



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH IN EXPLORING THE ROLES OF
YOUTH CITIZEN JOURNALISTS IN MALAYSIA***

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FBMK 2018 65



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By

MASTURA BINTI MAHAMED

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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November 2018

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2018

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Citizen journalism has been increasingly embraced among citizens globally with the expansion of the internet, new media technologies and social media platforms. In Malaysia, most studies about Malaysian citizen journalism were concentrated around Malaysian political scene and the elections. However not many studies were done to uncover who are the citizen journalists, their roles of these people behind citizen journalism or citizen reporting Malaysians particularly among youth segment of the population. The aim of this study is to explore the roles of youth citizen journalists in Malaysia. The study explored and applied the Producers Theory with its adapted model of Motivational, Situational and Social factors shaping productive news use. Another theory used to explore the study is the Conversational Concept which would help further explain the iterative cycle of self-production and use (interaction) in playing their role as citizen journalists.

The study was conducted in various cities in Malaysia precisely in Klang Valley, Johor Bahru, Kota Bharu, and Kuala Terengganu. The selection of informants was based on purposive sampling. They were from youth category (15-40 year old) Malaysians from multiple races. They also should at least attend formal education in Malaysia with various family, cultural background and education level. The informants were gathered from Citizen Journalists Malaysia (CJ.MY), The Vocket and The Patriots. These informants maintain their independent as citizen journalist though they have preferred platform based on their preference and interests. 14 informants participated in the study. Qualitative inquiry using the phenomenology approach was selected to capture as much depth of the informant's experience. In depth interview and observation was chosen as the data collection strategies to allow depth and rich data possible. Atlas.ti 8 was used to analyze the data that eventually create emerging themes. Audit trail,

members check, peer examination and rich thick description were used to ensure reliability and validity of the study.

The results of the study revealed, the informants saw youth citizen journalism with potential for citizens to express themselves. The informants also see it as empowerment for youth as well as for them to position themselves as important in the society. The citizen journalists also determined the traits of citizen journalist accordingly based on their personal experience. They often identify themselves playing more than just information distributors. They really take their role seriously with the association of responsibility and for the benefit of others. Therefore, the importance of spreading knowledge with adequate fact checking was consistent outcome of the journalistic process and ethical considerations. The evidence of life experiences also influenced their decision to become youth citizen journalists. In conclusion, the themes emerged displayed similarities of elements that ultimately represent the attempt to answer the research objectives in exploring their role and depth of meaning of citizen journalism phenomenon among youth in Malaysia.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENDEKATAN FENOMENOLOGI DALAM MENEROKA PERANAN WARTAWAN WARGA DALAM KALANGAN BELIA MALAYSIA

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Kewartawanan warga (citizen journalism) semakin menjadi suatu kelaziman di kalangan warga di seluruh dunia akibat jaringan internet, teknologi media baharu dan kewujudan media sosial. Di Malaysia pula lazimnya kajian tentang kewartawanan warga tertumpu kepada perihal politik dan pilihan raya. Walau bagaimanapun, belum terdapat kajian meluas melihat siapakah sebenarnya yang menjalankan kegiatan kewartawanan warga di Malaysia terutamanya di kalangan belia di negara ini. Kajian ini meneroka peranan belia dalam kewartawanan warga menggunakan Teori Produsage yang telah diadaptasi menjadi Model Motivasi, Situasi dan Sosial menerangkan penggunaan berita produktif. Selain itu, Konsep Perbualan turut digunakan untuk meningkatkan kefahaman mengenai arah tuju yang diambil oleh para wartawan warga ini yang melibatkan proses berlelaran interaksi-bina sendiri semasa para belia ini memainkan peranan mereka sebagai wartawan warga.

