

Conference Paper

When The Office Becomes in Hand: Control Practice to the Prosumer in News Aggregator *Uc News*

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Abstract

In the last decade, many social networking sites and platforms are increasingly being driven by a user-generated content system. Now, users can be actively involved as a consumer and producer (prosumer) simultaneously. One of the digital platforms that has become a trend in the last decade is news aggregator. This research will examine how the control practices are carried out by the manager or administrator of *UC News* application, one of the largest news aggregator in Indonesia, to the content writers on the platform. The methodology that is applied in this research employs virtual ethnography to obtain representation of digital culture mediated by the internet. The data were obtained from the responses to a set of open-ended questions to six informant selected according to rate of activity in the platform and the period of involvement as a content writer in *UC News*. In conventional work systems, the relationship between workers and superiors often restricted by the geographical constraints. However, the development of the internet has changed many things. Clients, bosses, workers, and end-user products can be located in different corners of the planet. This research found that the controls carried out by 'the superiors' on content writers were not lost, but rather ran more naturally and manipulatively so that workers did not feel objected to them. The new form of capitalism in the prosumer era shows a new type of hegemony that is increasingly not simple.

Keywords: content writers; news aggregator; prosumer capitalism; Web 2.0

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The internet technology transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has changed many things including the way audiences utilize the media. Initially, audience involvement was limited for reading, browsing the internet, and consuming online content. Meanwhile, Web 2.0 enhances its capabilities by allowing audiences to participate in writing and producing

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content (Ritzer, 2011). The expansion of the role of the audience creates a new term known as prosumer (producer and consumer). We can find this phenomenon massively on the social media platforms and most of the digital workers.

The emergence of digital media in Indonesia has been felt on a large scale since 1998. However, according to Tapsell (2017) the digital era in Indonesia began aggressively in 2004. Especially for social media and sites based in the United States, such as *YouTube* (2005), *Facebook* (2006), *Twitter* (2008) and *Path* (2010). The participatory media platform grew stronger during the first democratically elected president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono tenure. (Tapsell, 2017: 18)

Technology development basically contributes to media diversity. Straubhaar and LaRose (2002: 14 in Nasrullah, 2013: 16) note that there is a change in terminology regarding the media. These changes were related to technological developments, area coverage, mass production, mass distribution, and different effects from the mass media. The transition of Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 further confirms that change. Audiences are no longer positioned as passive consumers, but active prosumers. We can take a clear example on *Facebook* and *YouTube*. The users of both platforms are left to produce content in the form of profiles and status as they wish, while also consuming content created by the other users.

This is in line with the statement of Van Dijk (2006, 8-9) who said that in the era of interactive media, audiences were allowed to direct feedback and even transform the boundaries between information audiences and producers; that audiences in the era of interactive media can become consumers and at that time also become producers of information. The digital platform that invites and 'needs' the community's involvement is now increasingly popular and varied. One of them is now known as the news aggregator, which is a site or software that collects and combines news from other sources. Rouse (in Saputra, 2016) describes the aggregator as "an individual or organization that gathers web content (and/or sometimes applications) from different online sources for reuse or resale". From this definition, it can be seen the purpose of the news aggregator is to provide services that allow users to access various content in one place and faster (Saputra, 2016).

Some examples of news aggregator applications are developing in Indonesia, namely the *BaBe (Baca Berita)* application, *UC News*, *Read*, and *Kurio*. New alternative media in reading the news collected and presented the news from mainstream news sites. In addition, some news aggregators also collect content from ordinary people who act as content contributors. Both news, from the mainstream media and also the writings of the citizen will appear together in the news aggregator display.

As a reciprocal, the people who became content contributors were promised a number of material rewards or amounts of money. *UC News*, a content distributor from Alibaba Group, for example calculates rewards for each article based on contributor "index point", which is calculated through certain assessments such as quality of content, influence on readers, interaction, professionalism, and activity. The existence of reward in the form of money has also become the main trigger for the growing popularity of jobs as content writers in the community. Reporting from *liputan6.com* (*Alasan Penulis*, 2017), according to *UC News*, consumption of online content in Indonesia has increased by 61% in 2016 compared to the previous year. *UC News* has reported that consumption of *UC We-Media* content, that is from writers, bloggers, influencers, or other independent writers increased sixfold in December 2016 compared to the previous six months.

