

Participatory Online News Expertise and Credibility: A Study on Visual Citizen in TikTok bikini.bottom.news

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ABSTRACT TikTok already has the power to spread news apart from providing entertainment content. The emergence of TikTok is very massive and is used by many groups. TikTok brings a novelty with its content which is not only entertaining like lots of challenge videos and also often informative because many news channels have started to use TikTok as their media platform. One of them is the Bikini Bottom News TikTok account which actively reports the latest information on both socio-political issues and issues of international celebrities. The expertise of journalists and the credibility of TikTok, which started as an entertainment platform, come into question when we talk about news. This study analyzes the expertise and credibility of participatory online news in the visual community or citizens. Using case studies by conducting literature reviews and discussions with informants who have the same background, namely students regarding the bikini.bottom.news account, the authors obtain data that the TikTok platform, especially on the bikini.bottom.news account has two acceptances, which are considered to have met the skill requirements of a journalist to be trusted for the credibility of the news content and are considered not in accordance with the provisions of the expertise of a journalist and the content is considered not credible.

KEYWORDS *TikTok; Journalism Expertise; Credibility; Visual Citizen Bikini Bottom News.*

INTRODUCTION

TikTok has the power to spread news apart from providing entertainment content. One of them with a TikTok account bikini.bottom.news which actively provides the latest information related to socio-political issues and celebrities on the international stage. There is an account called bikini.bottom.news. This account is fascinating because with its appearance, which still emphasizes the entertainment element, the news conveyed is in accordance with the facts. On the other hand, some people will question whether the news reported by the account is in accordance with the grid of expertise or competence of a journalist and whether these credibilities can be trusted.

TikTok is a social media platform that uses vertical video and features entertainment content for its audience that is featured in the form of FYP (for your page) according to the algorithm that TikTok has created. The social network TikTok is logically categorized as entertainment content that has a large amount of visual stimulation and is very dynamic and creative, and high production speed and consumption rate by the audience is primarily determined by video playback features, funny stories, and content that is easy on the mind (Xu et al., 2019).

In another explanation, it can be said that TikTok has a digital environment that continuously invites user action and

participation, in which a community is then indirectly created and filled with Gen Z (Rapkin, 2017) even though at the beginning, there was a Covid-19 pandemic. Nineteen resulted in a significant increase in users from Millennials and gen X generations who follow the TikTok community and produce content in the same proportion (Bautista et al., 2021).

TikTok was downloaded the most in 2020. Its popularity has increased dramatically due to a wide variety of broadcasters, including media and journalists (Bautista et al., 2020), who are trying to innovate by quickly adapting to a particular code of a message. Despite the many prejudices against TikTok regarding how it is a platform with “shallow” entertainment content and has a bad effect on the audience because it is a waste of time, Bremer & Siebelink (2020) appreciate that TikTok users now, after mixing with many generations, have more critical views and participate in content only when they are genuinely interested in the subject of their viewing. This is most easily identified by looking at what the comments section of a piece of content looks like.

On TikTok, most users care a lot about image and personal brand; they get to the point of when, where, and what to post (Vogel & Rose, 2016). Therefore, even though it is not that important, it could cause the emergence of the truth value of the content on TikTok. However, with the continuous increase in activity since 2020, they are also responsible for controlling the movement of speculative and tendentious content (Perez, 2021). Similar to other social media, TikTok has started reporting significant streams of content that create misinformation.

Questioning TikTok and its efforts to protect original content and reduce misinformation, the TikTok account bikini.bottom.news is one example of an account on TikTok which is also a place for news sources and feels the implications of TikTok’s rapid development since the pandemic in early 2020.

Bikini Bottom News was first created in January 2022. With a year of designing unique news content on TikTok, this account has managed to get 2.4 million followers from around the world and 28.4 million likes. The fish icons in each video thumbnail are news anchors that appear like humans inspired by the children’s cartoon series from the United States, namely SpongeBob Squarepants. Bikini Bottom itself refers to the name of the city where SpongeBob lives with the character’s aquatic other. This is a unique attraction because this account can continue to provide serious news with entertaining and joking packaging. This can be seen from how the audience responds in the comment column for each video, which has millions of views. Responses such as “I can’t believe I trust fish,” “I got news from a fish,” and “I prefer listening to fish over other sources” show the audience’s trust in the news conveyed by this account.

