

## **Development and Strengthening of Citizen Journalism in Internet-based Information Sharing**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Journalism has gone through some major radical changes in the past century. This has been reflected by the practise of citizenship based journalism. This literature review analyses the concept of citizen journalism. This also explores the ethical responsibilities which are tied into digital platform publishing. It observes what gaps exist in citizen journalism and what future concepts should be explored and expanded upon. This has been done through the use of scholarly articles which pertain to the issue and provide meaningful insight into the many different themes. These themes highlight the commonalities which the scholars have observed in their investigative endeavours. Where gaps in the literature were present, they were noted and highlighted to assist future scholars in their own research endeavours. The future direction for research in investigative journalism is explored. This presents the projection that the overall concept could take in the future, potentially replacing mainstream news sites with locally sourced journalism that is more involved and intimate. The conclusion presents the gist of the information which can be gleaned from what is presented in the paper. This creates both a summarisation of the information as well as create a synthesis of the arguments presented in the paper to increase organisation of information and increase comprehensibility.

### **Review Article**

#### **Introduction**

The contemporary mediums of retrieving and spreading information have evolved significantly in the last decade or so. One such medium of information dissemination is social media and online information portals. These platforms of information dissemination not only provide authentically and reviewed content generated by the editorial staff, but also allow non-editorial or contracted staff to contribute to the portal. Here, the non-editorial or contracted staff contribute to news and information voluntarily (Singh, 2011). Such a team is usually termed as "Citizen Journalists". In the contemporary media industry, the term citizen journalist refers to citizens who are not employed by the news agency but contribute with the help of videos and images to report an event. In this context, it could be argued that citizen journalists are those who report on different issues confronting them and the general society, to highlight the importance of resolving those issues (Manosevitch & Tenenboim, 2016). The citizen journalists are not trained professionals and are considered as an amateur resource of the news agency.

The above discussion regarding citizen journalism enables the reader to understand

that citizen journalism is practised in today's information-centred world. But there is a need for ethical codes to be implicated in controlling the flow of unwanted or unethical information being published on different information disseminating websites and social media platform.

The purpose of this review article is to evaluate how citizen journalism is developing and is gaining strength in modern times when internet-based information sharing is also expediting. Considering the purpose, the researcher has evaluated contextual literature and researches conducted in the past on citizen journalism and its ethics. After evaluation, the researcher has identified gaps existing in the available literature on citizen journalism, as to identify areas where there is a need for further research to be done. The theme is continued in proposing a future direction for research on citizen journalism and the need for ethical boundaries to be designed for controlling and screening of the content published online.

#### **Aims & Objectives**

After determining the purpose of the review article, the objectives derived are as follows."

- To understand the concept of citizen journalism.
- To understand the ethical obligations of the digital publishing platform while publishing a piece of work provided by a citizen journalist
- To identify gaps in research about citizen journalism
- To define the parameters on which future research on citizen journalism should be conducted

### Method

To achieve the aim and objectives outlined in the previous section, the researcher has utilised secondary research method. By utilising secondary research methods, the research has gained in-depth knowledge of what is done regarding clarifying the concept of citizen journalism and its ethics by the researchers in the past researches (McBurney & White, 2013). These already published researches are discussed in the literature section, which has helped the researcher to identify those areas of research on citizen journalism and its ethics, which are not yet discovered or assessed (Fowler, 2014). Considering the method of collecting information and the evaluation of the historical data, the researcher infers that the research is qualitative, where the quality of argument presented by the researchers from past has been evaluated rather than the results derived from the research (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

### Review

Even though citizen journalism has been defined by numerous scholars and researchers, a precise and authentic definition is still not found. This is because each definition of citizen journalists is varying according to the qualification of the author and the definition they are aiming to establish (Harcup, 2013). Therefore; an authentic and comprehensive definition of citizen journalist could be:

*"An amateur and unprofessional personal contributions to the news by collecting information first hand and sharing it with news agencies and among the social circle".*

In every profession, the evolutionary process of the industry helps in determining the code

of ethics (Park & Banyai, 2007). In the current context, professionalisation has paved the way for news agencies and social media platforms disseminating information to the general public to adopt a specific code of ethics (Moyo, 2015). These codes help in determining which information should be shared with the world, keeping in view the socio-political and cultural perspectives in mind (Singh, 2011). On the contrary, unprofessional journalism and the content generated by these amateur journalists has paved the way for media agencies and social media platforms to publish content which neglects the normative structure of news and information filtering and processing (Singer, 2011). Therefore, the prevailing trend is that social media and news websites are crowded with pieces of information and knowledge which do not have any legitimacy and resulting in failure of the social and cultural structures.

With the advancement in social media and internet technologies, the problem is becoming even more significant. News agencies have lost the power to govern and influence ordinary citizens (Kim & Lowrey, 2014). Moreover, the traditional news gathering and editing process of the news industry is also rapidly changing and becoming more dependant on what citizen perceive rather than forming a consensus among the audiences (Park & Banyai, 2007). Moreover, organisational policies are also violated to accommodate content generated by the participating unprofessional journalists.

Considering the problems arising from the strengthening of citizen journalism, there are multiple theories and knowledge resources. These theories and knowledge resources went on to explain how the mediums of information could result in scenarios, where the social and ethical codes are violated (Kelly, 2009). The most prominent and worthy theory is the "Gate Keeping Theory" prescribed by Lewin (1947). The gatekeeping theory explains the process of information dissemination as a system which filters the information generating and determines which piece of information should be exposed to the general audience. Therefore, gatekeeping prescribe requires individuals and channels of communication to possess systems which determines what information should be provided to the general public (Onyango, 2013; Manosevitch & Tenenboim, 2016). The

gatekeeping theory and its implications require the management of the communication and information dissemination system to continually filter the information they are airing, keeping in view the standards of the organisation or the society.