The trend of community participation as content contributor in the online platform is supported by technological advances, internet access, and the availability of platform variations. In addition, the lucrative income offers for content contributors. It cannot be forgotten too, the time flexibility and the free work location also become a separate consideration for people who choose to work as content writers or freelancers. Meanwhile, the personal branding motif also strengthens the interest of content writers who are able to gain popularity through the media.

However, then the questions arose, did the audience really benefit as they were promised by the media? Ritzer (2010: 26) explained that exploitation appears more ambiguously in the case of Web 2.0. On the one hand, organizations (often companies) are the owners of most resources on Web 2.0 (such as, *Amazon*, *Wikipedia*, *Facebook*). Content producers are indeed in the hands of users, but profits or at least potential profits are still held by the company. They give users only a small portion of productive resources.

This paper is a critical effort to explore and analyze the phenomenon of the work of content writers, especially in the *UC News* platform. Content writers can be classified as a group of new workers in the prosumer era who are active in production activities as well as consumption (prosumption). The findings in this research explain that the consumption activity of content writers is not only limited to production and consumption, but they are also required to join on content distribution and marketization. They are classified as freelancers, which do not hold direct meetings with 'the superiors' (*UC News* platform administrator) in carrying out work and coordination. However, researcher found the other form of relationship between administrators and content writers. The administrator's control does not disappear, but runs in a more natural form. The high pressure will not be done by the company, because it can reduce the

productivity of contents. News aggregator is a user-generated content-based platform that cannot run without the participation of the audiences. So, the strategy of attracting participation is the main thing that must be considered by the company. Some of the interventions that researcher have found regarding company control to their content writers are through the e-mails that periodically sent for the writers and the *Whatsapp* group formation consist of content writers and also administrator in it. Toward those interventions of the *UC News*, the content writers seemed to receive happily and without complaints. There is a new capitalism phenomenon in the prosumer era, where commodification of workers and manipulation do not run simply.

1.2. Methodology

The method used in this study is a virtual ethnographic method conducted on six informants, namely the content writer at *UC News*. The six informants were selected with a variety of the activeness in content writing and the time of involvement to become *UC News* content writers. Virtual ethnography is expected to enrich research findings, because it cannot be denied that this research is closely related to digital culture or cyber-culture that occurs in cyberspace. Thus, virtual ethnography can reveal research data that cannot be found through participatory observation and offline interviews.

TABLE 1: The Informants Profile.

	Informant Name	Writing Category	Involved in <i>UC News</i> Since	Writing Intensity	Number of Posts in <i>UC News</i>
1.	Acep	Lifestyle	August 2017	At least one post everyday	875 articles (until April 14, 2018)
2.	Eva	Lifestyle-Fashion	October 2017	At least 10 posts everyday	600 articles (until April 10, 2018)
3.	Ilham	Lifestyle	April 2018	2-3 posts in a week	10 articles (April–May 27, 2018)
4.	Moddie	Politic and Social	August 2017	At the beginning 3-4 posts a week, lately 1 post in a week	21 articles (until April 14, 2018)
5.	Riawani	Inspiration	September 2017	1-2 posts everyday	>1000 articles (until April 14, 2018)
6.	Yeni	Lifestyle	December 2016	At least 1 post everyday	517 articles (until April 18, 2018)

Source: Researcher’s document

At the data retrieval stage, researcher distributed open questions containing 35 questions to each informant. Furthermore, the information was used as preliminary data which continued to more in-depth interviews with each informant through *Whatsapp*.

In addition, in this study, the researcher was not just observing the activity of content writers, but researcher also created an account in *UC News* and produced several writings. So that researcher had the same experience as the informants. In addition, the secondary data of this research were obtained from the written content produced by the informants in *UC News* as well as documents related to its guidelines and policy regulations..

1.3. News aggregator and *UC news* application

In the last decade we have seen many social networking sites and various blog platforms. With so much information, on the one hand we have many choices available, but on the other hand it causes confusion because of the many choices. The aggregator platform is present in today's massive information age with its function to collect data, process it, and present it to the internet citizen (netizen). It can be imagined that without aggregator, the netizen will have difficulty managing the desired information. As stated by Nugraha (2010) in *teknournal.com*, "aggregators become an essential component for people who use the internet as their information center, helping to optimize time and efficiency in absorbing content on the internet."

Content aggregator and news aggregator make the services presented by the internet become more personalized for every user. This is also related to the analysis of the media industry delivered by Prof. Clayton M. Christensen, Business Administration Professor from Harvard University (in Haryanto, 2017), which mentions one of the three important factors that need to be considered in the current media condition is always about the interests of the audience. Reporting from *searchcontentmanagement.techtarget.com* (in Prilani, 2017), there are two types of content aggregator; (1) those who only collect material from various sources for their website, and (2) people who collect and distribute content that suits their customers needs.