Online news websites usually function as virtual public spaces that are connected through online networks. Enable people to share information and news of various kinds, participate in online discussions, and create social networks (Dahlgren, 2001). According to Habermas, the perspective of public space emphasizes the openness of public communication and interaction

between people (Nah & Chung, 2012), which is important for a healthier community to function in a democratic society. From this point of view, journalism can refer to public discussions that can help public spaces facilitate democratic conversations (Friedland & Kim, 2009).

Citizen journalism is produced, disseminates, and exchanges various types of news and information, ranging from current topics and general interest to individual issues (Nah, 2008) and those who contribute to the public space. Through online news, ordinary people can interact with professional and citizen journalists, create networks, and conceptualize the role of journalists. In this process, social trust among local communities and media credibility may play a crucial role when online news users accept the role of professional and citizen journalists as community members (Nah & Chung, 2012). In other words, the perception of the journalistic role may be influenced by the social level of trust and media credibility towards the news media and news content.

The evolution of online journalism is a continuous and complex process, which should be assessed to see what impact it has on using the internet to convey news, especially in print media such as newspapers (O'Sullivan, 2005), while the main task of the media is to promote public space by reporting and producing the best events they can, with credible quality (Cabedoche, 2015). If the impetus in the public space is lost, then journalism's functions can be destroyed and its service to the community diminished. Credibility here functions as a mediator between the public and the media,

where credibility allows the public to choose what journalism they will consume.

Much research on credibility was carried out 60 years ago (Wölker & Powell, 2021). This shows that credibility in journalism has become essential and has always been questioned since its emergence. Credibility here can be understood as trust, consisting of three aspects: the message, the source, and the medium. This results from a continuous evaluation of various dimensions (Flanagin et al., 2000). The credibility of journalism is important because the audience cannot verify all of the contents themselves, so the audience must depend on their trust in the credibility of the journalism media (Harcup, 2015). Credibility is journalism's primary key, which can develop in a better direction.

Many credibility types of research focus on messages and mediums (Borah, 2014; Wölker & Powell, 2021), but there is not much research looking at the lack of sources or the credibility of sources, even though this is a problem in online news. When source credibility is lacking, audiences in online journalism will depend on text cues in the message and the medium (Metzger & Flanagin, 2015). Even so, along with the increasingly diverse online mediums, the audience cannot entirely depend on the medium's credibility when the credibility of the message's source is unknown. As is well known, the rise of mediums such as blogs, Twitter, TikTok, and other social media forums for participatory online journalism or citizen journalism, requires re-verification of the truth, especially given that Facebook is known as a place for hoaxes to nest.

Citizen journalism, also participatory journalism, has defined as an individual who wants to create or publish informational content online to benefit his community (Carpenter, 2010). The presence of citizen journalism adds to the diversity of content in the news market so that it can increase the awareness of a person who is increasingly exposed to various ideas (Y. C. Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

Citizen journalism encompasses a variety of internet-based activities, which involve blogging about current events, sharing photos and videos, and providing eyewitness commentary (Goode, 2009). The popularity of citizen journalism quickly grew as major news organizations were in a challenging situation of relying heavily on non-professional sources, such as amateur photos, videos, and firsthand reports, to narrate the events happening in the severely impacted regions (Zeng et al., 2019).

Several studies on citizen journalism state that differences in content in citizen journalism are aimed at variations in consumers' tastes (Carpenter, 2010). The Knight Citizen News noted that there are more than 450 citizen journalists in America. These citizen journalism sites only report information from the areas where they are located. Where the use of blogs is often used as a medium as well as the media they consume.

