Participatory Practices by Citizens `in Media`

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Abstract

Citizen journalism is rapidly emerging as an invaluable part of delivering the news. With the expansion of the Web and the ever-decreasing size and cost of camera phones and video cameras, the ability to commit acts of journalism is spreading to everyone.

Arianna Huffington

Journalism is the fourth pillar of Democracy. While Participatory Journalism is the support to the pillar. More citizens are participating in Journalism after the emergence of Multimedia mobile phones, Internet, Broadband, Social Media and Youtube. With use of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet, citizens without any background in journalism can write on issues for different platforms Citizen or participatory journalism strengths Democracy. In few cases the citizen journalist works as a whistle blower. The research article will emphasise on the need and importance of Participatory practices by the Citizens.

Key Words: Citizen Journalism, Democracy, Participatory Journalism, Multimedia,Media, MOJO

Introduction

Journalism is an integral part of any healthy democracy. It plays an important role in shaping our identities as citizens. It facilitates conversations and deliberations between and among citizens and their representatives. It thus helps in the strengthening of the public sphere and hence democracy. Citizen Journalism is an important initiative towards the democratization of the media which is emerging rapidly in the era of Mobile Journalism. Media is the medium or channel through which news, entertainment or promotional messages are disseminated. It consists of Television, Newspapers, Magazines, Radio and New Media.

Journalism and Its Types

Before discussing about Citizen Journalism let's try to find out on what journalism is. Journalism is the process of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information. There are various types of Journalism. Some of the major types are as mentioned below:

1. Advocacy Journalism: It deals with writing to advocate particular viewpoints or influence the opinions of the audience. It also describes the use of journalism techniques to promote a specific political or social cause.
2. Yellow Journalism: Yellow journalism is also known as sensationalism and it is writing which emphasizes exaggerated claims or rumors. It highlights little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses eye-catching headlines to sell more newspapers or to gain TRP.
3. Print Journalism: Print journalism can be split into three categories: Newspapers, Magazines and Books.
4. Broadcast Journalism: It is the field of news or entertainment which is broadcasted by electrical methods unlike traditional print media.
5. Tabloid Journalism: Tabloid is a newspaper of small format giving the news in condensed form, usually with illustrated often sensational material. It puts more stress on crime stories, astrology, gossip columns about the personal lives of celebrities and sports stars and junk food news etc.
6. Investigative Journalism: Journalism that tries to discover information of public interest that someone is trying to hide. It includes serious crimes, political corruption or corporate wrong doing.
7. Gonzo Journalism: Gonzo Journalism is characterized by its punchy style, rough language and ostensible disregard for conventional journalistic writing forms and customs. It attempts to present a multi-disciplinary perspective on a particular story, drawing from popular culture, sports, political, philosophical and literary sources.
8. Convergence Journalism: An emerging form of Journalism, which combines different forms of journalism such as print, photographic and video into one piece or group of pieces.

The Convergence Journalism or convergence of media have given birth to Citizen Journalism . Let's understand what Citizen Journalism is.

Citizen Journalism

It is news stories created by amateur reporters or ordinary citizens who may not have any professional training in journalism. These amateur reporters or citizens are basically the audience, viewers or readers who too want to share their stories and concerns in the society in which they live. Citizen journalism facilitates participation of the public in the media. With use of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet, citizens without any background in journalism can write on issues for different platforms. A citizen journalist has the ability to become an important player in the public discourse. Facilitating a diversity of voices and views from the public enhances the social responsibility of the media and helps strengthen the public sphere.

On April 16, 2007, amidst a school shooting on the campus of Virginia Tech University, graduate student Jamal Albarghouti decided to take reporting the news into his own hands. As police officers ordered him to get on the ground and take cover, Albarghouti took out his cell phone and took an approximately minute-long video that captured the sounds of the gunshots. He sent the video to CNN, which used it in coverage of the event ("Student shot video"). Albarghouti recorded the video from approximately 200 feet away from the gunshots and offered arguably the best coverage of the events that unfolded that day. Albarghouti's actions offer a perfect example of a concept called "citizen journalism," which occurs when untrained people take on the responsibility of reporting the news.

