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ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SOCIETY AND THE POTENTIAL OF CROWDFUNDING IN IMPROVING JOURNALIST COMPETENCE AND JOURNALISM QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the role of society and the potential of crowdfunding in enhancing the competence of journalists and improving the quality of journalism in Pekanbaru City, Riau, Indonesia. Adopting a qualitative approach involving document analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs), the study will examine how public participation and community-based funding can encourage better journalistic practices. Participatory journalism and open journalism theory are used as an analytical framework to understand the dynamics of collaboration between journalists and the community. The results indicate that community involvement through idea contributions, fact verification, and collective funding can strengthen journalistic accountability and creativity. Journalistic crowdfunding will be more successful if the community is more involved. This can be achieved by using local wisdom from Riau Malay culture, such as the values of togetherness, "gotong royong," and cultural communication, "pantun advice," to strengthen public communication. Crowdfunding can improve journalist competence by funding training programmes and professional certification, as well as providing alternative financing to support media independence. This community-based funding mechanism also encourages active public participation, ensuring that the news produced is meaningful to the community. However, challenges such as low media literacy, low public trust, and dependence on short-term donors must be addressed through clear regulations and collaboration between multiple parties. The study recommends strengthening media education, establishing community-journalist alliances, and developing transparent, sustainable crowdfunding platforms to ensure quality journalism in the digital era.

Keywords: Society role, participatory journalism, open journalism, crowdfunding, local wisdom, journalist competence.

INTRODUCTION

Journalists have an important role in conveying information, educating the public, and exercising social control over policies and strategic issues (Putra & Bidin, 2023). However, the quality of journalists' human resources is generally still low, with many not meeting competency standards, especially due to limited financial support. This condition has the potential to produce inaccurate, biased, or disinformation-laden reporting, which can ultimately harm society (Putra, 2024a; Putra, 2024b).

The Press Council requires journalist certification through Regulation Number 01/2018. However, the latest data shows that only 11.68% of the approximately 250,000 journalists in Indonesia have been certified (Buulolo, 2024; Munte, 2024). This condition requires an innovative solution. The crowdfunding model is proposed as a participatory funding mechanism that is in line with Law Number 40/1999 concerning the role of society in developing the press and supporting the Asta Cita of the government of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, especially the enlightenment of the nation through quality information (Matsuda et al., 2025). Crowdfunding or public fundraising could be an alternative solution, given its success in supporting journalism in various countries. Unfortunately, this potential has not been optimally utilized in Indonesia. Several media have actually started public funding projects but are still limited in scope, such as news production and distribution carried out by Project Multatuli (PM) as the first crowdfunding media in Indonesia (Humeira & Aji, 2024).

Journalistic crowdfunding, according to Bessarab et al. (2022), not only guarantees the public's right to quality information but also has the potential to increase public awareness and establish strategic collaboration between journalists, the public, and stakeholders to encourage media professionalism. This is in line with Law Number 40/1999 concerning the Press, especially Article 6, which is further regulated in the Press Council Regulation Number 2/2013 concerning the Code of Ethics for Mass Media Philanthropy (Namin et al., 2025; Putra, 2023b). However, real challenges are still seen in journalism practices at the local level, such as in Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, where only 1.5% of local media meet professional standards (El Amady, 2022). This low quality is influenced by two main factors: the weak technical and ethical competence of journalists, as seen from the minimal application of the principles of verification, independence, and accuracy, and the lack of public participation in monitoring media quality (Putra, 2023a; Putra, 2025). In this context, journalistic crowdfunding can be a dual solution: as a funding alternative that empowers communities while also encouraging media accountability through active public involvement.

This study develops the concept of community-based journalistic crowdfunding as an innovative breakthrough. As a pioneering study in Indonesia, especially for areas such as Pekanbaru, this concept not only provides alternative funding but also builds transparency through the active role of the community as a monitor of news quality. Based on the theory of Participatory Journalism and Open Journalism, this collaborative approach involves the community as an active partner in the journalistic process.

