

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF USER-GENERATED ONLINE VIDEO TO EMPOWER INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS: A DISCUSSION PAPER

Rahmatul Furqan<sup>1</sup> Sudirman Karnay<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Communication Science, Universitas Hasanuddin (rahmatul.furqan@unhas.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Communication Science, Universitas Hasanuddin (sudirmankarnay@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT.** The marginalisation towards Indonesian migrant workers is not a new story. Their dream of success abroad ended as a nightmare since some of them were physically and mentally abused, especially those who work in the informal sectors. A series of innovation in technologies have offered an opportunity for improvements in freedom and justice. This particular paper addresses the gap in the academic literature by analysing the role of citizen-generated video for advocacy purposes and hasten social changes, particularly for Indonesian migrant workers. Desk research was used as the methodology in this research. A large volume of bibliographic materials related to the use of user generated content to empower marginalized people was scanned and a limited number of documents have been critically reviewed. Articles were included in the review if the author discussed UGC along with debates related to its capacity for empowerment. As a result, this paper develops the argument that the capacity to participate in both video production and dissemination would enable Indonesian migrant workers to fight against injustice and discrimination and enhance their democratic engagement. With a set of the camera in their hand and supported by the networked platform, Indonesian migrant workers are now able to create first-hand evidence which is powerful to encourage or boost public social and political action. As a promising feature, the user-generated video is a way for Indonesian migrant workers to be “visible” and to have the “voice” and challenge the negative stereotype existed in the society or negative framing in mainstream media towards them.

**KEYWORDS:** migrant worker; youtube; online media, empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

On March 2018, a video of an employer hitting and slapping an Indonesian Migrant Workers (TKI) working in Hong Kong has gone viral. The video was recorded by the victim herself and has been circulating on Facebook. Immediately, it generated a vast amount of criticism from the enraged public who saw it online and the video was eventually used as evidence to conduct a further investigation by the police officer (Netralnews, 2018). That was not the first citizen-generated online video which captured the evidence of persecution towards Indonesian migrant workers and prompted public outrage. Hence, along with the increasing popularity of amateur videos being circulated and viewed online, the debate has arisen over its potential as well as the limitations to generate new modes of witnessing which may empower marginalised group, in this context Indonesian migrant workers.

The marginalisation towards Indonesian migrant workers is not a new story. As one of the largest labour-sending countries in Asia, it is estimated that Indonesia might send 40,000 labour migrants every month to work overseas and tried to improve their standard of living (International Labour Organization, 2006). In many cases, their dream of success abroad ended as a nightmare since some of them were physically and mentally abused, especially those who work in the informal sectors. As pointed out by Swepston, Taran, and Cholewinski (2015), Indonesian female domestic workers overseas are vulnerable to violence, discrimination, mistreatment, and exploitation. In 2010, there were 4,532 cases of violence against Indonesian migrant workers were recorded (Zulbahary, 2013).

Along with the revolution of technology, there is hope for changes. As stated by Benkler (2006) a series of innovation in technologies have offered an opportunity for improvements in freedom and justice. Numerous studies have shown how user-generated content and new media were used to witness several crises, from natural disasters, terrorist attacks, wars, to famine tragedies (Kyriakidou, 2015, p. 215). Pantti (2015) stated that user-generated video has now considered worthy of attention during crisis. This particular paper addresses the gap in the academic literature by analysing the role of citizen-generated video for advocacy purposes and hasten social changes, particularly for a marginalised group. This study develops the argument that the capability for Indonesian migrant workers to participate in both video production and dissemination would significantly effective and powerful to help them fight against injustice and discrimination and enhance their democratic engagement.

Desk research was used as the methodology in this research. A large volume of bibliographic materials related to the use of user generated content to empower marginalized people was scanned and a limited number of documents have been critically reviewed. A comprehensive search was conducted among the articles written in English using various database (includes Emerald, JSTOR, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Sage Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, Springerlink, Web of Science and Wiley Online Library). Main keywords searched includes- but not limited to, “user generated content”, “ugc and empowerment”, “use of ugc for advocacy” and “ugc and eyewitness video”. Articles were included in the review if the author discussed UGC along with debates related to its capacity for empowerment.