On a global scale, various news aggregators have long emerged. Which includes the most widely known for example *Google News* and *Yahoo*. *Google News* for example, collects articles from its homepage and makes it capable of being read with the search function. The collectors page then produced advertisements for *Yahoo* and *Google*. Other examples such as *huffingtonpost.com* and *thedailybeast.com*, offer aggregation of original reportage and comments. On one occasion, media boss Rupert Murdoch once mentioned this. According to him, *Google* should pay for every news taken from a number of media owned by the starnews boss. (Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012: 46)

In Indonesia, several examples of news aggregator applications are developing, for example, *UC News*, *BaBe (Baca Berita)*, *Baca*, *Kurio*, *Flipboard*, *Feedly*, and *Newsloop*. This study will analyze the relation and control practices that occur between the *UC News* manager/administrator and the content writers. Reporting from *marketeters.com* (Perdana, 2016), *UC News* is a business line news aggregator from *UC Browser*. Perdana (2016) stated “the player from China was already famous for his browser application which is said to have had 420 million active monthly users worldwide.” Meanwhile, in capital, quoted from *id.techinasia.com* (Pratama, 2017) *UC News* got an investment of US\$ 30 million (around Rp 400 billion) from their parent company *UCWeb*.

In addition, *UC News* has other advantages in terms of the number of downloaders. From the data summarized by App Annie (2018), in a publication published in January 2018 on the highest ranking of the most downloaded mobile applications in Indonesia, *UC News* is in the tenth rank. *UC News* is the only news aggregator application in the top ten rankings. Meanwhile, its predecessor application which is still in one Alibaba Group parent company, *UC Browser*, is ranked fourth.



Figure 1: *UC News* is in the 10th rank as the most downloaded mobile application in Indonesia (Source: App Annie, Januari 2018. Based on data in the App Annie 2017 Retrospective Report. In Hootsuite. (2018). Indonesia Digital Landscape 2018 [PDF Slide File]).

1.4. Production-consumption (Prosumption)

The concept of prosumption was first introduced by Alvin Toffler in his book *The Third Wave* (1980). Since pre-industrial times, Toffler called it “the first wave”, the prosumption

has begun. The agricultural society at that time consumed what they produced. They were not producers or consumers as in our current understanding, therefore they can be called “prosumer”. (Tofler, 1980: 266) In the article *Production, Consumption, Prosumption; The Nature of Capitalism in The Age of the Digital 'Prosumer'*, Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) said that prosumption consists of two things, namely production and consumption. Today, with an explosion in the use of online content, we increasingly have a reason to see prosumption.

Moreover, Ritzer (2011) in *McDonaldization of Society 6* explained about the renewal of internet technology Web 1.0 into Web 2.0. Web 1.0 (for example, *AOL, Yahoo*) is more of a provider than user-generated. The experience given by Web 1.0 to the internet users is limited for reading, browsing, and consuming online content. Meanwhile, Web 2.0 significantly increases its capabilities in prosumption, which allows internet users to write and produce content. It can be said that Web 2.0 must be recognized as a crucial form in the development of 'means of prosumption'. In the case of Web 2.0, users produce what they consume (Ritzer, 2011: 234).

New technological developments provide a new paradigm for new economic forms. Information technology, if viewed as a machine, facilitates the transformation of information itself into a product (commodity) from a production process. "The products of new information technology industries are information producing devices or information processing itself" (Castells, 1996: 67). Information becomes a contested commodity both by workers, company owners, and involving the state (Nasrullah, 2012: 194).

Prosumption activity cannot be separated from the work by content writers. Most content writers are ordinary citizens who do not have the knowledge of journalism. Ordinary citizens use the information that has been provided by the media as a commodity. At *UC News* content writers, they are active consumers of media content, while also working as contributors (producers) for the media. Therefore, how the production process of the writings produced by content writers and how the control that occurs between the platform manager and the writers occurs is an interesting thing to study.

1.5. Digital labor in prosumer capitalism era

Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010) said that the prosumption which were largely driven after the emergence of Web 2.0 produced a new form of capitalism, which he called prosumer capitalism. In prosumer capitalism, control and exploitation are carried out with different characters than other forms of capitalism (production capitalism or consumption capitalism). These trends offer the possibility of new prosumer capitalism.