The results of this study examine three main aspects: (a) the role of the community in improving journalists' competence, (b) the potential for journalistic crowdfunding in Pekanbaru based on community interest, technological infrastructure, and stakeholder support, and (c) Participatory journalism and community involvement support journalistic crowdfunding. This study contributes to the discourse on digital media funding by developing the concept of community-based funding and participatory journalism. These findings offer solutions to improve journalists' competence in Pekanbaru while building a more inclusive and sustainable local journalistic ecosystem through active collaboration of all stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to deeply understand the social realities of participants, focusing on the role of society and the potential of crowdfunding in increasing the capacity of journalists in Pekanbaru. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews (Table 1) for a comprehensive understanding and Focus Group Discussion/FGD (Table 2) to explore the dynamics of interactions between participants (Thorne, 2016). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 key informants (journalists, community leaders, academics, and campus press activists) to explore the role of society in improving the competence of journalists in Pekanbaru (Hwang et al., 2022). Furthermore, the FGD involved various stakeholders (senior journalists, press organizations, government, IT experts, and crowdfunding practitioners) to identify the potential for journalistic crowdfunding in Pekanbaru and participatory journalism in supporting journalistic crowdfunding (Praratya et al., 2024; Mohamad, 2023; Aitamurto, 2019).

Table 1: In-depth interview informants

| Informant code	Age	Occupation	Formal education
Informant 1A	25	Junior journalist	Bachelor graduate
Informant 2A	30	Junior journalist	Senior high school
Informant 3A	44	Senior journalist	Bachelor graduate
Informant 4A	62	Senior journalist	Senior high school
Informant 5A	55	Senior journalist	Magister
Informant 6A	40	Communication science lecture	PhD
Informant 7A	18	Campus Press activist	Student
Informant 8A	20	Campus Press activist	Student
Informant 9A	60	Community figure	Magister
Informant 10A	55	Community figure	Bachelor graduate
Informant 11A	50	Community figure	Senior high school
Informant 12A	46	Crowdfunding activist	Bachelor graduate

Table 2: Focus group discussion informants

Informant code	Age	Occupation	Formal education
Informant 1B	53	Senior journalist	Senior high school

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Informant 2B	56	Senior journalist	Bachelor graduate
Informant 3B	59	Community figure	Bachelor graduate
Informant 4B	47	Community figure	Magister
Informant 5B	40	Journalist organization administrator (PWI)	Bachelor graduate
Informant 6B	45	Media organization administrator (JMSI)	Bachelor graduate
Informant 7B	50	Riau regional government official	Magister
Informant 8B	45	Communication science lecture	PhD
Informant 9B	41	Information technology lecturer	PhD
Informant 10B	50	Education figure	PhD
Informant 11B	19	Campus Press activist	Student
Informant 12B	48	Crowdfunding activist	Magister

This study analyzes public participation in journalistic crowdfunding using NVivo 14 with thematic analysis (Usman et al., 2024; Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Three researchers conducted independent coding and co-occurrence analysis, revealing that crowdfunding not only improves the quality of journalism but also creates participatory communication through budget transparency and public discussion. The findings show a focus on public issues such as the environment and social justice, while increasing journalist accountability. Thus, journalistic crowdfunding acts as a collaborative space within the theoretical framework of Participatory Journalism that creates more inclusive and public-oriented media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the data was obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) regarding public perceptions of their role in supporting journalist competence and the potential for implementing journalistic crowdfunding. This study used NVivo 14 software for coding analysis and thematic analysis. NVivo 14 is effective in helping researchers trace or analyze the answers to each problem formulation (Awaliah et al., 2025). The results of the analysis identified three main themes in the form of an analysis map (project map), namely: (a) the role of the community in improving journalist competence, (b) the potential for journalistic crowdfunding in Pekanbaru based on community interest, technological infrastructure, and stakeholder support, and (c) Participatory journalism and community involvement support journalistic crowdfunding. The research findings show that these three aspects contribute significantly to improving journalist competence and realizing quality journalism practices.
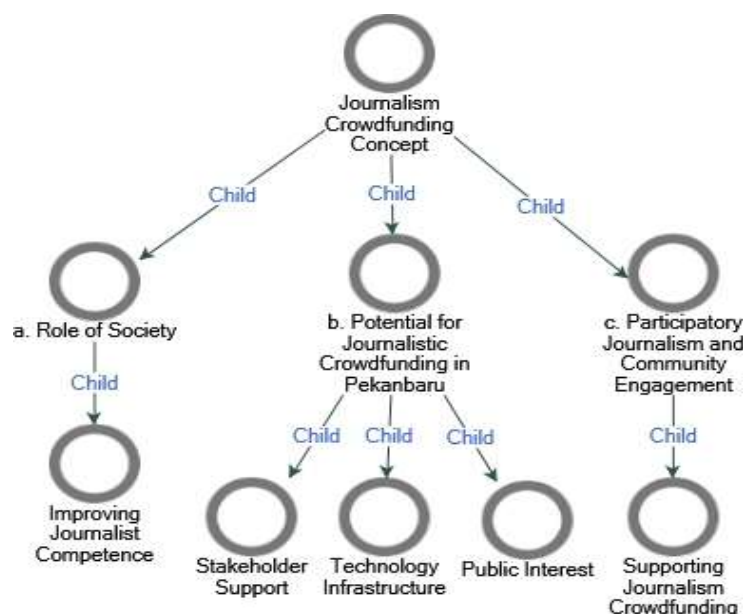