Kajian ini dijalankan di pelbagai bandar di Malaysia termasuk Lembah Klang, Johor Bahru, Kota Bharu dan Kuala Terengganu. Pemilihan informan kajian adalah menggunakan kaedah pensampelan bertujuan. Para informan adalah daripada golongan belia berumur antara 15-40 tahun dari pelbagai bangsa. Mereka sekurang-kurangnya menerima pendidikan formal di Malaysia dan datang dari pelbagai latar keluarga, budaya dan pendidikan. Para informan dipilih melalui Citizen Journalist Malaysia (CJ.MY), The Vocket dan The Patriots. Para informan mengekalkan kebebasan mereka sebagai wartawan warga walaupun setiap mereka mempunyai sebab dan platform pilihan masing-masing berdasarkan kecenderungan dan minat. 14 orang telah menyertai kajian ini. Kajian kualitatif ini telah menggunakan kaedah fenomenologi. Strategi temu bual dan pemerhatian dipilih bagi memperoleh data kajian yang mendalam dan deskripsi yang amat teliti mengenai pengalaman belia sebagai wartawan warga.

Perisian Atlas.ti 8 telah digunapakai menganalisa data yang terkumpul membentuk tema-tema. Selain itu jejak audit, pemeriksaan ahli informan dan pemeriksaan seawat digunakan untuk memastikan kebolehpercayaan dan kesahan kajian ini.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan, informan melihat peranan sebagai wartawan warga di kalangan belia sebagai potensi untuk mereka mengekspresi diri. Mereka juga melihat ia sebagai peluang pemerksaan belia, juga sebagai kaedah mereka menempatkan diri dalam masyarakat. Mereka juga telah menggariskan ciri-ciri wartawan warga berdasarkan kefahaman dan pengalaman mereka. Mereka melihat peranan wartawan warga tidak hanya sebagai penyebarkan maklumat malah lebih dari itu. Mereka mengambil tanggungjawab sebagai wartawan warga secara serius dan bermanfaat dengan menekankan aspek ilmu, pemeriksaan fakta sebagai hasil proses kewartawanan yang dijalankan dengan beretika. Pengalaman hidup para informan turut mempengaruhi peranan mereka sebagai wartawan warga. Kesimpulannya, tema-tema yang muncul menunjukkan persamaan untuk memperlihatkan peranan yang mereka jalani sekaligus menjawab persoalan kajian ini.

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MASTURA MAHAMED



I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 16 November 2018 to conduct the final examination of Mastura binti Mahamed on her thesis entitled "Phenomenological Approach in Exploring the Roles of Youth Citizen Journalists in Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CJ.MY	Citizen Journalists Malaysia
DOI	Diffusion of Innovation Model
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MPI	Malaysian Press Institute
MCMC	Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission
YCJ	Youth Citizen Journalists

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the study, the statement of the research problem, the research questions and objectives, the significance of the study, its scope and limitations, and definitions of keywords.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Online Journalism and Youth

The internet has changed the media landscape more than we expected when it was first introduced. The appearance of the internet has also changed the media landscape, causing many people to turn to online platforms for news and information. Greater internet access has allowed online journalism to be adopted both by purely online news sources and by traditional news organizations that have taken online journalism platforms under their wing (Franklin, 2014; Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). Furthermore, youth not only search for information and news online; they create their own content (user-generated content), reporting on what they are witnessing and adopting a gate-watching role. Gate-watching is observing and gathering information from sources on social media and deciding the truth based on one's own opinion and analysis of the huge range of perspectives offered by the internet. The internet places fewer restrictions than traditional media on the citizen who has embarked on citizen journalism using online platforms. However, the emergence of online journalism, followed by the emergence of citizen journalism and citizen media under authoritarian rule, may lead to differences in practice and intensity as citizen journalists gain increasing recognition of what they do and their contribution to society (Marchi, 2012).

It is the change in media production, distribution, and consumption brought about by the mainstreaming of digital and internet-based media that has led to an explosion of interest in citizen media. Citizen media are more easily captured, archived, and analyzed than ever before. The line between professionals and citizens is breaking down. The functions most often discussed in the literature are witnessing, gatekeeping, and gate-watching. Studies also reveal how citizen journalists were first to report on breaking news stories to international audiences by providing eyewitness reports (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Kaufhold, Valenzuela and de Zuniga, 2010; Bélair-Gagnon and Anderson, 2015).