Furthermore, in the new form of prosumer capitalism Ritzer & Jurgenson (2010: 31) underlines four important issues in it. First, capitalists have a higher difficulty in controlling prosumer and there is a greater resistance from prosumer. Second, the exploitation that occurs in prosumer is less clear-cut. Third, economic system differences are possible in it, where services are free and prosumer is not paid to do its work. Fourth, there is a condition of abundance rather than scarcity, the focus is on effectiveness rather than efficiency in prosumer capitalism.

“In prosumer capitalism companies are more likely to stand back and to meddle less with the prosumers who are producing and consuming the content” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010: 31). The internet is an extraction of values of sustainability, updateable work, and extreme intensive workers. We need renewable resources (humans and machinery), which are driven by collective workers, such as programmers, designers, and workers. We are not enough to produce a good website, we need to keep updating it and keep visitors coming back. (Terranova, 2000: 48)

According to Mark Graham, et al., one of the most important things regarding digital workers is bargaining power. The main element in the digital work platform is that they strive to minimize the regulation of relations between workers and employers (Lehdonvirta, 2016 in Graham, et al., 2017: 140). Workers, for example, are classified as independent contractors. New developments also occur in media companies. Technology makes media companies easier to manage their employees on a freelance basis than permanent employees, especially in countries where workers are highly paid (White, 2012: 16).

They -in ever increasing numbers- choose workers only when they need it, whether it's for a full day or just a few hours. This trend seems to have developed in the wider economic range with the advent of digital platforms. Trebor Scholz (2012 in Casilli, 2017) underlines that the emergence of digital workers is closely related to commodification of personal data and the harvesting of User-Generated Content (UGC) through clicks, shares, and communication with peers as de facto of unpaid labor.

2. Result and Discussion

2.1. Reasons for content writers involved in the UC News

At present, a variety of news aggregator platforms with a UGC base seek as many as possible users to contribute to their platform. In fact, large numbers of people welcomed the offer. As the data mentioned by *UC News*, as many as 1000 users have joined as

content writers on their platforms only during the first month the *UC We-Media* program was launched. What really made the enthusiasm of the people become digital content contributors?

From the data that researcher have found, every *UC News* content writer has different reasons regarding his/her motivation to join the platform. However, one similarity that appears to almost all content writers is on the financial motive offered by *UC News*. Several informants said that the offer of the cash money was quite tempting, even though in practice to reach this stage is needed hard work from content writers. This can be drawn as a conclusion that content writers from the outset have had the awareness not only to contribute content, but also to earn profit by joining *UC News*.

One thing is clear, compared to the concept of “citizen journalism”, which developed previously where citizens giving information voluntarily, this is not relevant enough to the phenomenon of news aggregator content writers who from the beginning had the motivation to achieve financial income. Some content writers also admit that their activities in *UC News* are freelance side jobs. Moreover, one of the informants, Acep, said that his activity as a content writer at *UC News* was a main job. This also confirms their position as ‘digital labor’ at *UC News*, rather than just a ‘citizen journalist’ if the term is not related to economic motive.

However, in addition to economic motive, informants also had many other reasons that attracted them to join *UC News*. The reasons for the other interests expressed by the content writers include the appearance of a simple platform—dashboard and application—, the variety of writing channels that can be chosen, and the desire to have experience writing in new media.

From the informants’ narratives about the story they joined at *UC News*, researcher also saw a common thread. The content writers who got direct offers from *UC News* to become their contributors are people who have had a pretty good track record in the field of writing. Whether it’s a blogger, a former journalist, or a member of a writing organization. This indicates that *UC News* is not arbitrary in recruiting ‘ordinary citizens’ who will be contributors to their content. However, it has been chosen through searching for profiles that are considered potential for writing and committed to becoming content writers.

2.2. When the office becomes in hand

If old consumers can be predicted and will remain loyal, it is different with new consumers who keep on moving, not just fixated on one medium. (Jenkins, 2006: 19)

Media companies also continue to learn how to maintain media audience commitment. Also includes active audiences who are involved as participatory consumers as well as content writers. Online platforms with user-generated content system bases cannot even run without public participation.