Figure 1. Concept of journalistic crowdfunding
Source: Data processed using NVivo 14

Theme 1: The role of society in supporting journalist competence

In the research analysis in NVivo 14 related to the role of society in supporting journalist competence, it shows that society plays a crucial role in improving journalist professionalism through various forms of participation, namely as a source of information, supervisor of news quality, and driver of the certification process. Active community contributions, ranging from providing input, reporting errors, to supporting training funding through crowdfunding, also strengthen journalistic accuracy and ethics. Good media literacy also encourages media transparency and accountability. This multi-party collaboration creates a more professional and integrated journalistic ecosystem.
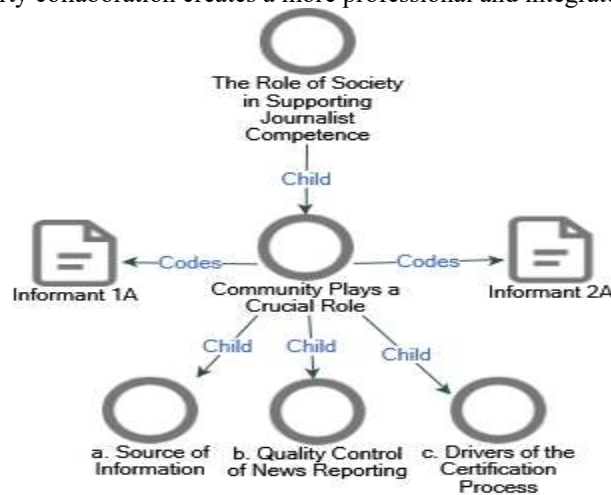
Figure 2. The role of society in supporting journalists' competence
Source: Data processed using NVivo 14

Based on in-depth interviews with two junior journalists (Informant 1A and Informant 2A) in this study, it was stated that the public plays a crucial role in encouraging media accuracy and accountability. One of them is through participatory verification. Currently, the public can help journalists verify news directly through the comments column on online news platforms or social media. Informant 1A said that when there is news that is inaccurate or contains errors, the public can immediately provide corrections accompanied by evidence, such as documents, photos, or valid alternative sources. Usually done in the comments column of online news and social media. Meanwhile, Informant 2A said, "This enriches the verification process and makes reporting more transparent".

According to Informant 9A (community figure), the active role of the public is crucial in maintaining quality journalism standards. In line with this, Informant 10A (community figure) emphasized that the public should be positioned as strategic partners of journalists, not just as passive recipients of information, in order to ensure the accuracy and accountability of news content. Informant 10A reasoned:

With constructive input, the community plays an active role in improving the quality of journalism while motivating journalists to develop their professionalism. Professional certification is one concrete evidence of the competence possessed by a journalist (Informant 10A).

Public support for journalist competency tests is also part of this effort. Campus press activists (Informant 7A and Informant 8A) said that by encouraging competency certification and regular training, the public can ensure that journalists work based on the principles of professionalism and ethics. According to Informant 8A, "Collaboration between the community, journalists, and media institutions creates a more credible and integrated information ecosystem". Meanwhile, Informant 6A (a communication lecturer) emphasized the role of academics as providers of expert sources:

As an academic, I am often contacted by journalists to provide analysis of certain issues. This is a form of synergy where the community acts as a source of knowledge (Informant 6A).

The role of academics as expert sources, as conveyed by Informant 6A, is also supported by the concept of "knowledge-based journalism" (Hamm, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of journalists referring to experts to deepen their analysis. Thus, the involvement of multi-stakeholders such as the community, academics, and media institutions in the process of verifying and developing journalist competence not only strengthens the information ecosystem but also reflects the principles of deliberative democracy (Wuryo et al., 2024), where public space becomes an arena for inclusive and critical knowledge exchange. On the funding side, senior journalists Informant 4A and

Informant 5A revealed that public funding support is increasingly important for the sustainability of quality journalism. They explained:

Funding from the public not only helps media operations but also becomes a shield to maintain editorial independence from pressure from capital owners or political interests (Informant 4A).

When journalists rely on non-binding funding, they are freer to side with the truth and public interest without worrying about external intervention (Informant 5A).

