

Gamification and participatory journalism: Media management strategies to increase engagement with user-generated content on news portals

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ABSTRACT

The rise of digital media has prompted news portals to increasingly engage the public in the news production process through User-Generated Content (UGC). This engagement offers audiences the opportunity to contribute as creators, while necessitating effective management to ensure content quality. This study examines how gamification and participatory journalism are utilized to enhance audience engagement with UGC on news portals. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes a case study method to investigate the Indozone Z Creators program. The study gathered data through in-depth interviews with the Head of Community and the Editor-in-Chief. The study's findings reveal that UGC management occurs in four stages: planning, content creation, distribution, and analysis. In the planning phase, Indozone builds its community by partnering with various stakeholders, providing training, facilitating communication, and running challenge-based activities. During the content creation stage, the implementation of points and badges incentivizes creators to produce content, while journalism training and mentorship strengthen their skills. In the distribution phase, social rewards, such as visibility and recognition for their contributions, motivate creators to continue participating. Every piece of content goes through an editorial curation and verification process, which is a crucial aspect of media management that ensures the quality, accuracy, and credibility of news coverage. Lastly, in the evaluation stage, media management assesses several factors, including audience engagement, creator loyalty, content rejection rates, and public trust in the media. Overall, the research indicates that media management's approach to handling UGC prioritizes not only the enhancement of audience engagement but also the effective management of creators, the maintenance of content quality, and the preservation of reporting credibility. As such, media management plays a vital role in balancing the participatory opportunities available to creators with the editorial responsibilities of the media.

Keywords: *Gamification; Participatory Journalism; Media Management; User-Generated Content; Audience Engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

The shift from conventional media to digital media has fundamentally changed how people consume information. Digital news portals now offer interactivity and two-way communication that traditional media do not, placing online communities at the centre. In this joint space, audiences are no longer passive spectators but are directly involved in creating, disseminating, and interpreting news. This is in line with the concept of Participatory Culture Theory which explains the shift of audiences from passive consumers to active participants in content production and distribution (Jenkins, H, 2006), which explains the shift in the role of the audience from passive consumers to active participants in content distribution. More specifically, the change is reflected in the practice of participatory journalism, where the public makes a real contribution to the news production process through the delivery of

information, experiences, photos, videos, and content about various events (Prawira & Mahamed, 2025). As a result of this participatory ecosystem, the audience in this context can play the role of a prosumer, namely a party that simultaneously consumes and produces content (Nwaubeta & Azubuike, 2025). osumer phenomenon is most evident in the digital news portal ecosystem, which is now actively designing interfaces and interactive spaces to accommodate user participation. In the Indonesian context, the development of digital news portals reflects a shift from one-way communication to a more participatory media ecosystem, where users not only consume news but also help produce, distribute, and disseminate content. Commentary features, user-generated content, digital communities, creator programs, and social media integration expand users' roles in the ecosystem. Thus, news portals do not stand alone as producers of information, but interact with various actors, such as journalists, users, creators, digital media platforms, advertisers, and communities in creating and distributing media value. A key step in designing the cooperative space isn't just following social trends, but supporting the news portal's efforts to improve user experience, expand content sources and reach, and preserve relevance amid competition in the digital media ecosystem (Archetti, 2022).

In Indonesia's digital media ecosystem, this practice is apparent in news portals developing creator communities that give users space to contribute to content production. Audience participation in content production has become part of Indonesia's digital media ecosystem. Several media portals are developing creator communities that allow users to contribute to content production through different engagement and appreciation mechanisms, as shown in Figure 1

Media Portal	Kompasiana	IDN Times	Hipwee	Indozone
Program/Community	Kompasianer	IDN Times Community	Hipwee Community	Z Creators
Form of User Participation	Users become contributors and publish content	Users write and submit articles	Users contribute to article production	Users act as content creators/contributors
Form of Content	Text, photos, videos	Articles	Articles, opinions, stories, and creative content	News, lifestyle, culinary, and local issues
Form of Appreciation/Engagement	Community interaction, publication, and existence as a contributor	Points, views, and contributor appreciation	Points, appreciation, and rewards	Points, challenges, rewards, and community recognition