In the context of modern citizen journalists and the online platforms which publish content produced by unprofessional journalists, the implications of Gatekeeping Theory are majorly neglected (Friend & Singer, 2007). The reason behind this assertion is that most of the online news and information sharing portals does not filter the information being shared from their respective platforms or have a standardised code of ethics to be followed. At this point, the researcher thinks it is essential for the readers to understand what recent researches have to say about the ethical implications of citizen journalism (Moyo, 2015). The selected research works are discussed in the following section.

## **Literature**

### **Does Gate Keeping Principle is Obligated in Citizen Journalism?**

Onyango (2011) researched to understand the impact that citizen journalism has on the gatekeeping process of society. For this purpose, the researcher set out the research activity in Kenya and researched how citizen journalism has contributed or negatively influenced the code of ethics for information dissemination prescribed by the "Television Broadcasting Corporation of Kenya". The researcher carried out primary research with the help of surveys and assessed the findings and results with the help of descriptive statistics. The sampling method adopted by the researcher was stratified purposive sampling. The survey conducted with the respondents focused on different elements of gatekeeping theory to understand how citizen journalism is affecting news and information programmes.

The fragment of result derived from the descriptive analysis of the data gathered reflected that the news generated by citizens lack in authenticity, inadequate verification of the information, deteriorated quality of the visuals and images and lack of objectivity in the reporting (Onyango, 2013; Harcup, 2013). In the end, the researcher asserted that there is

a need for introducing a code of ethics and standardised procedures in the editorial policy of the online news publishers.

### **Social Media Users' Perspective and Citizen Journalists View**

In contrast to the findings of Onyango (2011), the research conducted by El Semary and Al Khaja (2013) reflected differently on the authenticity and compliance with ethical codes, of citizen journalism. The researchers adopted a quantitative approach and assessed how the citizen of United Arab Emirates rate Television and Citizen Journalism about the reliability and authenticity of the news presented on both mediums. The researchers selected a sample of 300 social media users with the help of simple random sampling. Moreover, to avoid biases and present the view of both sides, the researchers also selected 95 citizen journalists with the help of purposive sampling. For assessing the responses collected against a survey questionnaire, the researchers developed a 12 item credibility scale.

The analysis of the findings of the research work depicted that social media users consider news and content generated by Citizen journalists as more credible as compared to news and content presented on television. The results of the study showed that the citizen journalists are more experienced, aware of ethical considerations while reporting on events and their work was published by professional news editors which resulted in increasing the reliability of the content (El Semary & Al Khaja, 2013). Still, there was a significant number of respondents who thought that there is a need for quality and quantity control of news and information published by citizen journalists on online media.

### **Citizen Journalism in Hostile Environments and the Implications of Code of Journalistic Ethics**

Duarte and Rivera (2017) carried out a non-experimental quantitative study to understand how much the codes of journalistic ethics are useful and functioning in a hostile environment for journalism in Mexico. The researchers used a Likert Scale based survey questionnaire and conducted primary research activity with a sample of 30 journalists selected based on convenient random

sampling. The results gathered from the primary research activity were assessed with the help of descriptive statistical analysis. The questionnaire developed for the study assessed the usefulness and functionality of citizen journalism in Mexico based on the mechanism's ability to decide if the citizen journalist is delivering accurate content and the integrity of the information is not tempered.

The results gathered by the researcher depicted that the involvement of the government's Information Ministry and respective online news and information publishing house in developing a more concrete and useful code of journalistic ethics is necessary. The study also proposed that there is a need for regularising citizen journalism related academic principle in the university to assure that professional and social obligations are not violated or avoided in publishing content on social media and websites (Duarte & Rivera, 2017).

### Literature Gap

From the review of the available literature, the researcher has observed that there is a significant amount of research work already conducted on citizen journalism and its ethical implications (Ess, 2009; Ewart, 2013). Moreover, several types of research have focused on citizen journalism and how different cultural settings and social and political environment views and rate citizen journalism. But there is a lack of clarity about the role of government and media houses observed in the available literature. Governments and the media houses, having online publishing facility as well, have a massive responsibility on their shoulders to work together and develop a screening mechanism (Friend & Singer, 2007). Research into the component of the screening mechanism could prove to be beneficial for the governments, media houses and citizen journalists to alter their strategies and provide authentic and reliable content to the readers.

### Future Direction for Research

Considering the gap in the literature identified in the previous section, future research in the field of citizen journalism should focus on prescribing the role of each component in the screening mechanism and its development. To further break down, the research should focus

on the role government, online news and information publishers and the citizen journalists could play in developing a screening mechanism, which ensures that unauthentic and socially unethical news and information content is not published for the reading of general population.

### Conclusion

In this review article, the researcher reviewed several research works carried out in the past, about the citizen journalism and the ethical implications that must be abode by the citizen journalists and the online news publishing houses. From the analysis of the past literature, the researcher has identified that there is a need for governments, citizen journalists and online news and information publishing houses to develop a legal and screening framework with mutual consensus. This framework should ensure that the news and information provided by citizen journalists are authentic and reliable. Moreover, it should not violate the socio-political and cultural aspects of society. The article is concluded with prescribing an area of future research in the field of citizen journalism, which could help to fill the existing gap in knowledge regarding the role of different authorities in ensuring ethical citizen journalism.

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