This phenomenon is seen in the development of citizen journalism platforms and independent media that rely on participatory funding models, such as public donations or crowdfunding, to finance investigative reporting. For example, a number of platforms such as Project Multatuli or Jaring.id in Indonesia use public donations to uncover corruption cases or social issues that are often ignored by the mainstream media (Tivany, 2022; Nawawi, 2025). Senior journalist Informant 4A and his media have conducted coverage using the crowdfunding model.

Funds from readers or supporters allow us to expose risky facts, without being pressured by commercial advertising (Informant 4A).

The importance of improving journalist competence by helping to fund journalist competency tests and various journalism training was also voiced by a number of informants. They hope that journalists will be open to the idea of journalistic crowdfunding to improve the quality of journalism in Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia. Informant 7A (campus press activist), Informant 1A (junior journalist), Informant 8A (campus press activist), Informant 5A (senior journalist), and Informant 12A (crowdfunding activist) stated:

Journalist competency tests and training are investments for quality journalism. Crowdfunding can be a solution to the problem of limited funds. People who care about accurate information will support (Informant 7A)

So far, many young journalists have been constrained by costs to participate in certification. If there is a crowdfunding platform specifically for training, I am sure donors will participate, especially for specific issues such as the environment or anti-corruption (Informant 1A).

The people of Pekanbaru are starting to realize the importance of quality news. They can not only criticize, but also make concrete contributions by funding journalist training. This is a form of shared social responsibility (Informant 8A)

Journalism crowdfunding has not been widely developed in Riau. This model can be a space for collaboration between campuses, professions, and the community to increase the capacity of journalists as well as media education (Informant 5A).

We are willing to work together to hold a pilot project crowdfunding for journalist competency tests and training. Including coverage of collaboration with the media. For example, one investigative report can be funded by the public. If it is transparent, the public will trust and support the journalist's competence (Informant 12A).

Theoretically, the idea of journalistic crowdfunding to improve journalist competence is in line with the concept of journalism sustainability (Goyanes et al., 2023), which emphasizes the importance of alternative funding models amidst the economic crisis of traditional media. This participatory approach also reflects Habermas's (2022) public sphere principle, where the public is not only a passive consumer but an active actor in ensuring the quality of information. The informant's statement about the enthusiasm of the Pekanbaru community to fund training and the willingness of crowdfunding practitioners) indicates the potential for civic engagement in the local media ecosystem. From a media development perspective, multi-stakeholder collaboration between campuses, journalist professions, and communities is an implementation of the knowledge-based journalism model that requires structural support (Hamm, 2024). The minimal use of crowdfunding in Riau shows a gap for strengthening media literacy as well as the professionalization of journalists, as expressed by Humeira & Aji (2024) in the context of journalism in developing countries. The pilot project proposed by the informant could be a case study for the application of community-funded journalism (Mor, 2024), especially for investigative coverage of specific issues, such as the environment, that are often ignored by the mainstream media.

This finding strengthens the proposition that journalistic crowdfunding not only functions as a funding tool but also as a public accountability mechanism where the community, as the funder, has the right to monitor the quality of training and coverage output. For the Pekanbaru context, systematic socialization is needed regarding the crowdfunding mechanism and the preparation of standards for reporting the use of public funds to be sustainable.

Theme 2: Potential for Journalism Crowdfunding in Pekanbaru based on community interest, technological infrastructure, and stakeholder support

Based on the FGD discussion in NVivo 14, journalistic crowdfunding was identified as a promising alternative funding solution to strengthen media independence amidst the economic challenges faced by the press industry today. The results of the study show diverse views from key informants representing various stakeholders in the media ecosystem, while supporting the concept of the journalism philanthropy model (Lincoln, 2025), where the community participates

in funding news production in a participatory manner. The following is an analysis map in the form of a project map (NVivo 14):
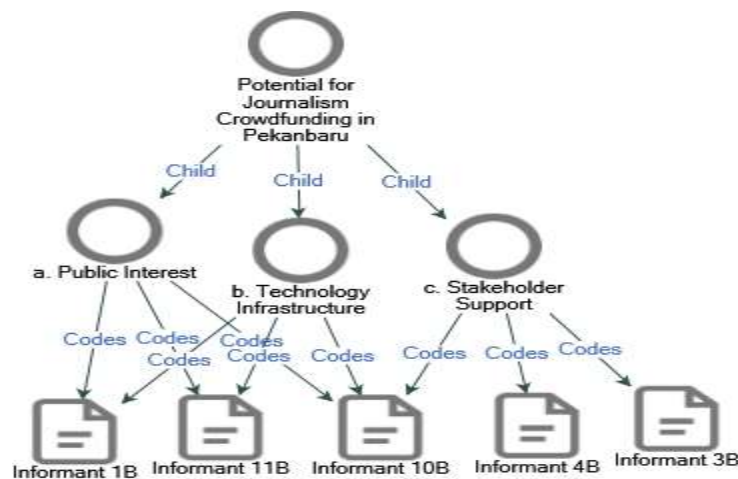
Figure 3. Potential for journalistic crowdfunding in Pekanbaru
Source: Data processed using NVivo 14