Even so, today's citizen journalism has developed far. The small publication medium that used to be their definition is no longer suitable to be applied because, in fact, in the field, citizen journalism uses a medium with a reach that can be very large by simply

clicking and sharing on social media features such as TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and so on, etc. What remains the same is how citizen journalism, which we also consider part of participatory journalism, is still a watchdog to mainstream media.

Method

This research was conducted to know how Indonesian audiences received the impact of the new model of news brought by TikTok through the case study method. Case studies are a form of social research with the scope of asking "how" or "why" in research. Case studies explain individuals, organizations, processes, programs, and other things because they are attractive, special, or unique. Case studies examine a contemporary phenomenon (a case) that occurs (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tasci et al., 2020; Yin, 2014).

In a case study, specifically in internet research, many problems are encountered, one of which is a case that extends to other domains, so a limitation is needed in conducting case studies in the internet realm (Gallagher, 2019).

To find limitations, the steps taken in this research are to find TikTok accounts that have the uniqueness found in TikTok accounts Bikini.Bottom.News. Then look for literature that is relevant to the research being done. Next is to find sources who are followers of the Bikini Bottom News account, as many as four people, and have casual discussions. After a relaxed conversation, the next step was in-depth interviews to dig up more in-depth information from the sources and search for content responses in

the comment column from the Bikini Bottom News account. Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative techniques and are presented as findings in this paper.

DISCUSSION

Visual Citizen

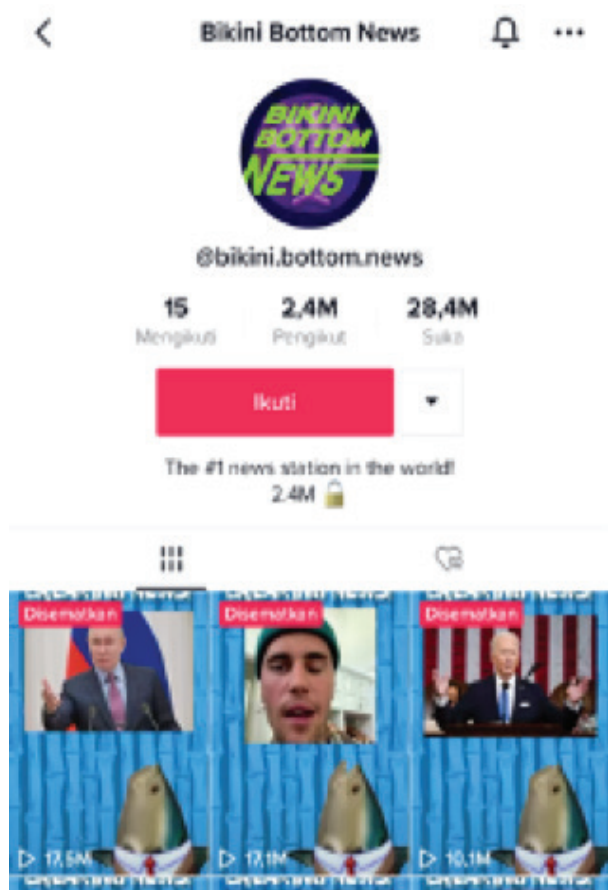


Figure 1 Bikini.Bottom.News Account.

Source: TikTok

Allan and Peters explain that there is a saying about visual citizens that they are a group of people with critical internet access and can explore news on digital platforms that suit their visual tastes consistently and build engagement daily (Allan & Peters, 2020). There are four ways to classify these visual citizens, namely (1) as news observers and circulators, (2) as contributors and spontaneous image makers, (3) as expert and

activist news image makers, and (4) as creative image makers and news commentators.

The four categories of visual citizens have three important values that become a benchmark for how they relate to digital visual news. The first is content and audience specifications, the second is adaptability, and the last is applicability which is the primary key to changing the trend of consuming news online through TikTok (Allan & Peters, 2020).

