



## **NEW MEDIA & CITIZEN JOURNALISM: GROWTH AND PROSPECTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*New Media has become an integral part of communication these days. Its benefits are not only restricted to personal but has proven a lot of times advantageous for the society too. Common people these days are using new media not only to showcase their problems but are also using it to enlighten the larger part of the society at the same time. With growth in new media, another thing that has technologically grown is citizen journalism. Citizen journalism, in simpler words implies common public's role in collection and dissemination of news for the interest of the society. Although an old concept, it has gained more popularity in the recent years due to evolvement of new media. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the challenges and growth of citizen journalism with the usage of new media.*

### **Key Words**

Citizen Journalism, New Media , growth, prospects.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is an essential part of our daily lives. With advent of new forms of technology, several new mediums of communication have come up which has allowed even a

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common man to spread information to millions of people in one go. New Media is increasing and there is no doubt that it is believed that it has a greater role in our lives like that of traditional media. In books and other sources of information New media refers to “those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing,” (<http://online.seu.edu>) Robert Logan in his book has stated that New media is “very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyperlinked and, perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed.” It is believed that new media technologies like social media are very useful to the society in times of crisis. The widespread adoption of new media technologies, and particularly social media, during times of crisis has been met with extensive enthusiasm, particularly with regards to the value and capabilities that applications such as social media are able to contribute to crisis management (Starbird and Palen,2010; Taylor et al.2012; etc, Watson et al. 2014; etc). Such applications can help enhance information gathering and problem solving capabilities (Vieweg et al., 2010, Watson et al. 2014; etc), enable users to seek reliable information( e.g. Novak and Vidoloff, 2011; Watson et al. 2014; etc) and help promote community resilience (Taylor et al.2012; etc, Watson et al. 2014; etc).

On the other hand , Citizen journalism is defined "as an alternative and activist form of newsgathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions.It often acts as a response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism (Courtney C. Radsch,; [2016](#)). It has been observed that nowadays media organizations are quite open to the idea of accepting information regarding public interest and concern from common masses as it saves both time and money. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis have described it as “[t]he act of a citizen, or a group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (S. Bowman, C Willis, *We Media*; 2003).

This paper is a literature based research that includes conference papers, peer reviewed journal articles, books , news articles and other relevant reports.

## **GROWTH OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM ALONG WITH NEW MEDIA**

Journalism as a field has evolved over years and so has the writing abilities of the common masses. The Metonymic adage, coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton "*The pen is mightier than the sword*" in 1839, is one of the prominent reasons why millions of non professional journalists bring out their experiences online with the help of new media forms like blogs, social networking sites, youtube videos etc.

With the help of their writing, citizen journalists try to cover those areas, which are not brought by mainstream media. It is not that mainstream media is not aware of this and tries to encourage citizen journalists as it reduces their workload. Big media conglomerate like CNN which operates in India as CNN IBN operates an official website called **CITIZEN JOURNALIST** where a lot of people post stories of great relevance to the nation. Citizen stories like **Saving Delhi's lake** by a campaigner, Juhi Choudhary have shown huge public response as it was followed by a protest to save the dying Naini lake in the midst of the city. At the international level, witnesses reporting 9/11 is one of the biggest examples of citizen journalism. Several such videos can be found on digital forum like youtube even today. A lot of people believe that citizen journalism is a more justified and truthful forms of journalism as people reporting such events do not work for an organization but for the society. On the other hand, professional journalists are of different viewpoint regarding the same. They hold the opinion that citizen journalism has nothing in common with journalism. British broadcasting Corporation's political presenter Andrew Marr, said in 2010, " Most citizen journalism strike me as nothing to do with journalism at all. " (Nadine Jurrat, Open Society Media program,; 2011).

With most of the media houses going online, the need for news stories have increased by ten fold. Citizen journalist stories can be found on all types of web-based applications starting from Wikipedia to personal blogs to news based applications. Most of these web-based applications are open sources and allows anyone to write, remove, add or edit content. This allows the audience to raise their voice to reach the necessary people in power and also other people concerned with the same matter. People located in geographically different areas can contribute to the same news piece sitting at their location itself. Since, most such websites are open source, not much technology is required to become a good citizen journalist these days.

