



## Impact and characteristics of the citizen-journalist on international relations and citizenship rights

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### Abstract

There have been immense advances in most aspects of science, especially in the field of possible to divide the media into old and new. That new media which is known citizen journalism has significant effects in politics and international relations. Citizen journalism has developed through the internet and its importance role have been revealed by the technologies such as smart phones, digital cameras and social media. The importance of citizen journalism has grown dramatically among nations. Notably, this sort of journalism may persuade nation's politics in specific actions which can be seen recently in Arab countries revolutions. Firstly, we will consider the concept of citizen journalism, with the aim of evaluating the meaning and background of this sort of media. Secondly, the effects of technology (citizen journalism) in politics and nation's relations shall be illustrated in depth. The final strand of this essay will consider the positive and negative features of citizen journalism in the ground of international relations.

**Keywords:** International Relations; Citizen Journalism; Social Media; Politics; Journalism

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### Introduction

There have been immense advances in most aspects of science, especially in the field of technology. One effect of improved technology can be seen in the media. Currently the media is faced with a new phenomenon, namely citizen journalism, which can challenge the basic principles of the media. It is possible to divide the media into old and new. The former is, simply, professional, that is to say: trained journalists covering the news professionally and sharing news via newspapers and TV. However, a new sort of journalism, which became popular by the late 1990s, has been defined as: "alternately labelled, is the act of a citizen or group of citizens involved in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and other forms of information") Barnes,

2012). Citizen journalism has developed through the internet and technology and its importance and role have been revealed by the internet and such technologies as smart phones, digital cameras and social media. Undoubtedly, citizen journalism leads to many people being aware of major events in the world and can potentially guide government policy in specific actions (Anon, 2013). It should be noted that mobile phones, particularly smart phones, are becoming affordable to more and more people. Also, considering that the speed of the internet is increasing and its cost has decreased sharply in recent years, the importance of citizen journalism has grown dramatically (Sturgies, 2012). However, is this effect positive? Or is it possible to consider this phenomenon as a peril?

This sort of journalism, which is a new rival of traditional journalism, shall be studied in this essay.

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Firstly, we will consider the concept of citizen journalism, with the aim of evaluating the meaning and background of this sort of media and differences with old media. Secondly, the effects of citizen journalism in international relations shall be illustrated in depth. The final strand of this essay will consider the positive and negative features of citizen journalism.

### **Concept of Citizen Journalism**

Humanity currently is experiencing the information, connection and technology era. This epoch has changed the principles of the media in general term. This new phenomenon is called citizen journalism. We can start by considering the background of the term, although this concept is extremely new and there is no general definition (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). Citizen journalism, interactive journalism, user-generated media, participatory journalism and public journalism break the mediator between news and readers. In fact, citizen journalism wants to see people more as journalists than mere readers, viewers and listeners. The theory behind citizen journalism is that citizens without any professional training can use modern technology tools and limitless internet in playing the journalist's role. In fact, they can create their content and share it via social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. According to expert opinion, the concept of citizen journalism did not exist before the internet and grew in tandem with the growth of the internet. Many citizens in developed countries have high-speed internet at home and use modern technology such as smart phones and highlevel cameras to capture photos and videos. Then, they are able to create their own homepages and share with several people. With most of these pages, furthermore, posting comments is possible and so both favourable and opposing views can be seen in these sorts of media (Barnes, 2012). Simon Si, Regional Communications Head of Jobstreet Malaysia, believes that this sort of voice normally is louder than the traditional media voice (Toh, 2013). Furthermore, this participation in media - political, cultural and social - can be evaluated by citizens and it can enhance globalisation. There is no doubt that citizen journalism is a global phenomenon but it does not mean that several countries use citizen journalism. For instance, in nations such as Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica, people continue to use traditional media (Barnes, 2012). As a result, it is hard to argue that the era of traditional media is over.

Perhaps the war against terrorism and the Iraq War of 2003 mark the birth of citizen journalism. With regard to the latter, there appeared a series of blogs devoted to the Iraq War, which continued until the war ended. While many war blogs were written by

Western people, such as Americans, one of the most challenging issues was those blogs created by Iraqis. This voice, which is almost in complete contrast to Western voices, was the reflection of citizens covering the disasters of this war. These sorts of blogs challenged the principles of traditional media as they were characterised by citizens. Furthermore, it is hard to say that these were more local, in light of research from 2008, which showed that 77% of these blogs were English and just 13% of them were Arabic. Citizen journalism has, therefore, become more globalised (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). Showing the differences between old and new media can assist our understanding of the concept of citizen journalism more clearly.