Figure 1. Comparison of Media Portals and User Communities

In Indonesia's digital media ecosystem, audience participation is apparent in the development of various community creators and user-generated content programs on media portals. Kompasiana, for example, provides a space for users to produce text, photo, and video content, with more than 843 thousand members and 4.5 million articles recorded as of August 2026. IDN Times developed a similar model through the IDN Times Community, and Hipwee through the Hipwee Community, permitting users to contribute by producing articles and receive various forms of recognition. These developments show that audience participation has become part of the digital media content management model, where the audience plays not only the role of consumers but also contributors to content production.

This concept is consistent with the Z Creators Indozone program, which provides a space for users to contribute to content production. Through this mechanism, the relationship between the media and the audience no longer flows in one direction;

instead, it forms a participatory ecosystem that allows users to create value for the media through content production and distribution. Thus, Z Creators can be understood as a form of participatory journalism practice that utilizes user contributions as part of a digital media content management strategy.

However, participation spaces do not automatically guarantee sustainable participant involvement. Media outlets need to develop strategies to encourage users to keep contributing and remain active in the community. In this context, gamification is one strategy that can increase participant involvement. Applying elements such as points, challenges, and rewards can provide a mechanism for recognition and incentives for users' activities in the media ecosystem.

Thus, gamification in Z Creators can be seen not only as a feature to increase interaction, but as part of a media community management plan for managing audience participation. Points can recognize creators' contributions, challenges can motivate content production, and rewards can show appreciation for participation. These three elements form a mechanism that connects user activities with media management goals: maintaining participation, increasing content production, and building community participation.

From the perspective of the digital media business ecosystem, the mechanism shows a reciprocal relationship between media and audiences. Z Creators gain opportunities to expand content production sources and build communities, while creators gain space to express themselves, gain recognition, and benefit from their contributions. Therefore, managing Z Creators can be seen as a media management strategy that integrates participatory journalism, gamification, and engagement to create shared value between the media and its creator community.

We argue that in the modern media ecosystem, participatory journalism is not simply an optional communication trend, but a key need for digital news portals to preserve relevance and emotional proximity to audiences (Cennamo, 2021; Skarzauskiene & Mačiulienė, 2021). This shift accentuates the importance of public involvement in the process of producing news in a sustainable manner (Zare & Persaud, 2024)

Technological development and the rapid use of the internet have created a highly competitive transformation in Indonesia's media business (Zare & Persaud, 2024). Media convergence triggers fierce competition for audience attention, shifting power between traditional mass media managers and digital channels (Cennamo, 2021; Eisdorfer, 2023). Easy access to various forms of news, audio, and video content forces media companies to continue managing technological innovation alongside operational proficiency (Chen & Wang, 2024). We argue that this merging pressure makes a single (top-down) news production model by in-house editors inefficient. Therefore, collaboration with user communities is the most rational option for media companies to expand coverage amid limited editorial resources (Jiang, 2024; Carroni et al., 2024).

This competitive dynamic is accompanied by a drastic change in the behavior of Gen Z and Millennial audiences who demand interactive, personal, and real-time content (Vukanovic, 2018; Eisdorfer, 2023). To remain competitive, online media companies have to adapt sustainably through innovative business models (Rozanova, 2021; Chen & Wang, 2024). Online communities provide a place for individuals to interact and collaborate in producing varied digital content. However, online communities' life cycles show highly dynamic fluctuations in participation, and user contributions are often inconsistent because of limited time, skills, and changing motivation (Skarzauskiene & Mačiulienė, 2021; Fu et al., 2024). The authors emphasize that without structured

governance, community participation will be sporadic and volatile, so the standard and durability of User-Generated Content (UGC) cannot be relied on in the long term (Chen et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2024).