Informant 1B (press figure) said that local people are starting to be disappointed with media coverage that is considered too influenced by business and political interests, thus sacrificing the quality of journalism. According to him, this condition has encouraged people to switch to social media platforms as a source of information, leaving conventional press reporting. The same thing was also expressed by Informant 11B (campus press activist). According to him, the local young generation is quite active on digital platforms and cares about social issues. If a campus press is involved in journalistic crowdfunding literacy, they are sure that many young people will want to contribute.

Regarding public interest, informant 10B (education figure) stated that the young generation of Pekanbaru has good digital literacy and is responsive to social issues. However, a creative approach is needed through visual content on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok to attract their interest. He emphasized that this age group has the potential to be actively involved if journalistic crowdfunding campaigns are able to display accountability for the use of funds and the real impacts generated. Thus, Generation Z is predicted to become the main support base.

These findings indicate a crisis of public trust in conventional media that is perceived as being too affiliated with political and business interests. This phenomenon is in line with the gatekeeping theory (Valdeón, 2022), which explains how editorial decisions are often influenced by external factors, including economic pressures. People turn to social media as an alternative source of information, even though these platforms are vulnerable to misinformation—a paradox also identified by Goyanes et al. (2023) in their study of media skepticism. However, this disruption opens up opportunities for journalistic crowdfunding, especially among the younger generation who are intrinsically involved in social issues and have high digital literacy. Their participation can be optimized through a participatory culture approach (Vos & Thomas, 2024; Goyanes et al., 2023) with creative visual content on Instagram or TikTok, while meeting the need for transparency and real impact, key factors in the accountability journalism model (Zhao et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, Informant 3B and Informant 4B (community leaders) hope that the idea of journalistic crowdfunding can really be realized in order to strengthen public interest. Because, as an urban city, the level of concern of the Pekanbaru community towards social issues is quite high. They said:

In fact, the awareness to support quality journalism already exists in society, but doubts arise due to the lack of concrete evidence. However, when a journalistic work, such as an investigative report on the environment or education, is presented transparently and its benefits are visible, I am sure the public response will be positive. The main challenge is maintaining consistency in building this trust (Informant 3B).

Pekanbaru people like to help, especially for issues that are close to their lives, such as socio-religious issues or education. But they need to know the transparency of the flow of funds (Informant 4B).

Furthermore, Informant 5B (PWI administrator) and Informant 6B (JMSI administrator) stated that journalistic crowdfunding is an alternative solution amidst the media's difficulties in obtaining conventional advertising, to finance coverage, training, or to take journalist competency tests. This statement not only indicates the opportunity for diversification of media business models (Mendes-Da-Silva et al., 2024) but also shows the potential of crowdfunding as a means of engagement that strengthens the concept of "reciprocal journalism" (Deavours et al., 2023) by involving

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the public in news production (Aitamurto, 2019; Othman, 2023). Although international models such as Spot.us (US) and Kickstarter Journalism (UK) have proven the effectiveness of this approach, its implementation in Indonesia, including in Pekanbaru, still faces unique challenges related to the culture of participation and transparency of funding. The Riau regional government responded positively to the crowdfunding discourse. The statement of Informant 7B (Riau government official) shows the existence of political will to institutionalize journalistic crowdfunding as a collaboration model, where community participation is not only voluntary but also obtains policy legitimacy. According to him:

We are ready to facilitate meetings between the media, crowdfunding platforms, and community members as a form of support for improving journalist competence and the quality of information in Riau. This collaboration scheme is in line with the 'Riau Maju' Province program, where we prioritize public participation (Informant 7B).

Local government support for this initiative can be understood through the lens of media governance, where the state acts as an enabler for multi-party collaboration. The political will to institutionalize journalistic crowdfunding is a form of policy recognition of the role of the community in developing a healthy media ecosystem (Hoque et al., 2023). Alignment with the Riau Maju regional development program shows an effort to mainstream participatory journalism practices into regional development policies, an approach that is in accordance with the principles of communication for development (Chandna, 2022). This finding enriches the academic discussion on sustainable journalism models in developing regions such as Indonesia (Humeira & Aji, 2024), especially in the context of the triangular relationship between communities, media, and local governments.