In the course of history, jobs often met geographically. Workers and their works are inseparable, where workers are the most important of their presence compared to all other factors in production. (Hudson, 2001 in Graham, et al. 2017: 136). However, with the development of internet use has changed many things. Clients, bosses, workers, and end-user products can be located in different corners of the planet. (Graham, et al, 2017: 136)

Researcher also highlighted the phenomenon in the relationship between *UC News* companies and their contributors. Content writers are not completely free and become uncoordinated workers. However, there is a maintenance or safeguard system conducted by *UC News* to content creators. Users who have registered an account are asked to fill in personal data such as e-mail address and ID card scan. This information is used by *UC News* as a database for continuous contact with users. For example, they are regularly sent e-mails that try to influence users to continue to be actively involved. The contents of e-mail such as, offering various benefits and recommending hot topics to write, as well as tips and tricks bring many benefits from writing *UC News* (researcher who also tried to create accounts as *UC News* contributors see e-mail coming almost every week to several once a day).

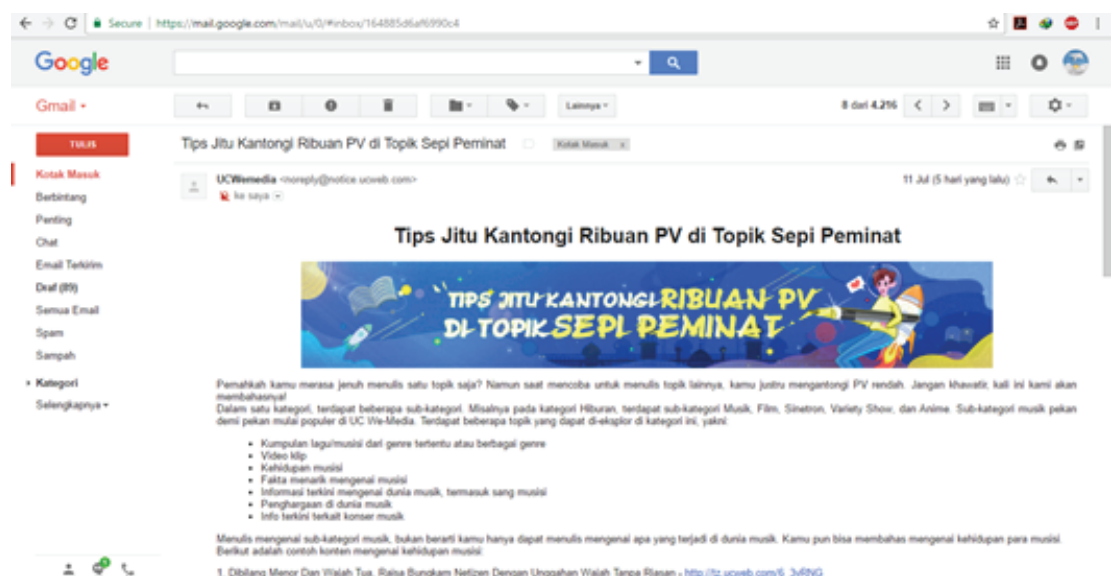


Figure 2: Examples of e-mail submissions that come to *UC News* content writers (Source: <http://trending.ucnews.ucweb.com/story/>) (Retrieved July 13, 2018)

In addition to the persuasion step via e-mail, researcher found that all informants revealed that they were members of a group on the *Whatsapp* platform, whose members contained a certain number of *UC News* content writers and several parties from the *UC News* company. The group is usually classified according to the category of content writers. The intensity of activity within the group tends to be high, from accommodating all the problems and questions encountered by contributors to motivating each other to continue writing at *UC News*.

The informant Acep said that he was included in the *Whatsapp* group consisting of 27 members from several people (manager and administrator) in *UC News* and content writers from the same category as him. Similarly with Eva who claimed to be included in the group - consisting of 17 people- who are the Top 20 Lifestyle Content Creators and two people from the *UC News*. Almost the same thing happened to Moddie who was a member of the Top Hot Politics Topic group. Riawani and Yeni also have groups with content writers from the same category as each of them. Meanwhile, Ilham is somewhat different. Ilham, who only joined one month at *UC News*, has not been involved in a particular category group. However, he entered into a larger group—containing 79 people—consisting of content writers from different categories, but equally from the same writing community as him.

Question: What activities are often carried out in the group? Does the group give you benefits or uses?