### **Differences Between Old and New Media**

Creating a distinguishing line between traditional journalism and citizen journalism is perhaps not the easiest task. Quality, integrity, comprehensiveness, balance, good writing, appropriate redesign, depth and community building are among the features of the old media (Craig, 2011). Traditional journalism is professional, uses cable network channels, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable News Network (CNN), or broadcast newspapers and movies. This sort of media follows particular issues and covers photos, videos and news that are consistent with their policy. Hal Straus, Editor of *washingtonpost.com*, believes that traditional media provide particular, reliable information about significant public issues and the opinions about that topic (Craig, 2011). Furthermore, the old media's topic coverage is limited to accepted ideas. For example, it is hard to find any issue in favour of racism or child abuse. In contrast, studying online journalism or citizen journalism continues by developing technology and creating new communities, such as through social media (Craig, 2011).

Citizen journalism, arguably, is on the opposite side of the traditional media. As mentioned above, this non-professional sort of journalism did not exist before the internet. With the improvement in technology has come this new sort of media. In general, citizen journalism provides this opportunity for citizens to share their photos, videos and all-important and interesting events (Barnes, 2012). They use internet sites such as YouTube and create blogs or social networks, including, for example, Facebook and Twitter to share photos and videos. Simon Si believes that "social networks have given the public a voice which can even be louder the corporate voice" (Toh, 2013). In addition, it is possible for citizens to express their opinion on specific news through social networking sites. This means that social media creates the conversational bridge between

the reporter and reader (Sturgies, 2012). Speed is another considerable difference between old media and citizen journalism. There is no doubt that journalists are not able to be everywhere and cover all the issues and, even by covering the events and news, the speed with which it is published is less than that of citizen journalism. However, the cameras and especially smart phones lead to many citizens covering an issue and uploading them to the internet immediately. As a result, citizen journalism is almost everywhere and delivered with great speed (Kelleher, 2012). Moreover, it is possible to argue that this new alternative source can improve the democratic system because this voice captures the diversity of public opinion. In addition, this voice can provide a voice to extremist groups, such as those involved in racism, violence and Neo-Nazism, the sort of groups that normally would not be permitted to broadcast via the mainstream media. We can see, therefore, how citizens without any professional training are now able to participate in world media as journalists.

### **The Effects of Citizen Journalism in Politic and International Relations**

At first glance, we may argue that the phenomenon of citizen journalism can provide invaluable news and count it as positive force for society. For example, one video that was shared on YouTube on 1 June 2013, known as "hard-working hawker", showed police brutality. Three policemen were arresting a victim but doing so in an extremely cruel manner. However, this claim was rejected after mainstream media videos illustrated a completely different perspective (Anon, 2013). Although it is possible to argue that citizen journalism is perilous, such examples are rare and, indeed, the positive effects are of greater significance.

During recent years the Middle East and North Africa have been the center of citizen protest, some of which have resulted in revolution. Mohamed Bouazizi's suicide in Tunisia, which was captured on video and shared by citizens on the internet, was seen by millions and was sufficient reason for people to begin protesting. These revolutions spread to other nations such as Libya, Egypt and beyond (MacDonald, 2013). Citizen journalism's positive effects increased in the case of Egypt, as professional journalists were not able to write about the threat to the public peace because of Egyptian criminal law (Peterson, 2013). In fact, during the Mubarak regime, the media was in control and was favorable to the government. However, citizens, by using technologies such as smart phones and cameras, captured the scenes that provided a true reflection of Egypt in revolution. For instance, Wael Abbas, an Egyptian blogger, shared a video on YouTube about police acts of brutality - in this case a policeman torturing

a minibus driver - which was spread by social media. This led to the prosecution and subsequent imprisonment of the policeman. It is important to note that this was a great victory for citizen journalism, particularly for the Egyptian people (Khalili, 2013). Totally, citizen journalism, through use of technology such as social media, has uncovered corruption, supported protesters and played a positive role comparable with that of the mainstream media. It should be noted that, based on research and statistics, the most viewed topics on the internet, such as on YouTube, are foreign events (non-US) and government. From 19 January 2009 to 15 January 2010, foreign events and government had 26% and 20% of YouTube watchers respectively (Sturgies, 2012). These statistics show that politics is the most popular topic in citizen journalism.