Amid pressures for budget efficiency and demands for high content volume (Jiang, 2024), online media platforms should investigate content delivery strategies that combine material and non-material incentives (Jain & Qian, 2021; Carroni et al., 2024). Engaging audiences in news planning has been shown to increase relevance and emotional attachment (Thomas & Baral, 2023). One news platform in Indonesia that consistently implements this model is Indozone.com through the Z Creators channel. With more than 27 thousand members across 31 countries, Z Creators enables Gen Z and Millennials to produce lifestyle, culinary, and local news. However, managing this large-scale community faces real challenges in preserving consistent quality and member motivation.

Although previous studies have discussed public participation and gamification in general on social media (Persada, 2023; Santos et al., 2024; Kačerauskas et al., 2023), there is still very limited research that empirically explores how digital journalism portals integrate gamification (points, challenges, leaderboards) with structured skills training programs and college academic collaborations to maintain UGC continuity.

Given the gap between the potential of participatory journalism and the challenge of fluctuating community participation, this study analyzes Indozone.com's management strategies for the Z Creators community in depth through an integrated approach (gamification, structured training, and social-material incentives). This research is vital to provide a theoretical and functional framework for digital media management in formulating adaptive, scalable, and sustainable community governance.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to investigate digital community management on the news portal Indozone.com in depth, comprehensively, and in real-life contexts. This research is guided by constructivism. From a constructivist perspective, social reality regarding user participation and the sustainability of User-Generated Content (UGC) is not a static, value-free objective fact, but a social construction that continues to develop through subjective interactions between media portal managers and Z Creators community members. Through this paradigm, researchers seek to understand how media actors construct, interpret, and apply the meaning, incentives, and mechanics of gamification to sustain public participation.

The selection of research subjects was carried out in a non-transformative manner using purposive sampling techniques. The main criteria for selecting informants were managerial authority, direct involvement in community operations, and an extensive understanding of Indozone.com's editorial policies and audience engagement strategies. Based on these criteria, two main key informants were identified. The first informant is the Editor-in-Chief of Indozone.com, Fahmy Fotaleno, who serves as an informant on editorial policy, editorial quality control, the vision of media convergence, and the assimilation of participatory journalism into the main editorial agenda. The second informant is the Head of Community Indozone.com, Yayan Supriyanto, who acts as an operational informant who designs, executes, and directly supervises the daily management of the Z Creators community, two-way communication tactics,

gamification mechanics, and the provision of social and material rewards.

This study collected data systematically using three main techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage. First, in-depth interviews were conducted in person and face-to-face as well as online using semi-structured interview guides. The semi-structured technique allows researchers to explore strategic decisions, perceptions, and media managers' evaluations in depth, while granting flexibility to ask appropriate follow-up questions during the interview process. The entire interview process is recorded, with interviewees' consent, and transcribed.

Second, the researchers conducted non-participant observations of the Indozone.com digital ecosystem during the research period. The focus of observation included user and manager interaction trends on Z Creators channel articles on the Indozone.com news portal, cooperative features and simplicity of navigation on the Z Creators mobile application, as well as the application of gamification mechanics on official social media and community communication channels, such as the use of monthly leaderboards, Contributor of the Month announcements, and the creation of thematic challenges. Third, the study conducted a documentation review by collecting, reading, and analyzing relevant archives and official documents to complement interview and observation data.

The study analyzed qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documentation using thematic analysis techniques based on dynamic models (Miles, 2014). The data analysis stages are carried out through three interconnected activity streams, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure the credibility, certainty, and validity of qualitative data (trustworthiness), this study applies two triangulation techniques. The study triangulates data sources by comparing and verifying the consistency of information from the Indozone Editor, Fahmy Fotaleno, on editorial policy with information from the Head of Community, Yayan Supriyanto, on field operations. Meanwhile, triangulation confirms the accuracy of data from in-depth interviews against physical evidence from UGC posts on the Indozone portal and the Z Creators mobile application feature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning Stage (Capacity Building of Creators in Participatory Journalism)

The results show that the planning stage in managing Z Creators Indozone does not involve only determining the content agenda by editors, but also designing a participation architecture that allows the audience to be involved in the content production process. In this context, media management designs a mechanism that connects editorial needs with creators' interests and abilities. As shown in Figure 2, the planning stage includes determining themes or challenges, communication modes with the community, debriefing creators' competencies, and preparing reward mechanisms to encourage sustainable participation.