## **TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AND ONLINE PARTICIPATION**

The innovation in technologies has enabled people to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of information in the format of video in recent years. Nowadays, the technology of video production, including camera and editing system are no longer exclusive because they are affordable and getting easier to be used without sophisticated skill sets required as explained by Bock (2012, p. 639). Hence, anyone with a video camera or smartphone are now capable of creating or recording their stories in the format of video, and Indonesian migrant workers are no exception. Some viral videos regarding the life of domestic workers overseas were recorded by themselves. By using a phone camera, they are able to produce the stories from their perspective (Bock, 2012).

In addition, new communication technologies not only allowed Indonesian migrant workers to produce a video but also to share it online. Through digital platforms or social media such as YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter, the general public can share or disseminate their video content worldwide or in a massive scale, and Castells (2009) called it as a ‘mass self-communication’. At this point, even migrant workers are able to participate in the visual public sphere in unprecedented numbers (Castells, 2009). The question then arises, with cameras in the hands of Indonesian migrant workers and Web 2.0 enabled them to disseminate their stories, would it empower them? Ningrum (2011) defined empowerment as a personal process in each individual life to take action on their behalves and aiming for a better change. In this context, empowerment is the way migrant workers engage with the innovation of technology and use it as a tool to protect themselves from any form of discrimination or exploitation and fight for their rights.

Kawar (2005) argued that Indonesian migrant workers are vulnerable because they are concentrated in a limited number of occupations, and many of them ended working in the domestic sector with greater isolation and limited access to engage with social support. Fei guo and robyn iredale (2003) also explained that the isolated situation in the domestic sector might lead to greater exploitation for migrant workers. With the characteristic of user-generated video which is supported by the web 2.0 application (o'reilly, 2005), it will enable migrant workers to connect with millions of people worldwide and would help them to be less isolated. This is in line with the argument of benkler (2006) that convergence technology is a way for people to access their individual autonomy and create shortcuts to obtain wide attention. In this context, through user-generated online video, Indonesian migrant workers

have an autonomy to directly gain wide attention, getting their case heard around the world based on their own perspective, and at this point makes them feel less isolated, not desperate and forgotten.

## **UGC AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT**

Virtually, migrant workers could engage with social support and ask for help or assists. As the footage was circulated in freely available social media channel, it is then can be accessed by activist communities and the broader global public. An example for this, a video which has been circulated on Facebook since March 2018. The video was created by an Indonesian migrant worker who worked in Malaysia. In the video, the female migrant worker was crying while asking for help from the authority as she claimed she had been exploited and abused by her Malaysian employer (Tribunnews, 2018). The video which created by the migrant worker herself quickly went viral and generated public empathy. Such footage can be seen as evidence of how user-generated content has empowered Indonesian migrant worker to document and personalise their story in a miserable and “melodramatic language” (Kampf & Liebes, 2013, p. 12).

The pessimistic view, however, has questioned the effectiveness of that user-generated online video to really make an impact or social change. Some scholars regard citizens videos with its “subjective” and “personalised” characteristics would limit the viewers to comprehend the entire context of the problem faced by the distant other or in this context Indonesian migrant workers (Tait, 2008). The question arises whether the videos produced by Indonesian migrant workers themselves would be as compelling as regular broadcast news produced by those professional journalists? Since the focus of the video was limited to the personal experience of the migrant worker, other factors such as economy and politic which might also contribute to the problem were not presented.

However, other scholars also argued that the characteristic of subjectivity in the user-generated online video might offer a sense of authenticity and spontaneity which then make it more believable (ahva & hellman, 2015, p. 674). Andén-papadopoulos (2013) also explains that the trustworthiness of news is no longer rely on the verified facts and sources, but the genuine emotion and the first-person experience also could make the story believable. As can be seen in the video recorded by indonesian migrant worker in malaysia, she was talking directly to the camera, telling the violence and discrimination she has experienced while crying. This sense of subjectivity is rarely covered by the narrative in traditional broadcast videos because professional reporters tend to witness objectively and are not expected to feel, only to report and observe as explained by bock (2012, p. 649). He further argued that user-generated online video offered a sense of plurality and seemed more persuasive compared to a video recorded by a professional journalist.