The aspect of community involvement in journalistic crowdfunding was expressed by FGD informants. Informant 5B, Informant 12B, and Informant 11B said:

In the Pekanbaru community groups, we often discuss hoaxes and the importance of quality news. If there is a transparent crowdfunding mechanism for journalist training, I am sure community members are ready to contribute; it could even be a joint media education program (Informant 5B).

Based on our experience raising community funds for social issues, Riau residents are responsive. The key is to create concrete and relatable journalistic projects, for example, funding coverage of annual floods or investigating damaged schools. The public needs to see the direct impact (Informant 12B).

Our young generation is already familiar with digital donations. What is lacking is a media that is willing to be open to collaborating with us. How about creating an 'adopt a journalist' program on social media, where the community can choose the training or coverage topics they want to fund (Informant 11B).

Community involvement in journalistic crowdfunding strengthens the theory of participatory journalism, which emphasizes the active role of the community in the media ecosystem (Vos & Thomas, 2024). The informant's statement shows that the Pekanbaru community not only has critical awareness of news quality but also readiness to participate financially through crowdfunding mechanisms - a phenomenon that is in line with the concept of civic crowdfunding in the context of journalism (Mor, 2024). In particular, the proposal for the 'adopt a journalist' program reflects the adaptation of digital civic engagement among the younger generation (Hasselwander et al., 2022), while also showing the potential of a community-driven journalism model that is oriented towards specific local needs.

The city of Pekanbaru has a digital infrastructure that is quite supportive of journalistic crowdfunding, although with some challenges. Adequate internet access in urban areas, as expressed by crowdfunding activists (Inf12B), is a major supporting factor. However, the digital divide in the suburbs remains an obstacle, even though local platforms such as Kitabisa.com and GandengTangan are familiar (Hisyam et al.,2024). Informant 9B (information systems lecturer) and Informant 8B (communication lecturer) added:

There is still a digital divide in the outskirts, but in general, several platforms that usually operate in Pekanbaru can be utilized well (Informant 9B).

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are very popular here. If the crowdfunding campaign is packaged creatively, it can reach many people. For this reason, digital literacy is very necessary (Informant 8B).

Theme 3: Participatory journalism and community engagement support journalistic crowdfunding

Based on the FGD findings in the NVivo 14 analysis involving various stakeholders such as media practitioners and academics in Pekanbaru, it was revealed that the principles of participatory journalism are an important pillar in the success of the journalistic crowdfunding concept.
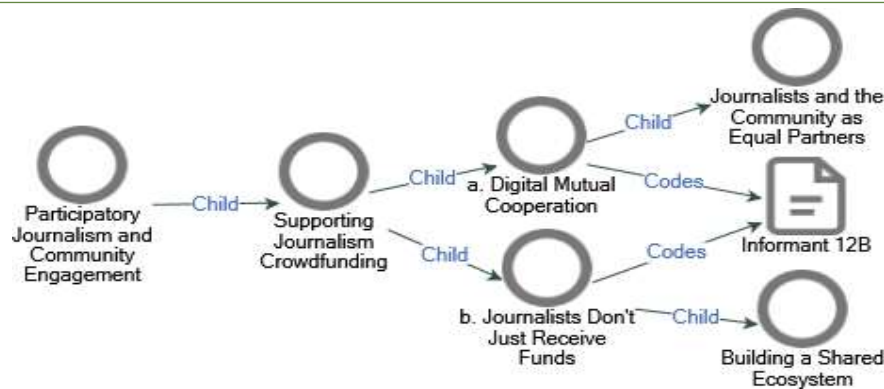
Figure 4. Participatory journalism and community engagement
Source: Data processed using NVivo 14

The NVivo 14 project map analysis shows that informant 12B (crowdfunding activist) in this approach offers a collaborative framework that transforms the traditional hierarchical relationship between information producers and consumers into an equal and mutually beneficial relationship.

Participatory journalism in crowdfunding is like digital cooperation, where journalists and the public become equal partners. Journalists no longer just receive funds, but build a shared ecosystem where citizens' financial contributions are accompanied by active involvement in the journalistic process (Informant 12B).