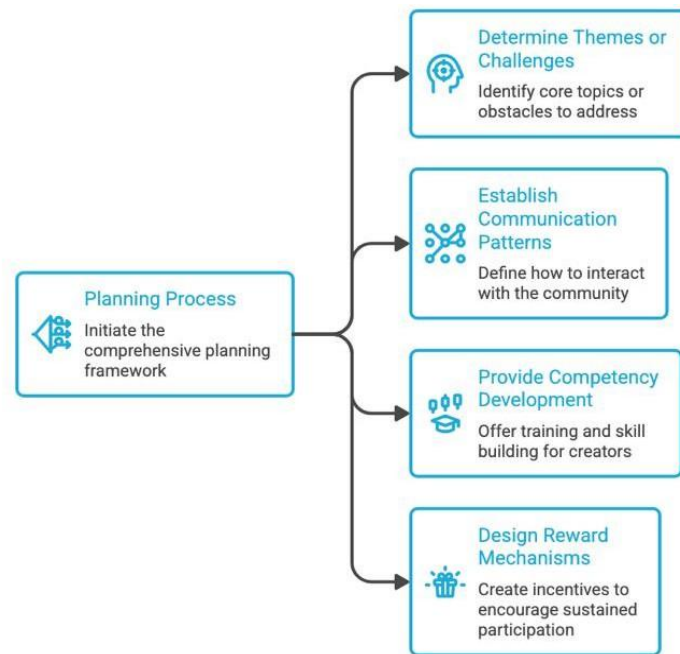


Figure 2. Planning Stage

One main finding is that challenge planning considers emerging community issues. Thus, user participation is not treated as a stand-alone activity, but is directed to produce content with journalistic relevance.

The editor-in-chief explained that participation planning must still consider editorial interests. "From the editorial point of view, public participation must be clear and specific. The biggest challenge is to plan so that residents' enthusiasm stays in line with the news value carried by Indozone. Therefore, we always plan the theme of community coverage or writing challenges to be relevant to factual issues," said the Editor-in-Chief of Indozone.

The statement shows that difficulties function as a participation management instrument. The editorial board does not directly determine all content produced by contributors, but sets the framework for the issue that becomes the space for participation. This model balances creators' freedom to produce content with the media's editorial control. The results show the characteristics of participatory journalism, namely public involvement in the information production process, but a media organization mechanism still directs and manages contributions; this is consistent with the idea that participatory journalism does not eliminate the function of media gatekeeping. Contributors are given space to produce user-generated content, while media organizations continue to carry out the selection and management functions through professional gatekeepers (Reader, 2021). The audience also participates, but the media organization retains authority over the selection, framing, and interpretation of user contributions (Prinzler & Stollfuß, 2026).

In addition to designing a participation theme, management also designs mechanisms to maintain creator engagement. Gamification is one approach to encourage continued contributions. Planning can take the form of awarding points, challenges, and rewards associated with creator activities. Points with relatively small value can be awarded for routine activities, while contributions that require producing

original content can be rewarded. Thus, gamification systems are intended not only to increase user engagement frequency but also to differentiate levels of user contribution (Raharjo et al., 2021). In the context of Z Creators, the incentive structure is combined with creator capacity building. Creators are not only encouraged to produce as much content as possible, but also given briefings on journalism and digital content production. Indozone's Head of Community, Yayan Supriyanto, explained that students, as the majority of Z Creator members, obtain practical knowledge of becoming content creators with a style relevant to young audiences. Z Creators, the largest creator community, offers Generation Z opportunities through Z Creators Class, a regular online and offline training program covering journalism, content writing, and creative production. The briefing shows that participation planning goes beyond incentives and encompasses investing in user capabilities. Basic journalism, writing, digital production, and media ethics training are part of efforts to improve the quality of user-generated content (UGC) that enters the media ecosystem (Yee, 2024). This matters because, in participatory journalism, more contributors do not automatically mean higher-quality information. Therefore, media management needs to build a participatory architecture that combines motivation, competence, and editorial mechanisms. This is in accordance with the explanation that social media technologically allows participatory interaction; management policies are still determined by professional logics, corporate priorities, and control (Fincham & Fincham, 2023)