In addition, authenticity is one of the primary factors in interpretative engagement (ahva & hellman, 2015, p. 678). At this point, raw footages can be considered as powerful to mobilise audiences to relate to the suffering of indonesian migrant workers. As argued by couldry (2012, p. 194) that raw footage created by general public might generate a moral responsibility for viewers also to pay attention and even investigate the problems faced by distant others or in this context indonesian migrant workers. The networked platform enables anyone to speak and investigate without relying on the resources of commercial media organisation (benkler, 2006). By accessing user-generated video of indonesian migrant worker, the public then would not close their eyes from the problem and would start to look up for ways to help them (ahva & hellman, 2015, p. 677). At this point, indonesian migrant workers are able to boost “collective action” along with their video stories circulated online. By provoking collective action from the public, indonesian migrant workers then have a chance to make a social change and fight against injustice. As argued by baumgartner and jones (2010), social or policy changes can occur due to public pressures.

On the other hand, it also needs to be questioned, would public pressures online matter? As criticised by Papacharissi (2002, p. 16) that public pressures online are not always effective in

generating social changes because the political system still limit the public participation offline, and therefore public opinions online might not make any difference. However, apart from that criticism, the video produced by Indonesian migrant worker is still undeniably important as information resources. Jacobs (2000) argued that the user-generated online videos are potential sources of social change since it might generate inter-public engagement, as well as intra-public autonomy. The videos of abused Indonesian migrant workers consist of powerful information that demands the authority to react. As stated by Farrell and Allan (2015) information from each individual or groups is a powerful weapon to encourage governments everywhere to protect and promote the fundamental human rights of their citizens. They also encourage the public to keep utilising the communications revolution to expose abuses and evoke public opinion to fight against them.

Another point lies in how the user-generated online video could empower marginalised group such as Indonesian migrant workers is because its capability to provide evidence. As mentioned earlier, the story of Indonesian migrant workers persecuted overseas is not new; it has happened for years. However, not every story was supported by video or evidence, such images are rare to be captured because it occurred in an individualised and isolated situation and therefore it is difficult for a journalist or traditional media to reach (Farrell & Allan, 2015). The stories of persecution against Indonesian migrant workers then got less coverage because of less evidence.

Farrell and Allan (2015) also said that without enough evidence, the case of violence against migrant workers could easily be swept under the carpet along with so many other “resisting arrest” cases where powerful interests drown out the voices of victims. Having a set of the camera in their hand and supported by the networked platform, Indonesian migrant workers are now able to create first-hand evidence and to ask for help from the viewers. As the example earlier, the video recorded by Indonesian migrant workers while she was being abused by her employer finally used as evidence to conduct a further investigation by the police officer. The images of Indonesian migrant worker abused by her employer could be influential in encouraging or boosting public social and political action. Farrell and Allan (2015) explain that citizen video which captured violence against human rights could be powerful evidence in following judicial processes.

Another factor that caused the discrimination towards Indonesian migrant workers is xenophobia which existed in receiving countries as stated by Macabuag and Dimaandal (2006). They further explain that domestic migrant workers are a minority group in the receiving countries and being a minority group overseas tend to make Indonesian workers marginalised by the dominant society. They tend to be identified as low class or low skills workers, and therefore, the dominant public who are intolerance would consider them as aliens, as inferiors and powerless, and this is what constitutes xenophobia which leads migrant workers to open racism and even action of violence (Macabuag & Dimaandal, 2006).

Those negative images of Indonesian migrant workers, sometimes enhanced by the commercial media. Mainly, because the framing or content of conventional media tends to be dominated by those who have power or dominant group (Zoettl, 2013). As an example, there was an advertisement by the Malaysian distributor of RoboVac automatic vacuum cleaners declared "Fire your Indonesian maid now!" (bbc, 2015). The advertisement portrayed Indonesian migrant workers as a replaceable maid, no more useful, and put them in a more vulnerable position. In addition, marginalised groups with their limited resources are seen as powerless and rarely get a chance to have a say in how they are seen and portrayed by the dominant society or conventional media as explained by Zoettl (2013). As the consequences, the opinions of a marginalised group like Indonesian migrant workers tend to be excluded by the traditional media. Hence, they have no control over their image being represented by the conventional media and have no power to correct or to challenge the negative stereotype towards them (Zoettl, 2013).