The development of crowdfunding in participatory journalism has fundamentally shifted the relationship between media and audiences. As emphasized by Informant 1B (press figure), the position of the community has now transformed from being merely passive sources to strategic partners involved since the early stages of coverage planning, especially for complex issues such as palm oil land conversion or flood disaster mitigation. This observation is reinforced by the statement of Informant 2B (press figure), who emphasized that this new approach positions citizens not only as information providers, but as the main subjects who have problems as well as actors of change, thus significantly increasing the practical value and social influence of the journalistic products produced. Informant 2B said:

In participatory journalism crowdfunding, the community as co-creator not only provides data but also hones journalists' competencies through collaborative verification challenges and strict accountability demands. This will force us to develop deeper investigative skills and inclusive public communication skills (Informant 2B).

Participatory journalism through crowdfunding changes the role of the community from consumers to active partners in the production and funding of journalistic works. Informant 8B (communication lecturer) and Informant 11B (campus press activist) said:

Digital content for journalistic crowdfunding must combine emotional narratives with factual data. The public needs to see the real impact of the journalism they fund—not just news, but change. Use multimedia formats such as mini documentary videos or interactive infographics to increase engagement (Informant 8B)

Later, you can use personal storytelling, such as featuring the voices of victims or communities affected by the issues covered. Content that is authentic and close to students' daily lives, for example, through memes or Twitter threads, is believed to be effective in triggering engagement. The key is not to be too formal, but still credible (Informant 11B).

These findings reveal that the success of the journalistic crowdfunding model depends on the ability to connect the emotional-intellectual aspects of the audience, present adaptive content, and maintain accountability (Aitamurto, 2019). Related studies show that an emotional narrative-based approach combined with factual data significantly increases audience engagement in journalistic funding (Chung et al.,2023). Meanwhile, research by Huttunen et al. (2022) emphasized that adapting content formats to audience characteristics is a key factor in building sustainable participation. Furthermore, the findings of Jusoh et al. (2023) underline that accountability through transparency in the use of funds and regular reporting are key prerequisites in building public trust in the journalistic crowdfunding model. As expressed by Informant 3B (community figure) and Informant 12B (crowdfunding activist):

People will support if they feel involved. Content must clearly explain: 'This is our problem, this is the solution, and your role is crucial.' For example, a river pollution case can be packaged with a specific call to action: 'Donate IDR 50,000 for this investigation.' Include testimonials from residents to make it more relatable (Informant 3B).

Our analytics show that content with deadlines and progress meters (e.g., '50% collected!') increases urgency. Also, absolute transparency: show who the team behind the project is, how the funds are used, and regular updates. Live Q&A with journalists can also build trust (Informant 12B).

This approach not only increases funding participation but also strengthens media-community relations, making crowdfunding an instrument of participatory and sustainable media democratization (Coombes & Doshi, 2022; Humeira & Aji, 2024). The main key lies in the transformation of hierarchical relationships into collaborative ones, where the public feels they have a real role in the journalistic process (Vos & Thomas, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2022). Research by Riedl (2023) shows that this kind of participatory model can create a media ecosystem that is more inclusive and responsive to community needs. Meanwhile, a study by Mor, N. (2024) found that transparency in journalistic crowdfunding increases media legitimacy in the eyes of the public while strengthening social accountability.

On the technical side, developing an inclusive crowdfunding platform is both a challenge and an opportunity to improve journalists' digital competence. As emphasized by Informant 6B (JMSI administrator), simple technological adaptations such as the integration of WhatsApp into the crowdfunding system not only facilitate community participation but also train journalists in managing digital platform-based communication - an essential competence in the era of modern journalism. Informant 12B said:

Technology should make things easier, not harder. The journalistic crowdfunding system needs to be built with a simple interface like WhatsApp, because 8 out of 10 Pekanbaru residents are more active on that platform than on complex websites (Informant 12B).

Support from academic literature reinforces the importance of technology adaptation in developing journalist capacity. Research by Nah et al. (2022) shows that public discourse that previously took place in physical spaces has now shifted to digital spaces, especially social media. To respond to this change, it is necessary to conceptualize citizen engagement through digital platforms, known as online civic engagement. This concept refers to citizen participation in the digital realm, including the use of social media to discuss, collaborate, or influence public policy. In addition, the accountability aspect is key to the sustainability of this model. Informant 9B (information systems lecturer) stated that financial transparency can be guaranteed through the adoption of simple, low-cost blockchain technology, as has been tested in several local media. The implementation of open-source distributed ledgers such as Hyperledger Fabric has been proven to be able to track the flow of funds accurately without burdening the budget, while building public trust (Kumar et al., 2023).

