as noted by Hermida (2010).

The analysis found that age and education are key demographic factors influencing public reliance on citizen journalism, especially regarding timeliness, accuracy, and local relevance. Meanwhile, income level does not appear to be a major influence, highlighting the democratizing role of digital access in shaping media consumption habits in the Philippines.

Moreover, the five news characteristics, immediacy and proximity received the highest mean scores, indicating that participants relied more heavily on citizen journalism when it came to timely and locally relevant information. Specifically, citizen journalism was perceived to deliver faster updates and to better address events occurring within participants' immediate surroundings. These results resonate with the assertions of Hermida (2010), who described citizen journalism as "ambient journalism," a system that allows real-time sharing of information via social media platforms, offering immediacy that traditional media sometimes cannot provide. Similarly, Paulussen and D'heer (2013) emphasized the strength of citizen journalism in

covering hyperlocal events that may not receive adequate attention from mainstream media outlets.

In contrast, the dimensions of accuracy, correctness, and completeness yielded more moderate scores, suggesting that while respondents value the accessibility of citizen journalism, they remain skeptical about its factual rigor and ethical reliability. These findings align with previous research by Karlsson (2015), who noted that the absence of formal editorial oversight in citizen journalism often leads to questions regarding its accuracy and credibility. The study by Singer (2007) further confirmed that although citizen journalism democratizes news production, it lacks institutional mechanisms for verification, raising concerns about correctness and completeness.

Demographic analysis revealed statistically significant differences in reliance based on age and educational attainment. Older respondents, particularly those in the 41–54 age group, reported higher reliance on citizen journalism across dimensions such as immediacy, accuracy, and overall trust. This suggests a possible generational shift wherein older adults, previously more dependent on traditional news, now turn to digital alternatives to fulfill their need for up-to-date information. Tandoc and Maitra (2018) proposed that such behavior may stem from older individuals' heightened engagement with civic matters and their increased desire for timely news during periods of social or political flux. In terms of educational attainment, significant variation was found only in the proximity dimension, where respondents with at least secondary education expressed greater reliance on citizen journalism for news that was geographically or emotionally close. This reflects Straubhaar's (1991) theory of cultural proximity, which posits that audiences are more likely to engage with media content that aligns with their cultural and geographic contexts.

Moreover, the study found no statistically significant differences in reliance based on socioeconomic status, particularly monthly income. Despite the economic disparities among participants, reliance on citizen journalism was consistent across income groups. This could be attributed to the pervasive accessibility of digital media in the Philippines, where social media platforms such as Facebook are heavily used across all income levels for news consumption (Meltwater, 2024). This observation aligns with Posetti and Bontcheva's (2020) argument that the widespread availability of mobile internet has helped narrow the information gap among different economic sectors, enabling broader access to both credible and non-credible sources.

The overall mean score suggested a neutral stance, with respondents exhibiting a balanced reliance on both citizen and traditional journalism. While citizen journalism was favored for its immediacy and proximity, traditional media retained its role as a trusted institution for delivering accurate, correct, and complete news. These findings indicate a hybridized media consumption behavior where the public strategically navigates between citizen and traditional sources based on their informational needs and contextual relevance.

Conclusion

Citizen journalism holds a prominent role in public news consumption, especially in delivering immediate and localized information. Its responsiveness and broad reach make it a key player when traditional media is delayed or unavailable. However, traditional journalism remains vital for ensuring credibility, factual accuracy, and depth. In terms of source, despite the rise of citizen-generated content, the public still prefers mainstream outlets for complex, sensitive, or high-stakes news due to their professional standards and editorial oversight. Demographic factors, particularly age and educational attainment, significantly influence reliance on different types of journalism. Older individuals (41–54) exhibited greater trust in citizen journalism's timeliness and reliability, while those with at least secondary education valued its proximity and relevance to their local contexts. There is also no significant difference

in reliance based on income, suggesting that citizen journalism serves as an egalitarian news source. Its accessibility via free platforms like Facebook makes it usable across economic groups, helping close traditional knowledge gaps. These findings suggest a balanced reliance on both citizen and traditional journalism, reflecting media pluralism. Filipino audiences appear to adapt consciously by curating content from both sources depending on their informational needs—be it speed, relevance, or credibility

Recommendations

The study recommends implementing media literacy programs through academic institutions and community organizations to help the public critically assess news across platforms. These programs should target all age groups and emphasize fact-checking, source verification, and journalistic ethics. Moreover, community-based training modules for citizen journalists, facilitated by government agencies and NGOs can also be developed. These should cover ethical reporting, digital safety, and fact-checking practices to enhance the credibility of grassroots reporting. Likewise, traditional media outlets are encouraged to adopt hybrid models that integrate citizen journalism while maintaining editorial oversight. This approach can blend citizen journalism's strengths (immediacy and proximity) with professional standards for accuracy and depth. Future studies can include exposure level as a variable and assess how often individuals access both citizen and traditional journalism, which may reveal patterns in media preference and trust influenced by frequency and intensity of use. To broaden the platform scope of citizen journalism research, they should explore not just Facebook but also Twitter (X), TikTok, YouTube, and other emerging platforms to capture a more complete picture of how digital citizens engage with news. They can also conduct longitudinal and interdisciplinary studies to examine psychological and sociocultural factors influencing media preference. Tracking changes over time can help understand shifts in trust, habits, and the impact of misinformation exposure. Finally, they can advocate for policy interventions that address misinformation without infringing on press freedom. Through this, policymakers can create transparent, inclusive frameworks that hold platforms accountable while supporting the role of citizen journalists in democratic discourse.

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