The emergence of online citizen journalism is a more prevalent phenomenon now; user-generated internet content and its increasing accessibility to many people in both urban and rural areas have made such journalism more prominent, and more people are taking an interest in playing a role as citizen journalists (Riaz and Pasha, 2011; Chung and Nah, 2013a). As citizen journalists, these people are more than just interactive in responding to comments; they report news content that highlights issues relevant to them or their communities, and they adopt other journalistic functions as they feel appropriate. Most citizen journalists interviewed mentioned that they adopt journalistic roles as citizen journalists in ways that are closely similar to their professional counterparts (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Papacharissi, 2011).

In Western countries, it has been observed that the growth of online citizen journalism from online journalism is more evident than in other parts of the world. Some online journalism platforms accept citizen-generated content as part of their operations, although some editors of news portals are skeptical about news content from citizen journalists (Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa, 2010; Kaba and Touré, 2014; Okorie, Oyedepo and Usaini, 2014).

Hence, the development of the internet and its influence on youth has led to a situation where citizen journalists inform others and distribute information. For example, they promote an active citizen role among youth, benefiting from the increased space and lower levels of filtering associated with the new media tools to speak out and share their “take” on stories that are neglected by the mainstream media (Deuze and Fortunati, 2010). There is also increasing discussion about youth being agents who highlight and solve issues pertaining to minorities and underprivileged segments in society. Youth’s use of information and communication technology has the potential to balance the tendency of the mainstream media not to include responses from every angle in their reporting, a tendency which perhaps contributes to the perception of imbalance in mainstream media reporting (Campbell, 2014; Harcup, 2015).

Meanwhile, in Eastern countries, the development and exposure of online citizen journalism may vary. Online journalism is growing, as is the accessibility of the internet. The interesting point is the prominence of the internet as the driving factor for the growth of citizen journalism in all regions, although there are significant differences among the roles it plays, as some countries have more autocratic media. This situation has made citizens opt for online media to share news or information that is usually not featured in the mainstream media, such as issues of social justice in Singapore (Ho and Baildon, 2013), citizen reporting of war crises (Hamdy, 2010), and human-interest news in Indonesia (Nasrullah, 2012; Pintak, 2014). Online platforms allow citizens to report what is happening, as they have fewer or no filters and anyone can share their stories with relatively few restrictions. This mostly voluntary sharing and reporting has led to the

creation of citizen journalism sites and the evolution of citizen journalists in the East.

The impact of the rapid growth of influence of the internet on Malaysians is evident. Progress in technology has had its biggest influence on youth in Malaysia. In a 2014 study jointly conducted by the Georgia Institute of Technology and the International Telecommunications Union, 13.4 percent of Malaysian youth (more than 3.9 million youth) were classed as competent with computers and familiar with the internet. Most youth have been exposed to technology from an early age. The study indicated that Malaysia has “relatively high” internet penetration among the country’s population (at 68 percent in 2014), which the report attributed to the country’s high proportion of avid internet users including among the youth segment of the population (ICT Data and, Division and ITU, 2014).

To further explain the current situation, researchers have observed that constant use among youth of new media platforms for social and academic purposes indicates that technology has significantly and positively influenced and added value to youth’s daily lives. The adoption of technology has encouraged youth to play a more active role in society, allowing them to showcase their ideas and share them with the world via new media platforms. This has changed perceptions in a positive way and has increased levels of youth societal and civic engagement through connection and consumption of information (Spurgeon *et al.*, 2012).