The next findings show that communication between community managers and creators is planned as two-way communication. Creators are not only recipients of instructions or program targets, but also parties who provide responses, input, and experiences to media managers. Head of Community Indozone: "At Indozone.com, we believe that the engagement of community members is built from the content we create and the interactions we build with them. Two-way communication is one of the key principles we plan from the beginning in managing the community. This statement shows that engagement in managing Z Creators is not gauged solely by the amount of content produced. The interaction between media and creators is part of the community management process. From a media management perspective, this communication pattern allows organizations to gather feedback on creators' needs, interests, and experiences, which they can then use to develop participation programs (Riemann, 2024).

Implementation Stage (Content Creation)

Z Creators manages content creation via two main mechanisms: gamification-based production incentives and strengthened creator capacity through training and mentoring. Together, these mechanisms encourage creator productivity while maintaining content quality.

Regarding production incentives, Z Creators implements a gamification system with points and badges to recognize members' contributions; earning points is tied not only to producing articles, but also to the level of response or audience engagement with the content. Content that receives more attention, such as comments and shares, gives creators opportunities to earn more points. This is as conveyed by the Head of Community Indozone: "The contributions that we appreciate are very diverse. For example, members who write articles that receive a lot of attention or interaction from readers (comments/shares) will get more points. It motivates them to keep producing content."

The interview results show that the points system serves as a reward mechanism for audience activity and engagement with creators' content. Thus, gamification not only functions as an additional community feature but also becomes part of the user contribution management mechanism. The level of reader interaction is one indicator used to assess creators.

In addition to gamification incentives, the study found a preventive quality-control mechanism through capacity development programs. Creators receive journalistic training and mentoring on an ongoing basis to improve their ability to produce content. The training is part of an effort to equip creators with an understanding of information accuracy, journalistic techniques, and ethics in content production.

The Editor-in-Chief of Indozone explained that Gamification has succeeded in sparking citizens' interest in writing, but the editorial team cannot compromise on accuracy. A journalistic training and mentoring program is vital to reduce the risk of misinformation and ethical violations before a manuscript reaches the editor's desk.

The statement shows that increasing the number and motivation of contributors through gamification is followed by a quality-strengthening mechanism. Training and mentoring serve as preventive measures, implemented before the content enters the editorial stage. Through this mechanism, creators are guided to understand basic journalistic standards, minimizing the chance of misinformation and ethical violations during production.

The Z Creators Goes to Campus program, organized by Indozone, is a collaborative strategy with various universities in Indonesia to equip students with journalistic skills and innovative content production. This program has been implemented through various forms of cooperation, including with Nusa Cendana University (Undana), Diponegoro University (Undip), Telkom University, and Prof. Dr. Moestopo University (Religion). These joint efforts show that Z Creators Goes to Campus is not only oriented toward expanding the creator community, but also toward developing student competencies as part of the participatory journalism ecosystem and digital content production.



Figure 3. Telkom University collaborates with Indozone in the Z Creators Goes to Campus activity



Figure 4. Training with Telkom University Students

Figures 3 and 4 show that Z Creators community management does not rely only on individual contributions; it also creates a collaboration mechanism by supplying features that allow members to participate in the content production process together. Indozone.com developed several collaborative channels, such as discussion forums, community-specific groups, and tools for co-creating articles. These features give members a space to exchange ideas, discuss topics, and develop content collaboratively. Thus, technology functions not only as a means of content production and distribution, but also as infrastructure that connects community members in creating media value.