Account Bikini Bottom News, the writer, can categorize it as visual citizen number 4. The people behind the account also continuously create creative content and periodically convey their “comments,” framing their video news content. This account targets a broad audience, namely those who understand English, so their reach can be broad globally and not limited to specific regions. The news they cover is also news on an international scale, although it is still dominated by news from the US or with a “western” lens. The broad specifications here encourage the widespread circulation of their content. They apply adaptations by adding entertainment to their content, namely packing them with themes Bikini Bottom by using fish characters as their news anchors. This provides a novelty and something that the audience is interested in engaging with their content, which, although in terms of content is no different from other news accounts, the audience can comment on how the setting for the appearance of the “fish” news.

Researchers classify the first informant, Ilham, as the number one visual citizen who circulates news and comments on the news content he gets. For him, the account is

fascinating because the packaging is outside the standard of how a news platform should be.

He was also categorized as visual citizen number 1 (one) because he is only an observer and circulator, whereas Faris follows the account and shares news that he finds interesting. He is not interested in joining further because, according to him, news with a visual appearance like this is not suitable for him personally because it is considered to reduce the credibility of the news being delivered. Although they are both visual citizens number 1, what's interesting is the perspective between Faris and Ilham on news credibility bikini.bottom.news, there is a difference. This is categorized as visual citizen number 1(one) because he is a news observer and circulator.

According to Ichi, news packaged in Spongebob's appearance is exciting because it is like a combination of usually formal news but collaborated with Spongebob cartoons, which connotes daily entertainment for children. According to Ichi, this kind of reporting model will suit the culture of the Indonesian people who like meme displays like this or fantastic displays, not to mention clickbait. Ichi will not follow accounts. Ichi is a news observer and circulator, so she is categorized as a visual citizen number 1 (one).

Akwan sees that the visual appearance using the Spongebob cartoon makes the news not look credible and unattractive. According to Akwan, news should be news with visuals like most of the existing ones. He compared it to visual news on other platforms such as YouTube; according to him, citizen journalism on YouTube is more reliable because it has a display that is up to

standard or with a longer and more complete duration. Akwan feels that the display is uniform in the account bikini bottom news; it bored the reader when he used the same concept. Supposedly, newsmakers can create news creatively with one characteristic that shows their identity without having the same format for all the news.

Denis revealed that she liked the display format on the news channel bikini.bottom.news because it brings a novelty in a news display format that is not only formal, like on television. According to her, the idea of using a fish presenter and bikini bottom background is very interesting, and out of the box, so it deserves appreciation. It is entertaining appearance makes it a category one visual citizen because she wants to spread the contents of that account to its friends.

Journalist Expertise

After a lengthy description regarding TikTok and Bikini Bottom News, how does the power possessed by this platform affect or be accepted by the Indonesian people? A discussion was carried out by researchers one month ago with young graduates with bachelor's and master's degrees from well-known campuses. We assume they are digital natives, have internet access, and have the ability or are properly educated. After a lengthy description regarding TikTok and Bikini Bottom News, how does the power possessed by this platform affect or be accepted by the Indonesian people?

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The next question is, what about the expertise or expertise of the journalist here in the case of the TikTok account, namely the journalist's ability in the form of "fish-faced" content creators. In Lowrey and Anderson's research, it is stated that few people agree with the statement that participatory online news makes the journalistic realm less exclusive and trustworthy. This means that people still trust participatory news accounts circulating in digital media, including TikTok (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005). They also stated that journalism is still a job that requires a complex scientific basis.

Even so, the first source, namely Ilham said this study assessed that the science of journalism does not mean that the general public cannot access it. Most of the respondents can carry out the essential functions of a journalist even though they are not journalists. They associate journalism with respect, but that doesn't mean they can't be approached or intimidated.

The second resource person, Faris did judge that on account of bikini.bottom.news already had the expertise of a journalist, which surprised him because it turned out that comedy packaging, which he initially thought was a comedy account, journalism account and conveyed trustworthy and quite serious news, according to him. Faris said that journalism expertise on this account could be seen from how the news content has higher quality than accounts that deliver the news but whose expertise is unclear. This assumes account bikini.bottom.news already has the skills of a journalist after he watches

and follows her videos.