## **UGC AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT**

As a promising feature, the user-generated video is a way for Indonesian migrant workers to gain their visibility. Bourdieu (1977) pointed out the capability of convergence technology to enable

marginalised group being on camera, or make them visible is another powerful thing. He further explains that traditionally, only commercial media that capable or has the power to make things or people being seen or unseen. At the same time, video magically also “give voice to the voiceless” (Zoettl, 2013). Having the opportunity to be “visible” and to have the “voice” on the camera can be considered as a form of empowerment for Indonesian migrant workers. As a marginalised group, they finally have the opportunity to speak on behalf of themselves. Having now the opportunity to be visible and to be heard through user-generated online video, the Indonesian migrant workers might challenge the negative stereotype existed in the society or negative framing used by such commercial media towards them.

After many years of being excluded, the migrant workers finally get a chance to let their stories to be heard through a set of camera and supported by the networked platform. They now are able to provide first-hand perspectives even from the domestic arena. The videos that they produced by themselves highlight their experiences which have been ignored and marginalised for years in traditional media representations. At this point, it could be argued that the opportunity for Indonesian migrant workers to involve in the form of mass self-communication through user-generated content might empower their democratic engagement (Benkler, 2006).

Furthermore, the convergence technology enables them to set the agenda by themselves, overthrowing the conventional media as the main mediator of the public agenda (Benkler, 2006). In the form of user-generated videos, Indonesian migrant workers are able to produced information related to their jobs and exchange that information among the other Indonesian migrant workers. For example, on YouTube or Facebook, some Indonesian migrant workers produced informative content that might be helpful for other migrant workers. As argued by Benkler (2006), the networked information technology not only enable people to do more for and by themselves, but also it improves their capacity to do something for or with others. This highlights the role of user-generated online video to allow people to find the solution together in a new model of associations which beyond the formal boundaries and outside legal-political association (Benkler, 2006). In this context, the user-generated online video could raise a sense of online solidarity among Indonesian migrant workers and such solidarity is significant to empower them as pointed out by Ningrum (2011). At the same time, it offers Indonesian migrant workers to a wide access of information, and this can be the solution that would prevent them from acts of violence because as said by Kawar (2005) many Indonesian migrant workers are vulnerable because they have limited access to information.

Finally, as Zoettl (2013) said that ‘person who has the camera, has the power’. The contribution of user-generated video is significant to empower Indonesian migrant workers overseas. However, it also needs to put in concern the fact that having a set of camera supported by networked platform will not automatically transform ‘object’ of political action into the ‘subject’ as pointed out by Ramella and Olmos (2005). In this context, even though many Indonesian migrant workers already have the tools of technology in their hand, it will not guarantee they will use it to empower their democratic engagement. We should then refer back to the argument of Papacharissi (2002) that the technology or Internet functions as a tool, and therefore it could not, on their own, make a provoke changes or generate a public sphere. Hence, how significant user-generated content would empower society is not relying on the nature of technologies themselves, but instead, how the community makes use of it in productive ways.

## **CONCLUSION**

To sum up, it can be argued that user-generated online video will be effective to empower Indonesian migrant workers when they actively use it in the creation and dissemination of information. Along with the revolution of technology, a marginalised group such as Indonesian migrant worker finally have the opportunity to Indonesian migrant workers has autonomy to directly gain wide attention, getting their case heard around the world based on their own perspective, and at this point makes them feel less isolated, not desperate and forgotten. In addition, The videos recorded by Indonesian migrant workers can be more believable and seemed more persuasive compared to a

traditional broadcast video because it has the characteristic of subjectivity and a sense of authenticity. Hence, raw footage can be considered as powerful to mobilise audiences to relate with the suffering of Indonesian migrant workers and public then would not close their eyes from the problem and would start to look up for ways to help them. At this point, it can be argued that Indonesian migrant workers have the power to boost “collective action” along with their video stories circulated online. Furthermore, having a set of the camera in their hand and supported by the networked platform, Indonesian migrant workers are now able to create first-hand evidence which is powerful to encourage or boost public social and political action. As a promising feature, the user-generated video is a way for Indonesian migrant workers to be “visible” and to have the “voice” and challenge the negative stereotype existed in the society or negative framing used by such commercial media towards them. Lastly, the user-generated online video might provoke a sense of online solidarity among Indonesian migrant workers, and such solidarity is significant to empower them, and it offers them a broad access of information that would prevent them from acts of violence.