Sharing, information about competition, the latest rules to share article. Yes, sometimes there are just new things discussed, such as the weird rules at *UC News*, etc. (Acep)

Sharing article links, informal discussions on how to improve the viewer and the quality of writing. Sharing knowledge, article link sharing containers. (Eva)

Sharing knowledge or just sharing writing and motivating each other. Yes. Lots of input from the group, especially if there are questions about *UC News*. (Ilham)

Distributing writings that are new/created by each writer. So far not because I just joined one day (in Top Hot Politics Topic group). (Moddie)

Sharing info about *UC News* (rules, tips on getting high PV, info on articles that reach high PV, etc.) and their respective experiences related to *UC News*. Yes. So it's always updated with the new rules at *UC News*, keeping writing motivation consistent, and getting solutions to problems related to *UC News*. (Riawani)

Discussion, guided by admin from *UC News*. Very beneficial, because it can quickly know the dynamics of *UC News*, including when there are problems such as writing offline, writing pending, etc. (Yeni)

In the development of the latest media workers, White (2012: 10) states that there has been an increased need for flexibility and capability on a wider scale than creative workers. Especially for user-generated content platforms that involve contributors from all corners of the world, workers have no ties and are free to move from one media to another. So, companies also need to make efforts to keep their contributors' commitments. Researcher look at the "office" function applied to the conventional labor force, also occurs in digital labor in different forms, namely groups in virtual space.

In the "virtual office" there is no binding relationship and boss-subordinate relationships as well as employers and workers, but the bonds that occur actually appear among the contributors themselves. Relations between media management and contributors are more equal than superiors. They were present in the group as a problem solver for the problems experienced by everyday content writers. Sometimes they are also present to invite contributors to join certain *UC News* programs that are present regularly, such as the *UC Talks* forum, monthly writing competitions, or recommend trends.

This kind of coordination room model, is considered by the content writers to be a lot of advantages, while the *UC News* as a platform also benefited from the maintained commitment and motivation of their contributors. Some advantages for content writers include, first, the group is considered important to answer every dynamic that occurs on the *UC News* platform. Second, the group can be a place to share writing links to reach more readers. Third, between writers are motivated to continue to be consistent in writing precisely from their fellowmen. Fourth, the existence of the group is considered useful because among content writers often share knowledge related to writing and mastering the platform.

Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010: 31) explained that in the era of new capitalism, capitalists are increasingly difficult to control prosumer and there seems to be some greater resistance than prosumer. In prosumer capitalism, companies appear to be standing behind and not too meddling in prosumer affairs. Likewise, Zwick, et. al. (2008) discuss economic politics of consumption based on freedom and creativity of consumers. As an input from a critical point of view for the contributors to the Web 2.0 platform, it is necessary to see that capitalist companies do not try to dictate how prosumer use each platform because they do not need to do it. If they do, it allows a decrease in the content produced.

3. Conclusion

The relationship between the *UC News* platform administrator and content writers is seen from the initial process when content writers start to participate in the platform. Before joining as an active content writer at *UC News*, most informants claimed to have received an offer directly from the *UC News* manager. Those who get an offer are audiences who have a track record in the authorship, such as bloggers, journalists or former journalists, and individual writers. It can be seen that *UC News* is not arbitrary in involving public audiences for their platforms, but who have the potential to work professionally and commit themselves.

The control carried out by the company to the contributors does not appear to be intense, but actually still exists and goes in more natural way. These controls are carried out such as through *Whatsapp* group created by administrator/manager from *UC News* and contain a number of contributors based on certain categories or communities. The group is always ready to guide the difficulties encountered by content writers in their work activities at *UC News*. Meanwhile, the enthusiasm of the group members is usually quite high, between content writers can share their knowledge, experience, and benefits from *UC News*. In addition, persuasion from the platform to continue to produce content runs continuously through automatic e-mail that is periodically sent to the creators.

Regarding the intervention of the *UC News*, the content writers seemed to be happy and without complaints. They even feel the pride can be collected in the same group as the top *UC News* writers, get a new outpouring of knowledge about writing and managing the platform, and feel benefited by the group that helps answer every dynamic of change from the *UC News* platform.

News aggregator is a user-generated content-based platform that cannot run without the participation of the audience. So, the strategy of attracting participation is the main thing that must be considered by the company. However, they will not do pressing control because they do not need to do it, which can actually reduce the productivity of content. In terms of the contributors also feel the flexibility that is quite high and they are willing to tolerate low pay even without payment from what they do. Prosumer gets some of the production resources from the media platform, but the owner of the main resource and the biggest profit is still the company. There is a new capitalism phenomenon in the prosumer era, where commodification of workers and manipulation do not run simply. Therefore, web 2.0 users and every active consumer need to have awareness and be critical of what they do in the online world.

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