The findings also show that collaboration strengthens a sense of belonging to the community. When members are involved in the production process, they not only engage with the content but also feel part of the process and its success. This condition reinforces the social dimension of participatory journalism because audience engagement does not stop at consumption or interaction with news; it develops into participation in the production process. Therefore, joint functionalities can be understood as part of a media management strategy to create a participatory environment that allows more interactive relationships among media, creators, and community members.

Technology also simplifies content production. In addition to providing production devices with appropriate specifications, devices like mobile phones make content creation more accessible. This approach allows members with different skill levels and access to different technology resources to participate. Apps, content upload features, image and video editing tools, and easy-to-use content templates reduce technical barriers to UGC production. Thus, technology enables broader access to content production and promotes diverse community participation.



Figure 5. Online Community Content Theme

Figure 5 shows that technology development and joint features are key parts of community infrastructure. The ease of creating and uploading content makes the production process more flexible, while the interaction feature provides a space for members to exchange information and ideas. This shows that managing digital communities is not only about the amount of content produced, but also about how technology is designed to facilitate relationships and interactions between users.

Beyond the technological aspect, research shows that community member engagement increases through social interaction and rewards. Members who feel their contributions are appreciated and acknowledged tend to be more motivated to stay involved in the community. One example is the Contributor of the Month feature. This recognition gives visibility to members' contributions and creates an experience where their work gets attention from media and community managers.

The findings show that social rewards are not always material. Public recognition, status, visibility, and appreciation can strengthen motivation to participate (Banerjee et al., 2023).

In digital communities, these rewards can build a creator's reputation and increase a sense of belonging. Thus, Z Creators' engagement strategy combines intrinsic motivation through appreciation with extrinsic motivation through the reward system given to members.

This strategy is further strengthened through gamification. Indozone uses elements such as leaderboards, achievements, challenges, and awards to encourage members to keep contributing. This system turns content production into a series of activities with specific targets, achievements, and forms of recognition. Members who participate in challenges or competitions can earn certain awards or status, creating an incentive to maintain production activities.

Extrinsic rewards have been shown to accelerate the transition of ordinary audiences into content creators (prosumers). However, studies (Ferrer, Conill, 2017) remind us of the dangers of biased spamming in journalism gamification, where users assemble superficial content to chase points. Indozone's strategy of requiring digital literacy and technical training has proven to be a crucial managerial step to mitigate the risk of degradation of the quality of the content; it is in accordance with training not just an additional activity, but can be a mechanism to improve the competence of content production and verification (Yee & Huey Shyh, 2024).

Distribution Stage (Editorial Curation)

The content distribution stage in Z Creators' management is not carried out automatically after the creator completes content production. The editorial team first curates and verifies the creator's content before distributing it to the public. At this stage, content management combines two mechanisms: social validation (social rewarding) to recognize the creator's contribution and editorial gatekeeping to ensure the content meets journalistic standards.

Regarding social validation, the interview showed that rewards for creators are not only material but also recognition of their achievements in the media ecosystem. These forms of recognition include being named Contributor of the Month, promoting creator profiles, and giving high-performing articles greater exposure on the main page.

The Head of Community Indozone explained that, in addition to material awards, public recognition plays an important role, such as being featured as the best contributor of the month (Contributor of the Month) or having their articles become the most read on the media's main page.



Figure 6 Gamification of leaderboards and community member achievements

Figure 6. shows how gamification mechanisms are used to provide visibility into members' achievements. From a media management perspective, leaderboards and achievements function not only as game elements, but also as participation management instruments. Media can direct members' attention to activities that are considered valuable to the community ecosystem, while members receive feedback on their achievements and position in the community.

However, these findings also suggest that gamification should serve as a supporting instrument, not the only measure of participation success. An increase in contributions, interactions, or leaderboard position has not automatically indicated improved journalistic quality. Therefore, the reward system needs to go hand in hand with competency debriefing, curation, and editorial control to keep increased participation in line with media standards.