As mentioned before the advantages of citizen journalism are considerable. One of these positive effects is alerting of special news that highlights potential emergencies. Perhaps the best example to this effect is the Haiti earthquake of 2010. Several major news reporters shared photos that had been captured by citizens following the earthquake. Many newspapers the following day also showed photos and alerted the world to this disaster (MacLoed, 2010). We see here how citizen journalism can alert and report on phenomena that professional journalism may not aware of, or simply cannot cover. Improving technology provides this opportunity to people to capture significant events and share them via social media, thus leading to increased awareness across the globe.

Another essential role of citizen journalism is in connection among leaders and citizens. It means political leaders use social media such as Twitter and Facebook to connect directly with their fans. It eliminates the connection bridge which had been took this responsibility by old sorts of Media. It is possible to argue that there it cannot be exaggerated because old media may overstate news for other reasons such as high rating and so on. For instance, president Rouhani twitted the significant phone conversation with president Obama in September 2013 (Mason, Charbonneau, 2013).

Normally, old media - or the professional media - follow a policy and cover the story with a specific angle. Citizen journalism, in contrast, covers a different angle and is perhaps truer to the story.

### **Other Side of Citizen Journalism**

There is no denying the effects of this sort of media in recent years. However, it is also arguable that this differing view of news (from the traditional media) can be perilous. Normally, one of the basic purposes of the old media is to provide a fair view, which means that the old media may take the need for a balanced view responsibility and thus cover both

favorable and opposing views. In contrast, it is hard to argue that citizen journalism is covered fairly and shows true facts. Indeed, citizens uploading their points of view may lead to misleading perspectives and propaganda. Moreover, the technology now available provides opportunity to edit or remove “noise” from video or photos. It is possible to remove scenes or make them more favorable by Photoshop, and so there is scope for creation of propaganda. For instance, during the Arab countries Revolution, in which several posters were shared, it is hard to say whether they all provided a fair and true story (Annabel, 2013). Users of citizen journalism are not professional and the readers of these news are also not professional. As a result of that, citizen journalism is potentially peril place. Essentially, on the one hand citizen journalism can be positive, and on the other hand, it can be negative.

### Conclusion

By taking all above-mentioned arguments into consideration, the following conclusion can be made: Media in general is highly important in nation’s relations and politic. Truly, it is a new sort of weapon which can persuade citizens in favor or against of special event. Citizen journalism is a new phenomenon, which is growing in tandem with the internet and modern technology. It differs from traditional media, in that it enables citizens to play a journalist role directly. Smart phones, cameras and social networking sites have led to an increase in citizen journalism. One may argue that the 2003 war in Iraq provided us with the first enormous impact that can come from citizen journalism.

In the old media, news and events are normally covered by professional journalists and shared in such media as broadcast newspapers, TV and movies. They follow a particular view and policy and generally show their favored view. On the other side, citizen journalism enables the everyday citizen to participate as an amateur journalist. Creating a bridge of conversation between the journalist and reader is the first difference between old and new media. Personal blogs and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook are the best place for sharing and being a journalist. Speed is another main difference and without any doubt citizen journalism is considerably faster than old media. We have noted that professional journalists cannot be everywhere but citizen journalism can capture almost all important phenomena. Modern technology tools, such as smart phones and high-speed internet, provide this opportunity for citizens to upload almost significant events, pictures or videos.

The main features of citizen journalism in international relations and politics can be summarized as follows: at first, the citizen

journalist was an amateur journalist and so illustrating a poster that is able to change the story and news is possible. It is possible to argue that this is one of the negative effects of citizen journalism. Secondly, citizen journalism can play a significant role in dictatorial regimes. The Arab countries Revolutions is the best example in this case. In Egypt, for instance, where considerable censorship existed, citizens played the role of professional journalist during the Arab nation’s revolution. Thirdly, traditional media cannot be everywhere in any time but citizen journalism, by using modern technology, is almost everywhere in any time. The importance of this issue becomes more apparent when we consider human catastrophes and disasters, such as the earthquakes in Taiwan and Haiti. Lastly, a negative effect of citizen journalism, which should not be forgotten, is news propaganda: citizens can change the angle of a story and show the facts as completely different to what they are.

In general, underestimating the importance of citizen journalism is not logical. The best option for citizen journalism is for it to be involved in old media as complimentary role.

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