The internet and new media platforms have also created opportunities for youth to tell their stories through hands-on media applications, such as photo collage and post-sharing to enhance individual and community understanding of social issues that are relevant and exciting to them. This phenomenon has produced an active media culture among youth; they are active designers and producers of an alternative media for youth. This makes them ideally placed to have a vast impact on the community at large, becoming distributors of information for their community, when these youth function as citizen journalists, representing themselves and their communities (Charmaraman, 2013).

1.1.2 Citizen Journalism in Malaysia

Citizen journalism in Malaysia has followed the global trend, with more citizens participating as citizen journalists in line with the emergence of new media technologies and social media platforms. Citizen journalism has allowed citizens to share information and platforms, giving a voice to the people. Citizen journalism has allowed more space for freedom of expression, which then evolved into greater space for media freedom in Malaysia. Such digital empowerment has encouraged citizens to become involved in citizen journalism

to advocate issues such as the empowerment of women and interfaith tolerance (Balaraman, 2013).

Citizen journalism has also opened more opportunities for citizens to get involved in the investigation of public issues. This emerging trend in investigative journalism provides space for citizens to participate in public issues through reporting and discussion. More often than not, citizen journalism is evidence of a collaborative effort that often presents challenges to citizen journalists, as their contribution and role have yet to be properly acknowledged by professional journalists and by society at large. Citizen journalists are shaping the media industry as they adapt to changing technologies, and the importance of citizen journalists (particularly in investigative reporting) is evident, although concerns about ethics may arise (Hamid and Ishak, 2015).

Citizen journalists are ordinary people who use journalistic processes and values to participate in sharing information with minimal or no training. They have a similar vision to their professional counterparts in terms of wishing to facilitate a better society and represent the truth. However, citizen journalists are more focused on their role in facilitating social responsibility initiatives than on financial gain. The emergence of advanced technologies and new media has provided ordinary citizens with platforms that are more affordable and effective for conveying their messages and concerns (Thomas, 2015).

Researchers including van der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014) have pointed out that, in many countries, the mainstream media system is under government control. As a result, mainstream media outlets emphasize good news and pay less attention to news that represents the public's day-to-day issues and concerns. With the emergence of the new media platforms, the public can express their demand for news content that represents them and their issues and therefore create their own content through (possibly limited) journalistic processes. Youth citizen journalists acquire the ability and skills to create their own content as a way of covering issues that are underrepresented in the mainstream media.

Despite the issue of citizen under representation in the mainstream news, research has also shown that public perception regards citizen journalism as mere sensationalism, with a focus on personal opinion rather than on hard facts. It is seen as lacking credibility in terms of news content, and the social trust conferred on professional journalists is not extended to their citizen journalist counterparts (Nah and Chung, 2012a). Research by Carr, Barnidge, Lee, and Tsang (2014) highlighted that the public are often skeptical about citizen journalists and their roles. They have a high tendency to disbelieve citizen reporting, even when it is of good quality, on the basis of their misconceptions about the role of citizen journalists.

Therefore, the time has come to examine the roles of citizen journalists in an effort to establish solid ground on which citizen journalism can be considered as a serious medium that encourages the empowerment and participation of citizens in journalistic processes. The beauty of this changing media environment is its flexibility, whereby former audiences are now not only participating in discussions but also producing their own content, even bypassing the traditional media by providing content based on their own perspectives, using ICT and the internet as the platform for freedom of expression (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Lacy *et al.*, 2009; Deutsch and Radsch, 2012).

More than 75 percent of youth who participated in one study admitted that they seek information from the internet and social media platforms because the traditional media in Malaysia is perceived as failing to provide sufficient information and as having excessive censorship and legal restrictions compared to online platforms. Alternative news websites, because they are subject to fewer restrictions, were deemed to be fairer and more objective in their news articles; they were also seen as providing more comprehensive coverage than mainstream news media, particularly in covering controversial issues (Wilson *et al.*, 2011).