The findings show that content distribution is also part of the social reward mechanism for creators. Content that receives close audience attention can give creators greater visibility. Thus, distribution not only serves as a channel for delivering content to the public, but also as an instrument to build the reputation and recognition of creators within the community (Liang et al., 2025)

However, strong audience response does not automatically make content worthy of distribution. The interview results with the Editor-in-Chief show that the editorial team makes the final decision on publication feasibility. The Editor-in-Chief said:

"The gatekeeping function remains entirely in the hands of the editor. Even if an article from the creator is very popular or has high potential for virality, if it fails our fact-checking, the manuscript will not be distributed. The final filter remains the standard of professional journalism."

The statement shows that popularity and potential virality are not a substitute for journalistic standards. Fixed content must undergo fact-checking before publication (Khan et al., 2023). Thus, audience engagement indicators and editorial feasibility indicators are clearly distinct. High engagement can provide added value in terms of exposure and creator recognition, but it does not absolutely determine editorial decisions to distribute content (De Koning et al., 2025)

The study also shows two layers of mechanisms in the distribution process. The first layer is an audience-based mechanism, namely attention, reading, commentary, and popularity of content that can generate social rewards for creators. The second layer is an editorial mechanism, namely verification and curation by editors based on journalistic standards. These two mechanisms work together, so high-performing content must still meet quality requirements before gaining wider distribution.

Thus, the distribution stage in Z Creator management shows that user participation is not left entirely to the popularity mechanism. The media provides space for audience responses to shape the reward mechanism, but it still maintains editorial authority over what content can enter the public space. (Zhang et al., 2025) Note that providing social recognition in the form of visibility (such as the Author's highlight) significantly strengthens creator loyalty far beyond financial compensation alone. However, this distribution requires editorial "gatekeepers" to prevent hoaxes from spreading behind community accounts.

Stage 4 Analysis (Metrics Monitoring and Editorial Evaluation)

The results show that the analysis stage in managing Z Creators involves monitoring audience response and the quality of the content produced and distributed. The evaluation focuses not only on the number of interactions the content generates, but also on community engagement, participant loyalty, and the content's impact on media credibility. Thus, the analysis serves as a tool to evaluate the participation strategy's effectiveness and as a basis for community management and future content.

Forgement monitoring: The community team routinely monitors interactions across various communication channels. These interactions include audience activities on social media and direct communication through direct messages (DM) and email. The team then uses interaction data to gauge audience engagement and community members' loyalty. Indozone's Head of Community explained:

"We try to stay active. Every day, the team monitors and responds to every interaction on our social media and DM/Email, and then we evaluate the data to see how high the engagement rate and loyalty of the participants are."

These findings show that community management happens through continuous monitoring, not just during certain campaigns or programs. Audience interaction provides data used to understand the level of community member engagement. In this way, managers can learn how the community responds to content and activities and use this information for evaluation. In addition, community engagement data can also be

used by managers to find out member responses and conduct evaluations (De Koning et al., 2025)

In addition to audience engagement metrics, the results show that editorial departments use editorial quality indicators in evaluating the performance of user-generated content. One indicator is the rejection rate, which provides an overview of a manuscript's suitability for editorial standards. This evaluation complements quantitative metrics from audience responses because content success is not measured only by clicks or interactions.

The Editor-in-Chief of Indozone explained:

"For the editor, the final evaluation metric is not just 'how many clicks this citizen content gets'. We evaluate whether the UGC that airs has succeeded in increasing public trust in Indozone, or even damaging it. Institutional credibility is our main metric."

This statement shows that editorial evaluation goes beyond traffic performance. Public trust and institutional credibility are also considered when assessing the success of published UGC. This means that a high number of clicks or interactions does not automatically indicate the success of the content if the content has the potential to reduce trust in the media (Raza et al., 2022)

Based on the interview results, two evaluation orientations emerge in the analysis stage. First, audience engagement orientation, which looks at how the audience responds to content and interacts with the community. Second, editorial quality orientation, which assesses the suitability of content against journalistic standards and its contribution to media credibility. Both orientations are used simultaneously to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of UGC management. This is in accordance with social media encouraging media organizations to pay attention to audience demands and develop audience engagement strategies, but at the same time media organizations still face problems regarding journalistic norms, values, and quality (Degen et al., 2024)



Figure 7. Stages of Evaluation and Analysis

Figure 7 shows two complementary evaluation orientations in managing User-Generated Content (UGC): audience engagement and editorial quality. Audience engagement focuses on audience response, interaction, and community participation, while editorial quality emphasizes the suitability of content with journalistic standards and its contribution to media credibility. Integrating these two orientations shows that UGC effectiveness is measured not only by the level of audience interaction, but also by the quality and credibility of the content produced.