According to Ichi, this expertise can be seen from how the account delivers factual news, even though it has a funny appearance. Ichi doesn't care whether the account comes from an official media account or not, but Ichi looks more at the history of the account's content to ensure that everything conveyed is news facts and delivered with news delivery techniques as usual.

Akwan consider that this account does not have the expertise of a journalist because, basically, they only convey general things that everyone already knows from most news. For users, news platforms must be able to provide online reviews in-depth and provide important information, which is a continuation of the general information presented at the beginning of the news. News duration can be an indicator of how deep a story is delivered. In bikini.bottom.news, short duration indicates that the information will not be much and only targets people who need quick information about something without any interest in reviewing what is happening. Even though they are both short, the videos on this TikTok account are considered to have no more journalist skills than the same short videos from official news accounts. On the official news account, for members, even though the duration is relatively straightforward, the news delivered is more concise, and a follow-up link is provided to read or find out about the news as a news report in-depth.

Denis said that this account already meets the standards of journalism expertise, where journalists should be able to adapt and be flexible in conveying news in various media.

Since TikTok is based on entertainment media, it is only natural for journalists to convey their news entertainingly and informally. According to Denis, journalists on this account have a plus because they can adapt to the media, where information is disseminated according to the audience's needs.

According to occupational competence theory, if journalists' control over their knowledge base is removed, they can be replaced by their rival workers, such as PR practitioners, which will benefit certain political parties (Abbott, 2014). Worse, if a rival carries out the journalist's work, the truth elements in the news will usually be replaced with promotional materials. Given the expertise of a journalist, what is needed is certification, but this isn't easy to do on news platforms on traditional such as blogs, social media, YouTube, etc. Therefore, respondents say they still believe in participatory news, but instead of reporting, it is more to comment on an incident that happened (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005).

Journalist Credibility

Credibility is a quality that is accepted and displayed due to various factors, including trustworthiness and expertise (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). Credibility is attached to the message from the recipient during the exchange of information (Johnson & Kaye, 2010). Research on the internet mostly uses three variables in determining credibility: interactivity, multimodality, and hypertextuality. Interactivity is one of the essential capacities of media which is operationalized as a quality variable of communication media that reflects the degree to which the audience can interact

with news content (Chung et al., 2012).

There are six dimensions of interactivity: the complexity of the choices available, the level of effort required, responsiveness to users, monitoring the use of information, ease of adding information and facilitating interpersonal communication (Heeter, 1989). These six factors can be applied to digital media, in this case, news on TikTok, which has indirectly implemented these six values in the TikTok work system.

Multimediality refers to the degree to which moving text, graphics, and images are translated and integrated into a shared digital form. This is important because it shows the convergence of online news from what was originally traditional (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006). This multimedia is now the main asset of the TikTok platform; it consists of a variety of text, audio, video, and images that can be input from anywhere in various formats and even work with a particular editor application to create content on the TikTok platform, namely CapCut.

Hypertextuality is how a media provides archives and connects stories in a link. With lots of hypertextuality indicating the number of content archives owned and referring to the high interaction that occurs on a platform, in this case, TikTok in the 2022 era no longer uses hyperlinks as how researchers formulated it in the early 2020 era. The hyperlinks used in TikTok are the like feature and share comments, which will increase engagement with content and enter the main page. Coupled with hashtags that explain the contents of the content. Audio and trends used in TikTok content are also included in the context of hyperlinks in 2022

on the TikTok platform. We will usually be connected to similar video archives using the same audio.

Ilham said that, according to him, he could trust the news on the “fish” account more than news from national news accounts, which substantially used clickbait and only repeated the same information. Apart from the substance problem, the source also said that the account Bikini Bottom News it’s fast enough to report trending news on other social media like Twitter. Then the content he consumes personally matches his daily visual and comedic tastes so that he feels closeness when interacting with fellow audiences from that account. Ilham himself follows the account bikini.bottom.news because he believes in the expertise and credibility that the account has. To prove this, Ilham made a comparison with the news that appeared on Twitter whether they were the same or not, and it turned out that the results showed that the news conveyed was the same, so it was enough to make Ilham believe.