Hence, such discourse about weather youth citizen journalism has been successful in relating to whether the role of youth citizen journalists stimulating active citizenship among youth is growing and ever changing. Expanding avenues and minimum regulations and surveillance of the use of new media enabled youth to speak out and to share their take on stories that are neglected by the mainstream media. The mainstream media has a tendency not to cover views and responses from every angle, and this may contribute to perceptions of imbalance in mainstream media reporting (Campbell, 2014; Harcup, 2015).

Review of the literature thus identifies a need for further research pertaining to youth and their roles as citizen journalists, an area that the researcher intends to investigate in this study.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The issue of the kind of functions carried out by citizen journalists compared to their professional counterparts is part of the continuing scholarly debate over journalistic practice. This discussion focuses on the interest among ordinary citizens particularly among youth in searching for and creating alternative ways to address possible imbalances in mainstream reporting and to play a more active role in news production. Evidently youth found themselves lack of channels to express themselves in conventional media setting Carr *et al.* (2014) argued that this issue has led to an open debate about the credibility, risk and

objectivity and perception of the mainstream media compared to citizen journalism especially among young people. Skeptics do not yet consider citizen journalism to be a serious medium for news and information. Other studies have found that citizen journalists create space for information to be distributed via the internet, as the mainstream media have limited space for news that has less importance for the news corporations (Bentley *et al.*, 2006; Forde, 2011; Meadows, 2012; Skovsgaard *et al.*, 2013).

For youth, the debate often brings the effectiveness of youth in journalistic contribution in new media environment and the mass media into sharp focus to better represent themselves and their issues, questioning whether they effectively execute the roles that are expected of them and suggesting ways in which citizen journalists complementing or opposing or act as corrective to the mainstream media in reporting youth and grassroots issues and how they see themselves as citizen journalists and how life experience enriched the choice as citizen journalists. Such exploration on the notion of youth citizens association to their journalistic endeavors to find out their role youth citizen journalists associated with. The debate indicates that researchers should study the role of youth citizens in journalistic practice to gain a better understanding of issues such as perception, responsibility, roles and experiences among youth citizen journalists in the eyes of youth citizen journalists. Youth citizen journalists so far had been associated with keyboard warriors' cyber trooper and other negative connotation particularly in developing countries. (Johnson and Wiedenbeck, 2009; Nah and Chung, 2012b; Mutsvaire *et al.*, 2014). Previous discussion about the role of citizen journalists in Western countries including among youth has considered them first as distributors of information Youth seeking for alternative as they become skeptical of the mainstream media (Alexander, 2015; Atton, 2009b; Gillmor, 2004; van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014); then their function was upgraded to one of discussion, and then it evolved into interaction and possibly a more complex watchdog role. While in Malaysia, youth have limited channels to spread their ideas and knowledge in the conventional media setting. They did not consider mainstream media as the main news source as they are skeptical of those outlets. They are also exposed at risk of victims for cyber bully and misperception by the general public and the media. Youth citizen journalists also found themselves on the edge of highlighting youth as well as community related interest and issues to aim for attention of the authorities and relevant parties (Lim, 2013). Therefore the need to uncover their how youth citizen journalists fit in such situation with more online platforms welcome youth citizen journalist sharing their stories.

In their analyses about Malaysian citizen journalists, Tapsell (2013) and Weiss (2013) found that citizen journalists acting as information distributors at times evolved into a more complex role—the watchdog role—particularly in terms of fact-checking and functioning as witnesses. The process of fact-checking and witnessing involves citizens in cross-checking sources used in the mainstream media and in observing events in person. Citizen journalists who do this are seen as representing the voice and interests of the people. This may be caused by

multiple cultural, social, and political factors, yet the real outcome has yet to be thoroughly examined. Therefore, it will be interesting to explore such areas, not limited to the general election but extending to other aspects of the Malaysian experience, as social media usage and citizen experience are particularly evident in Malaysia. In Malaysian context study on citizen media yet to address youth issues and interests, more focus on political and community developments (Tapsell, 2013).