However, community participation will not be optimal without the support of a responsive system. Inf6B (JMSI administrator) emphasized that the good intentions of citizens must be supported by tools that facilitate real-time engagement, such as automatic notifications and easily accessible fund tracking dashboards. The lack of such features in many conventional crowdfunding platforms is the cause of low participation retention. Therefore, the development of a participatory journalism system must combine the principles of user-centered design with measurable accountability mechanisms (Vos & Thomas, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2022). Collaboration between journalists, the technology community, and civil society is key to creating a media ecosystem that is not only transparent but also empowering (Zhao et al., 2022; Aitamurto, 2019). Thus, journalistic crowdfunding can evolve from being just a fundraising tool to an inclusive and sustainable instrument for democratizing information.

Active community participation in journalistic crowdfunding has become a determining factor in the success of coverage projects, as expressed by Informant 11B (campus press activist) and Informant 5B (PWI administrator):

Successfully funded journalism projects always involve the community in a real way: from choosing the headline to auditing the report. The community does not want to be just an ATM – they want to be a working partner (Informant 11B).

Community involvement in journalism crowdfunding not only improves the quality of investigations but lso expands the network of resources and knowledge. They will produce journalistic work that is more in-depth, independent, and relevant to the community. (Informant 5B).

Research shows that the success of crowdfunding journalism depends on active community involvement, rather than just financial donations (Alavi et al., 2025). Crowdfunding journalism has currently shifted from a passive donor model to co-creation, in which the public acts as a working partner in accordance with the concept of participatory journalism (Vos & Thomas, 2024). This phenomenon also aligns with the views of Informants 3B and 4B (both community leaders), who advocate for a culture of cooperation. According to research by Aricindy and Wijaya (2023), this approach is rooted in local wisdom and strengthens solidarity through sincere cooperation. Using advice rhymes in community involvement through campaign content is believed to help journalists succeed in their journalistic crowdfunding mission. This tradition contains social capital in the form of trust and social networks that empower the community, including citizen journalism. Both argue:

In our village, the tradition of cooperation for the common good has been passed down from generation to generation. When this concept can be applied to fund investigative coverage of corruption in cleaning funds, for example. I am sure the residents were immediately enthusiastic because they felt that this was important to be opened to the public.

But they were also firm, every rupiah must be accounted for by the media with real evidence and honesty. The use of advice rhymes also helps increase community participation (Informant 3B).

The standards for reporting the use of public funds must be transparent, accountable, and easily accessible. Reports must include allocation, realization, results, and long-term impacts on the community and the environment. Independent audits and public oversight are also needed to ensure the efficiency and sustainability of the use of funds (Informant 4B).

In another section, the strategic role of students in bridging the media and society has a strong theoretical basis. As expressed by Informant 11B (campus press activist) and reinforced by the concept of "boundary spanners" in the research of Hatch et al. (2023), students function as vital links in the participatory journalism ecosystem. The findings of Mell et al. (2022) further confirmed that the involvement of intermediaries such as academics can increase the level of social legitimacy of journalistic projects to achieve high levels of trust. Informant 11B said:

Students become a bridge between the media and the community. We hold focus groups with residents before submitting crowdfunding proposals, so that the funded topics touch the needs of the grassroots (Informant 11B).

This multi-stakeholder collaboration represents a new model of participatory journalism supported by recent literature. As Pantic, M. (2022) argued in a study of the digital media ecosystem, the sustainability of contemporary journalism requires a "networked journalism" approach that integrates multiple stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

A study of journalistic crowdfunding in Pekanbaru through the perspectives of Participatory Journalism and Open Journalism reveals three significant findings. Firstly, public participation is not limited to collective funding; it also encompasses the contribution of ideas, fact-checking, and content production — a form of journalistic 'gotong royong' that aligns with the local wisdom of the Riau Malay community. This active involvement strengthens media accountability and increases the creativity of reporting, with cultural approaches such as 'advice rhymes' that effectively encourage public participation. Secondly, this model serves two functions: providing an alternative financing solution for media independence and improving journalist competence. Community-based journalism training, professional certification, and digital skills development are made possible through this funding mechanism. Support from local stakeholders creates a supportive ecosystem where interactive content based on local wisdom produces more meaningful news for the community. Thirdly, the success of this concept relies on transparent fund management, combining local wisdom, values, and multi-party collaboration to overcome challenges such as low media literacy and the need to increase public trust in journalists.

The study recommends strengthening the alliance between journalists and the community, as well as developing a sustainable crowdfunding platform, in order to create a unique, democratic, quality journalistic ecosystem in Riau. In terms of implementation, the journalistic crowdfunding model in Pekanbaru brings about a multidimensional transformation, changing the dynamics of journalist–community relations from passive to collaborative and creating a symbiotic relationship between developing journalist competence and improving reporting quality through an approach based on local community interests.

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