This finding aligns with the Engagement Pyramid perspective in digital journalism, which views audience engagement as an evolving process ranging from consuming, sharing, and commenting to participating in content production. Thus, engagement is

not merely understood as the accumulation of likes, comments, or view counts, but as a form of involvement that can strengthen the ongoing relationship between the media and the audience and encourage the audience (Agung et al., 2019).

In the context of UGC, such audience engagement still requires editorial mechanisms. The more space users are given to produce and distribute content, the more important the processes of verification, curation, and editing become to ensure that published content meets journalistic standards. Therefore, audience engagement and editorial quality are not viewed as two conflicting goals, but rather as two dimensions that must be managed simultaneously. Engagement serves to encourage participation and foster ongoing relationships with the community, while editorial quality safeguards the credibility and journalistic value of user-generated content.

In the context of Z Creators Indozone, the integration of these two approaches demonstrates that the success of a UGC management strategy is not solely determined by a media platform's ability to increase the volume and intensity of creator participation. Mass Media also need to ensure that such participation results in content that has journalistic value and still undergoes editorial verification and curation. Thus, a UGC management strategy can be understood as an effort to balance audience participation, engagement, content production, and editorial quality control within a single digital media ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

The results show that Z Creators' management on Indozone applies media management to participatory journalism, especially by increasing user involvement in content production. Participatory journalism gives the audience space to contribute to content production, while media management provides structure, mechanisms, and control so participation remains directed and still supports the media's goals. The study's findings show that the process takes place through four interrelated stages: planning, content creation, distribution, and analysis.

First, the planning stage shows that media management helps build a participatory architecture. Z Creators not only provides a space for the community to produce content, but also develops the community through partnerships with universities, two-way communication, and Theme Challenges. From a participatory journalism perspective, this mechanism allows the audience to be involved in the information production process. Meanwhile, from a media management perspective, planning is needed to ensure participation has direction and remains relevant to content needs and the media's journalistic agenda.

Second, the content creation stage shows the integration between motivational strategies and capacity building. Gamification systems, such as points and badges, provide incentives and encourage creators to keep producing content. At the same time, journalistic training and mentoring improve creators' competence in production, accuracy, and media ethics. In participatory journalism, this mechanism strengthens the audience's position as content producers. Meanwhile, in media management, capacity building helps manage the quality of participant resources.

Third, the distribution stage combines social rewards and editorial gatekeeping. Creators can gain recognition through Contributor of the Month, increased visibility, and content exposure. However, popularity and potential virality are not the only basis for distribution. Editors still have the authority to curate and verify facts. These findings highlight a key feature of participatory journalism: public involvement in content

production that still interacts with the media's professional structure. From a media management perspective, gatekeeping functions as a quality-control mechanism and protects journalistic standards.

Fourth, the analysis stage shows that media management uses audience engagement data and editorial evaluation to assess the effectiveness of UGC management. Engagement rate, community interaction, and participant loyalty help explain audience response, while rejection rate indicates content quality. The evaluation also considers the trust and credibility of media institutions. Thus, participatory journalism not only creates space for audience contribution but also generates data that media management can use to evaluate and improve community and content management strategies.

Conceptually, the research findings suggest that media management and participatory journalism have a complementary relationship. Participatory journalism provides a mechanism for public engagement in content production, while media management organizes that engagement through planning, capacity building, incentivizing, curation, distribution, and evaluation. Therefore, user engagement is shaped not only by the opportunity to contribute, but also by how the media designs and manages its participation ecosystem.

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