Interestingly, Facebook has identified Malaysia as the country that has the third-largest number of active Facebook users in the world. The number of users of Facebook and other social media platforms in Malaysia is expected to continue rising for years to come. (Kamaruddin, Ghazali, & Muda, 2015). At least 50 percent of 20- to 30-year-olds are active users of the internet, according to a recent report (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission [MCMC], 2017). The same report revealed that 80 percent of youth (those below the age of 40) are active users of the internet. This shows that the youth segment is the most avid user of the internet (MCMC, 2017). Therefore, it is safe to say that it will be interesting to explore further the existence of youth citizen journalists via these platforms as to just avid user. Hence, the exploration of youth as online citizen journalists reporting using new media platform was a subject waiting to be explored on the basis of the studies and reports mentioned above.

So far, in the Malaysian context, Kamaruddin, Ghazali, and Muda (2015) have concluded that citizens felt the mainstream media is inadequate; results indicate the gap for citizens to play a more significant role on alternative platforms to exercise their rights and self-expression particularly among youth and counter misrepresentation of youth in mainstream media and among the public. Citizen journalists create their own content using new media platforms such as citizen websites and social media to cover areas not covered by the mainstream media. This situation is highlighted by other research findings that suggest that the mainstream media are characterized by a lack of coverage of grassroots news which is closer to youth such as career development, problem solving and other social issues related to youth. The emerging journalistic processes and tools adopted by citizens via the internet particularly from youth indicate efforts to absorb this inadequacy of the mainstream media and to increase the chance for citizen journalists to become more responsive in reacting and take action based on their life experiences to address existing gap (Balaraman and Ibrahim, 2013; Lim, 2013). Hence, a focus on how youth citizen journalists are taking on these developments is the next step in uncovering their experience; previous research on this topic has not yet explored the citizen journalism experience among youth in Malaysia.

Moreover, the Malaysian media landscape is still poorly understood, and there has been little depth of study on citizen journalists in Malaysia. The issue of youth playing a significant role as citizen journalists in Malaysia remains unclear, as past studies have typically relied on issues and impact rather than focusing

on the citizen journalists' role within the processes and practices of the Malaysian media landscape (Balaraman, 2013; Othman & Nayan, 2013).

Interestingly, despite the overall positive outlook for the role of youth as citizen journalists, it remains unclear how successful their efforts have been. Studies by Berger (2011) and Bentley, Littau, Meyer, Watson, and Walsh (2007) youth indicated a successful role and function for youth citizen journalists. In the present condition in Malaysia since youth are more active in online, are they also active playing the role as citizen journalists and their roles based on their experience that not many would have known, thus need for more exploration.

There is also a gap in the use of specific theory to explain the role of citizen journalists. From these studies, it might be safe to argue that the gap is both theoretical and practical. The specific theory often used in discussing the role of citizen journalists is the three dimensions of professionalism (Singer, 2003), which offers insight into certain characteristics of the role of youth as citizen journalists. Theories such as users and gratification theory and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology emphasize the use of technology (in this case, internet use) but do not focus on the role of individuals who use the internet in different locations, with different infrastructure, and in different social settings (Balaraman *et al.*, 2015). The role of youth citizen journalists in developing nations where there is less press freedom will offer different insights into the extension and implementation of the roles discussed and identified for the present study.

Based on the arguments presented above, the study is intended to establish the kind of role that youth citizen journalists play in the Malaysian media landscape. The researcher employs qualitative methods, using in-depth interviews with youth citizen journalists to uncover the roles that they play in this increasingly prominent phenomenon.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do youth citizen journalists define their understanding of citizen journalism?
2. What kinds of role are played by youth citizen journalists?
3. What life experiences influence the choice of youth to become citizen journalists?

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore the roles of youth citizen journalists in Malaysia.