Internet connection, computer or a mobile phone with proper Internet access is all you need to become a good citizen journalist. Since the revolution of mobile phones, there has been a rapid growth of smart phones. These Smart phones are mostly 3G/4G enabled and henceforth provide a speedy Internet connection. Not only this, Telecom industry due to fierce competition is providing internet services at a much lower rate these days, henceforth enabling more people to buy internet services. The recent revolution of Reliance Jio, is one of the latest example of this. Software to set up a blog is freely available on wordpress.org or blogger.com and pictures and videos can be uploaded on websites such as You tube or Flickr within minutes(Nadine Jurrat, Open Society Media program,; 2011). Social networking sites likes Twitter and Facebook as well as apps like Whatsapp are a phenomenon unto themselves but share many of the attributes of citizen journalism (C.H. Bentley,; 2008). New media has allowed people to build a virtual community where people interact without knowing each other ever. Wired magazine contributing editor coined the term “crowdsourcing” describe the new journalistic practice of going to the public for content (C.H. Bentley,; 2008).

### **CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND ETHICS**

With respect to the ethical problems associated with the dissemination of misinformation, it should be noted that most citizen journalists, who are typically not trained in reporting, are unaware of ethical codes within journalism, such as the need for fact checking and source confirmation (Riaz and Pasha, 2011). A lot of times, simply due to the fact that a lot of citizen journalists are unprofessional and untrained, their contributions do not imply with media ethics,laws and regulations. Moreover, it has been seen that write-ups of citizen journalists are more intimate and personal in nature. In fact, a lot of citizen journalists see themselves as activists and therefore do not believe that they should adhere to media ethics.(Nadine Jurrat, Open Society Media program,; 2011). However, if their work is published in the media, it can have damaging effects, especially on the websites where editorial gatekeeping is left completely to the audience (Nadine Jurrat, Open Society Media program,; 2011). One of the most relevant examples to this is the post that talked about Apple CEO Steve Jobs having a heart attack and later resulted into stock prices sinking to a 17 month low in minutes of the posting. Many people believe anonymity is one of the reasons why such incidents take place in citizen journalism. The audience, needs to be extremely careful while assessing content from citizen journalists. One should always check the facts

that are given with news sources be it online or offline. Legal actions in the past have been seen for citizen journalists as they are not immune to them.

## **THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM**

With the help of new media and its forms, especially social media, many citizen journalism websites and blogs have become more professional and transparent. Companies are hiring special editors to ensure credibility and precision. A lot of editorial guidelines are also being framed so that media ethics is maintained. As a result, revenue generation in coming times will increase a lot due to advertising and promotions. Space sold on genuine websites and blogs to advertisers will promote more genuine news articles going online. At present, citizen journalism can be seen more on niche or local topics, which with time and technology will go global soon. Citizen journalism, which is more dependent on voluntary contributions, will soon see more people as new media revolution allows more people to freelance along with their regular jobs. All this will happen, only if citizen journalist websites have an access to the scale of mass media but under guidance. Credibility and trustworthiness can only be achieved if the determination to provide right information to the audience is there. Furthermore, more business models need to be developed to provide financial assistance to journalists so that a proper research can be done to investigate a story. Finally, a new era of citizen journalism should be started to provide truthful and correct information to audience within minutes of the incident but under the code of media ethics and regulations.

## **DISCUSSION**

At present, the growth of citizen journalism and new media go hand in hand. The chances are quite high that with times to come citizen journalism will not only see a newer and better form of communication but will also see a faster and reliable form to convey information to the masses. Starbird and Parlin, in their paper, indicated that citizen journalism could prove wonders in times of crises. Although a lot of discussion regarding the same can be read in papers and books, still the authenticity of how truthful and correct information is provided during the time of crisis is yet to be verified. Incidents like 9/11 have shown the importance of citizen journalism where eyewitnesses have provided pictures from the spot, which no media houses could have captured. At the same time, they are also believed to be intruding one's privacy as a lot of people mind capturing such images that are of personal nature.

Another area of discussion is the relevance of stories done by citizen journalists. Andrew Marr, in 2010, stated that most citizen journalism strike to him as nothing to do with journalism at all. This is not his viewpoint alone. Research indicates that more than half of citizen journalism stories are covered on the basis of the popularity of the issue and not the need of it. More than half of the Internet is full of stories related to feminine issues, which are popular in nature. Now the relevance of such issues is up to the audience is to decide. At any point, covering all such stories, of different spheres of life is not possible by any media house.

The final point of discussion here is the ethical concerns associated with citizen journalism. As indicated Riaz and Pasha, since the common man is not trained in this field, henceforth does follow the protocol of media ethics and regulation. While this statement is true to some extent, there have been several incidents where known professionally trained journalists have gone against the ethics to cover sting operations for the need of the hour. Although one cannot justify such actions, there is no doubt that be it citizen journalists or the professional one, both should try and respect the privacy of individuals and should not encroach upon anyone's human rights.

At present, Responsible journalism is something that is required globally and to cover such huge geographical parameters, new media if used appropriately, can serve as a boon for both the society and humankind.

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