

# Democracy, journalism and society



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- Ooi Fang

Yin

Democracy is defined, basically as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. Democracy is a very challenging form for politicians and it can be exercised by the people (Becker & Raveloson). According to U. S president Abraham Lincoln (1865), he once stated that “ government of the people, by the people, for the people”. So democracy literally is a set of ideas and principles that used to protect the basic human rights, freedom and to uphold citizenship. And in democracy, media is playing a contributory role by informing the public, educating voters, promoting ideas, and ensuring the government are accountable and transparent.

Ever since, media has become a forum for public discussion and public debate has been recognized since 17<sup>th</sup> century. And today the communication way is still dominated by the media such as television, radio, newspaper, magazine, internet and etc. No matter is old age media or contemporary mass media, the distinctive function is still remain unchanged as media is used to disseminates information and form 2 way of communication (Crozier & Huntington & Watanuki, 1975). In order to obtain wider range of information, media audiences are replying on media information. For an example, voters watch TV to get the latest update during election campaign. In this case, from my point of view I agree with media is playing a crucial role in shaping a healthy democracy. Media audiences are more aware of various social issue, political and government activities through mass media.

Dewey (2008) continue to argue, media also playing as a watchdog to guide of public interest over government and monitoring function. In news journalism media, watchdog is referring to an individual or group of people that come with notion of avoiding illegal practices. This can be seen as one of unique strength in media that helps to shape a healthy democracy because watchdog is ensuring government accountability in democracy and access the government performance. (Coronel, 2003). Watchdog is there to against abuse of power, corruption, financial irresponsibility, assorted malfeasance and other wrongdoing that might threaten the society. Example, based on the case that happen in Thailand, the investigate reports and the press has uncovered wrongdoing of the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. ( Miranda, 2002).

The strength of media in enhancing the democratic value is through the use of alternative media and audience participation. It became a space or forum for people to exchange of ideas, opinion and the value is more clearly defined (Becker & Rsvelson, 2008). This is how a contemporary media facilitate public discussion and feed into promote a democracy. Nowadays media is fundamental to offer opportunity and right for citizen to associate freely, to educate the citizen about public issue and ideology is one of the factor to motivate the party member ( Clark, 2009). Media play as an active role in public debate and it is generally used to reflect citizen's criticism, ideas, and agreement through website, vox pop and etc.

Basically a democracy requires the active participation of citizen. Ideally, the mass media is used to keep audiences engaged in the government activities. (Coronel 1994). So there's amount of political news and stories are publish or <https://assignbuster.com/democracy-journalism-and-society/>

air in variety media, this allow citizens to appear on screen and speak in their own voices, express their feeling and discuss. (McNair, 2000). For example radio has become the channel of choice as it is low cost and more accessible to the public which used to promote grassroots democracy. Besides that, the Vox Pop, is also widely used in television and newspaper stories. The producers will pick randomly and having an interview session with the citizens on the street. Vox pop consider as a form of news coverage, which is help to shape the worldview of citizen and influence the news agenda. (Grab & Zhou, Barnett, 1999). As Loviglio (2002) has shown, Vox pop is a news reporting that offer 2 way public communication on a range of topics or issues, so citizens are able to talk and comment about their perception towards democracy. All the public discussion in a move to engage public and listen to the citizen voice. In the new democracies, we expect the media would build a civic culture through a tradition discussion or public debate. Besides, vox pops has make a connection between government and citizen, since everything is mediated through authoritative voice ( Tait, 2001). It is arguable that public opinion has certain impact on democracy. The rise of Vox Pop been also seen as an important element in news organisation, in term to make news more relevant in democracy.

However, there's some argument and critics from other scholars as well. Based on the book by Lewis et. Al. (2005), they argue that vox pop do offer an opportunity for citizen to voice out their political opinion, but at the same time there's also some limitation. Cottle argues that even citizens participate in the following television talk show, but their voice are not been heard as always because of infrequently allowed to develop their own opinion. Citizen

rarely have chance to be “ primary definers” to provide frame work as normally anchor will first introduce the topic, frame the topic area, deliver basic information as a preview.( Hall et al, 1978). Richard Tait (2004) also continue critics that vox pops is just serve as a responds to elitism news programme and more or less similar to an audience participation programme. In addition, Vox Pop allows citizen to participate and openly discuss about their common concern such as political debate, but they are more into expressing their own feeling based on their personal experience and self-interest, rather than the common good or making any improvement. (Richard, 2004). They will speak as a consumer but not as a citizen that attempt to create a better place for their country. Nevertheless Vox Pop still has contribution in shaping a healthy democracy. It create a space for all the political view being expressed and substantive opinion to be seen. Vox pop still serve as a useful media to allow citizen participation and a way to communicate (Lewis et. al, 2005).