The specific objectives are:

1. to define youth citizen journalists' understanding of citizen journalism in Malaysia;
2. to identify the roles played by youth citizen journalists in Malaysia;
3. to describe the experiences influencing youth's choice to become citizen journalists in Malaysia.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Given these research questions and objectives, it is hoped that the present study will add to existing knowledge about citizen journalists and their roles in Malaysia. A study of online citizen journalism in Malaysia is desirable and significant, because citizen journalism, especially among youth, is a phenomenon that is yet to be fully understood and accepted, particularly in the area of their roles and practices. Academic studies of citizen journalism in Malaysia are still very limited, particularly in understanding the roles of youth as citizen journalists. This study will help to clarify misconceptions about citizen journalists. The Malaysian mass media landscape has evolved; previously dominated and monopolized by professional journalists, it is now being shattered by members of a community who were formerly an audience but who have decided to undertake more active roles. To understand these developments better, the researcher intends to focus on the roles and practices of citizen journalists rather than on the issues and impacts surrounding citizen journalism, which have been discussed widely in scholarly articles. The focus here is on the practitioners of citizen journalism: the citizen journalists themselves.

In terms of methodology, this research will adopt a phenomenological approach to qualitative methods. It will focus on citizen journalists in the youth category, aged between 15 and 40 years old (Youth Societies and Youth Development Act, 2007). These young citizen journalists will provide interesting insights into Malaysian citizen journalism from various angles, including the development, direction, and future of citizen journalism in Malaysia, thereby enhancing the contribution of this study and the depth of its analysis.

Furthermore, it is hoped that this study will become a starting point for the government to take citizen journalists seriously, giving them due recognition and taking them into account at the policy level. Previous research by Stigliani (2013) mentioned that little is known about these young citizen journalists, despite a consensus in the literature that their journalism is of benefit to society. The present study will discuss the significance of the roles that these individuals play as non-professional citizen journalists and how debate and public engagement are facilitated by the contribution of youth citizen journalists. These young citizen journalists perceive new media platforms and sites as providing alternative, specialized viewpoints, allowing them to adopt specific roles and niche

purposes, unlike professional journalists, whose news stories focus on the masses. Among these specific roles are the roles of problem-solver and advocate for particular issues. Young citizen journalists appear to be more creative, as they operate with fewer restrictions than professional journalists (Stigliani, 2013). This is an important development, because news consumption and contribution has changed, with technological enhancements making the interrelationship and interdependency between the two sides more complex and more interesting as a focus for future research in the field of journalism.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the theoretical aspects of the existing phenomenon. Picone's (2011) casual model of produsage theory is used to explore the meanings of participation for youth citizen journalists in order to define and understand this group and their roles in the Malaysian journalistic landscape. This is a fundamental step to explore the perceived identities of citizen journalists and their journalistic practices, as well as their respective levels of prestige and power in serving the public interest with ethical considerations to discover the meaning of their experiences in determining their choice to become citizen journalists and adopt specific roles (Picone, 2011, 2016). The model is used as a base and the researcher hopes to expand it so as to enhance understanding of the experience of youth citizen journalists as they embark into citizen journalism. More about the casual model of produsage will be explained in the literature review section.

Previous research focused on the professional practice aspects of journalism in order to understand journalistic roles and practices, and they discussed many factors within three dimensions: cognitive, normative, and evaluative. They used other models to compare the differences in professional practices of citizen journalists and their professional counterparts to the roles they associate themselves to. Therefore, it is about time to explore models that captured the essence of citizen journalism elements that somehow explained the youth citizen journalism role in the Malaysian context. For example, Chung and Nah (2013) applied the professional dimension to explain the different roles of citizen journalists and their professional counterparts and the ways these different roles feed into perceptions of the professionalism of both parties. The example is limited to explaining certain aspects of role decision-making as they choose to become citizen journalists and the example study was done in the United States of America.

While in Asia, a study of contributors to the *OhmyNews* portal, a citizen journalist site, found that citizen journalists prioritize the spread of knowledge for the public good and that recognition comes with knowledge and with the roles they play to serve the people. Training, on the other hand, is viewed as being of lower priority for these citizen journalists in their specific circumstances. The informants in the study felt that a lack of training does not affect how they see their roles as citizen journalists (Nah *et al.*, 2015; Chung and Nah, 2016).