## REFERENCES

- Ahva, L., & Hellman, M. (2015). Citizen eyewitness images and audience engagement in crisis coverage. *International Communication Gazette*, 77(7), 668-681.
- Andén-Papadopoulos, K. (2013). Media witnessing and the ‘crowd-sourced video revolution’. *Visual Communication*, 12(3), 341-357.
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2010). *Agendas and instability in American politics*: University of Chicago Press.
- bbc. (2015). 'Fire your Indonesian maid' advert sparks row with Malaysia. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31143198>
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*: Yale University Press.
- Bock, M. A. (2012). Citizen video journalists and authority in narrative: Reviving the role of the witness. *Journalism*, 13(5), 639-653.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice (Vol. 16)*: Cambridge university press.
- Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*: Polity.
- Farrell, N., & Allan, S. (2015). Redrawing boundaries: WITNESS and the politics of citizen videos. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(3), 237-253.
- Guo, F., & Iredale, R. (2003). *Migration in the Asia Pacific: population, settlement and citizenship Issues*. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- International Labour Organization. (2006). *Using Indonesian law to protect and empower Indonesian migrant workers: some lessons from the Philippines* Retrieved from Jakarta:
- Jacobs, R. N. (2000). *Race, media, and the crisis of civil society: From Watts to Rodney King*: Cambridge University Press.

- Kampf, Z., & Liebes, T. (2013). *Transforming media coverage of violent conflicts: The new face of war*: Springer.
- Kawar, M. (2005). *Gender and Migration: Why are Women more Vulnerable?*
- Kyriakidou, M. (2015). Media witnessing: exploring the audience of distant suffering. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(2), 215-231.
- Macabuag, L., & Dimaandal, J. M. (2006). Working together for migrants' empowerment. *Asian and Pacific migration journal*, 15(3), 415-424.
- Netralnews. (2018). Video of Indonesian Migrant Worker Tortured in Hong Kong Goes Viral. Retrieved from <http://www.en.netralnews.com/news/opinion/read/18909/video.of.indonesian.migrant.worker.tortured.in.hong.kong.goes.viral>
- Ningrum, W. O. N. (2011). Problems Faced by Indonesian Female Migrant Workers and the Empowerment Through Writings (Organisations): a Case Study of Indonesian Female Migrant Workers in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 4(13), 225.
- O'reilly, T. (2005). What is Web 2.0 design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>.
- Pantti, M. (2015). Grassroots humanitarianism on YouTube: Ordinary fundraisers, unlikely donors, and global solidarity. *International Communication Gazette*, 77(7), 622-636.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New media & society*, 4(1), 9-27.
- Ramella, M., & Olmos, G. (2005). Participant authored audiovisual stories (PAAS): Giving the camera away or giving the camera a way. *Papers in Social Research Methods: Qualitative Series*, 10, 1-24.
- Swepton, L., Taran, P., & Cholewinski, R. (2015). *Migration, human rights and governance*. Switzerland: Courand et Associés.
- Tait, S. (2008). Pornographies of violence? Internet spectatorship on body horror. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(1), 91-111.
- Tribunnews. (2018). Viral video pengakuan tkw di Malaysia dijual majikan kesana kemari, Pak Jokowi, tolong saya. Retrieved from <http://pontianak.tribunnews.com/2018/03/10/viral-video-pengakuan-tkw-di-malaysia-dijual-majikan-kesana-kemari-pak-jokowi-tolong-saya>
- Zoetl, P. A. (2013). Images of culture: Participatory video, identity and empowerment. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 209-224.
- Zulbahary, T. (2013). Indonesia: the solidaritas perempuan's experience in increasing women migrant workers' access to SRHR information and services. *Labour migration, gender, and sexual and reproductive health and rights*, 11(1).