In contrast to Ilham, Faris the second person felt that the account’s credibility was doubtful. Even though Faris shares videos that he finds interesting from the account and will follow them at a later date, for Faris, the account is not credible enough to be used as an online media platform because, according to Faris, online media should have a display format like how most online media stream such as detik.com, etc. For Faris, combining humor or comedy into news coverage will reduce the credibility of online media so that he will not consume news from that account but limited to entertainment content.

This explained that Ichi felt this account

was credible and worthy of being used as a reference for online media, even though he would not follow it because TikTok is not a place to connect with other accounts. But Ichi will continue to see the contents of the account bikini.bottom.news to get the latest news updates. Ichi has watched a lot of the account’s content and traces the account’s history, which he thinks is credible because it conveys facts. Ichi’s way of verifying is to compare news content with news from the mainstream media to see if the news is the same and accurate. Ichi added that, according to her, the account’s content was more credible than most online news accounts from Indonesia, which had fantastic video titles or thumbnails about the news. Still, the contents were empty or hoaxes, making Ichi feel, “why should I consume this news.” The high number of shares and comments related to news content in each video content also shows that their videos are credible enough to be consumed by audiences as participatory online news.

Akwan considers the TikTok account Bikini Bottom News less credible because there is no journalistic process like what happens in editor rooms at news agencies. In addition, the visual appearance of the account also influences that for him, using cartoons as media, especially children’s cartoons, will give an appearance that seems unbelievable because it is just entertainment. For this reason, for Akwan, the visuals of this account significantly influence the credibility and expertise of the journalists he trusts. Even so, these accounts are more trustworthy than accounts with a credible appearance but hoax content.

Although Denis approved the journalist's skill on account bikini.bottom.news, she did not find the credibility of the news on the account enough to be used as a reference for the main news. For her, getting information from this account is only a fulfillment of an entertainment lifestyle. To find news, Denis still uses the mainstream media, which delivers news in-depth and comprehensively.

Criticisms usually attached to online participatory news are about the extent to which their news is factual in substance and analysis, and there is little pressure to show accurate information without bias (Johnson & Kaye, 2010). Contrary to these findings, several studies show that people accept and trust the credibility of online news (D. Kim & Johnson, 2009).

CONCLUSION

TikTok platform with accounts Bikini Bottom News considered by the sources to have the expertise and credibility of journalism. Apart from that, the visual citizen culture, which is suitable for and enjoyed by Indonesian people, also influences the circulation of participatory news content on TikTok, which causes more news content to be shared.

Two sources stated that they believed in the Bikini Bottom News TikTok account. This trust is caused by the Bikini Bottom News account providing information that is quite reliable, compared to other accounts that put it forward clickbait so that these two sources feel that the Bikini Bottom News TikTok account has good credibility. With this credibility, the audience only sees information in a short time. In addition, this short viewing duration factor also influences

the audience to use their time and feel their time is not wasted.

Three sources stated they could not accept Bikini Bottom News as a trusted news channel. This is because the two informants are still influenced by mainstream news, which is indeed concerned with everyday journalism. These three sources still trust news channels such as Kompas.com, Detik.com, and Tempo, which have credibility at the forefront of journalism.

The source's lack of trust in the TikTok account is assumed because TikTok only partially presents news. An average duration of 1-3 minutes results in information being partly conveyed and affects the source's lack of trust in the content being shared. In addition, the monotonous format of news on TikTok is considered less attractive to sources, as well as the presentation of content in English and discussion of International News, making the two sources less interested in using this TikTok account as their news reference.

The weakness of this research is that the data from sources cannot be varied and is still limited to a few people with similar backgrounds, so the results might be different if the sources come from other social classes. Further research with sources from various backgrounds and classes or similar accounts but native to Indonesia is needed to discover more and more deeply about how TikTok is accepted in Indonesia as a participatory online news media platform, not just an entertainment platform. Research with a quantitative survey model to check the validity of the content can also be carried out in the future.

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