This research may interest social and academic groups, as it focuses on youth's ability to become citizens who are knowledgeable, who have a global perspective, and who practice the democratic principle of information without restriction while remaining socially responsible.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research put focus only on youth online citizen journalists in Malaysia. The researcher would like to explore the growing operations and online influence of youth citizen journalists. This could be a significant comparison, as traditional media are owned by particular organizations and have adequate staff and journalists paid to provide news and to record audio and video, whereas online citizen journalists may experience a quite different scenario (Moeller, 2009).

In order to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives, this study will focus its attention to the roles and practices of youth citizen journalists and the reasons behind their acquisition of these different roles.

Previous studies carried out in the field of citizen journalism by researchers in Malaysia have focused mainly on blogs and their content rather than on citizen journalists. It cannot be denied that citizen journalism has arisen from blogging; however, in reference to the original definition of journalism itself, the group who are the focus of this study are the individuals who are responsible for collecting information, outlining the vision for the future, and producing and publishing products (Balaraman, 2013).

The study undertakes the phenomenological approach in exploring the roles of youth citizen journalists. Therefore, the exploration is limited to the meaning making process of youth citizen journalists and only understandable within their personal context. Therefore, generalization was limited due to the nature of phenomenological study. Despite the limitation, the depth of meaning-making descriptions from each informant is intended to answer the objectives of the study.

Another limitation is the availability of resources to conduct the study. The scarcity of informants available for the study and the time frame limit the participation of informants in the study. The researcher faced some limitation to identify and lock informants committed enough to the research process. It happened particularly at the beginning of the current study. The informants also had to back out due to commitment reasons resulting the researcher had to travel far to meet the informants.

1.7 Definition of Keywords

1.7.1 Exploring

Exploring is to look into or to study the influence of various interdisciplinary dimensions of life and other elements shaping a phenomenon or a situation. The exploration of different dimensions and journalism elements were fundamental in shaping theories, roles, scenarios or outcomes of news stories, ethics, and journalistic practice. The exploration of roles perceived will often influence the production process as well as the objectivity of news reporting (Steensen and Ahva, 2014).

In the context of this research, the researcher will specifically exploring the roles among youth citizen journalists in order to increase understanding of the roles of youth citizen journalists.

1.7.2 Roles

In journalistic context, roles are defined as the different dimensions of how journalists, in this case citizen journalists, view and operate with different ideals in serving journalistic purposes. This includes how they view the type of journalist as well as the news content produced (Mellado & Lagos, 2014; Mellado & van Dalen, 2013).

In the context of this research, the researcher will explore the roles that these youth citizen journalists associate themselves with and how that association influences the journalistic process pertaining to their roles. Other matters of interest will be the news content that these citizen journalists produce in Malaysia.

1.7.3 Citizen Journalists

Individuals who are involved in journalistic processes but are not paid or trained as journalists are citizen journalists. They contribute content to a news source. They are involved in and operate journalistic processes. They employ press tools and technology through multiple platforms, including newspapers, online news sites, blogs, and forums (Rosen, 2008; Ross and Cromier, 2010; Peters and Broersma, 2012).

In this study, the researcher attempts to understand how exactly youth citizen journalists identify their roles and how they operate as citizen journalists to become pioneers in digital publishing, transforming the way news and information are written, produced, and delivered.

1.7.4 Youth

A youth (or young person) is a person aged between 15 and 40 years old (Youth Societies and Youth Development Act, 2007). The researcher tries to understand people in this age group as individuals involved as citizen journalists in the Malaysian context and the role they play as amateur reporters within this complex profession.

In this study, the researcher focuses on the role of youth citizen journalists and how they view their own role as citizen journalists, specifically with regard to how they perceive their practice and performance as citizen journalists.

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