Besides, democracy is brought about through public debate and it is necessary of mass participation and a requirement for democratic responsiveness to public references (Sartori, 1987). Clearly every political participants attempt to control over the public opinion and structure favourable outcome to their political interest as most of the public are depending heavily on the messages that construed by the media (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001) So it is important to examine who control the political rhetoric, based on two scholars, Kinders & Sanders (1990). They underscored how the media is structuring, interpreting and shaping political issue in democracy. The media has emerge as a more active role in repacking the

player's fame and shaping the policy message. So public debates and public participation is vital to strengthen democratic institutions. In this way, citizen opinion can be considered and taken into account as one of the contributions and effort towards public debating aligned with democracy. (Coronel, 1994). Public opinion is a tool to control politicians that lead the country, the voices must be heard.

Similarly media role is primarily that helping to shape a healthy democracy in pursuit of economic growth. Journalist attempt to influence, educate and inform the citizen through variety type of mainstream media, this is how media role is contributing where politicians can promote their unique policy frames and get the message across to public effectively. (Cohen et. al, 1963). Media are widely used by journalist to convey information to the general public and to expand their visibility in democracy, as the press has tremendous influence (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001). A journalist is required with professional skill in news reporting and representing divergent views, which helps to propagate peace journalism. Sen (2001) has argues that free press contribute greatly in assuring an accountable governance.

In the other hand, the journalist are challenged by certain limitation and constraints by using media to promote democracy. Some of the unethical journalist practices might causing inability to fulfil democratic function. (Coronel, 1994). At the same time, each media has gatekeepers and they might filter over the information, so not everyone's voice and opinion can be heard. The gatekeepers often determine the media content and manipulate the messages, so many of the citizen's opinion has been cut down. Many voices been so frequently been ignored when the gatekeepers who are able

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to define the story, selecting on what issue is news value and they decide what to publish on the mass media (Clack, 2009). It is pointless if the citizen can only express their criticism in a closed room

In doing so, we move on the discussion to citizen journalist as well. Journalist and citizen journalist are two group of people that work together and it is a two way form of news. Citizen journalist is defined as ordinary users who participate and engage in journalist practise which including blogging, photo and video sharing and article posting (Goode, 2009). In other word they are not professional journalist but they are generally associated with internet and they do sharing. Internet allows them to comment or interact with each other, and the most important thing is the freedom from state control.

Nowadays media is enveloping and participating in alternative media to promote democracy, and citizen journalist is one of it. (Miller, 2004). A media democracy is basically using mass media to empower all members of society through propaganda and citizen journalism, which citizen can participate themselves in anything by posting or sharing through their cell phone.

Based on commenters Pippa Norris (2000), media function mainly as information provider and it helps to improve political engagement that consider as a positive effect of the rise of spin. From this perspective, the deregulation use of media by journalist or citizen journalist actually being beneficial to democracy.

However there is scepticism about citizen journalist by some media scholars and critics. They argued that citizen journalists are reducing the quality and credibility by using media. According to Wall (2012), people have perception

that citizen journalist is poor for professional news, arguing that they lack of skills to adequately serve as a watchdog on wrongdoing by powerful forces. Besides, the critic argue that citizen journalist might displace the untruth, incomplete, and untrustworthy source in misleading the media audiences. For example: They just publish whatever they see without finding the truth, and attempt to bring popular attention. Another strain of criticism portray that citizen journalism might reinforcing prejudice and muddling the truth, according to Coronel (1994).

As a conclusion, media might have certain limitation in rules and regulation but it is possible to see media role has help to enhance in democratic value, in the sense that media is still a powerful and fundamental element which ultimately helps the government in making the democratic system more accountable. In many new democracies, media are still seen as a democratic tool despite the contemporary media propensity for sleaze, sensationalism and superficiality.

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