Citizen journalism is also known as "public", "participatory", "democratic" "guerrilla", "Crowd sourcing" or "street" journalism which is based upon public citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. Citizen journalism is referred to by many other names, including:

- Collaborative citizen journalism (CCJ)
- Personal publishing
- Grassroots media
- Networked journalism
- Open source journalism
- Citizen media
- Participatory journalism
- Hyperlocal journalism
- Distributed journalism
- Stand-alone journalism
- Bottom-up journalism
- Nonmedia journalism
- Indymedia
- Guerrilla journalism

All these terms revolve around user generated content.

Origin and Evolution of Citizen Journalism: The idea that every citizen can engage in acts of journalism has a long history in the United States. The contemporary citizen journalist movement emerged after journalists began to question the predictability of their coverage of events such as the 1988 U.S. presidential election. Those journalists became part of the public, or civic, journalism movement, which sought to counter the erosion of trust in the news media and the widespread disillusionment with politics and civic affairs. The rise of citizen journalism is linked to the notion of active citizenship and the need to strengthen democratic governance. An active citizen is an alert member of the society who represents different concerns and happenings around him/her.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in Young India (1-12-1927), "Democracy is an impossible thing until the power is shared by all….Even a pariah, labourer, who makes it possible for you to earn your living, will have his share in self-governance."To ensure better functioning of democracy, we not only need to ensure that all sections of the society takes part in the democratic processes but also strive to build a better citizenry. Only a competent and responsible citizenry can secure democracy. By writing on the condition of the road to media the citizen journalist is trying to contribute to the citizen's voice on the dismal condition of a particular area. Similarly, if there is something good that is happening in the society, we can share it in the public sphere. Citizen journalism is one of the channels through which ordinary citizens can speak up and participate in the democratic process. It enables the audience to become part of the media system rather than being a simple consumer of the media product.

Citizen Journalism or Participatory Practices by the Citizens

The citizen journalism grew gradually during its journey from letter to editor to Blogs. This journey includes the participatory practices of the citizens. Let's discuss this journey step by step:

Folk Media: It is participatory, community specific, interactive and minimal in expenditure. It requires least formal training. Yet its vibrancy in communicating message to the audience and involving them instantly is exemplary. It is dynamic media as the communicator need not be stationed in one place but can go on spreading the message from place to place. **Gambhira** is a folk format of Bengal which presents important announcements and happenings in the society in front of the common man. This folk media format is in trend in Malda district in West Bengal.

Bhatta Kabita is another folk news format. This was utilized to spread the information of 19th May, 1961 language uprising in Barak Valley of Assam among villagers of Cachar district. The Citizen Journalists of this folk news format are known as Bhat poets. They, on listening or witnessing any incident are able to decide its points of importance. They then transform such points into simple poems which are recited in rural market places.Folk media continues to be the media of the common man in villages through which they interact on topics of importance and interest. Timeliness of such topics and brevity of expression qualifies these as practices of citizen journalism. Folk media does not require costly media instruments. Its oral nature also overcomes the limitation of literacy. So it is ideal for Citizen Journalism of the poor and illiterate.

Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor are the traditional and oldest of citizen's contribution in journalism. Almost every newspapers/magazines/periodicals have this section which enables the common person to respond or give feedback to any news, editorial or article which might have appeared in the newspaper. It is important for a citizen to be alert and articulate for prompting responding to articles or news in a newspaper/magazine etc. Many citizens who write letters to the editor can develop themselves into actual citizen journalists.

Citizen Reporting through Newspapers: Although Letters to editor is also a participatory practice but many newspapers such as Times of India and Some Hindi newspapers invite the citizens to participate in unveiling the social issues.

Citizen Journalism through Community Radio: A large number of Universities, educational institutes and voluntary organizations are running community stations. For each of such radio stations, the communities they cater to are different. Universities normally utilize community radio stations to cater to academic, career and entertainment needs of students. Such radio stations increase students' capacity of self- expression and provide them voice of groups. Voluntary Organizations run community radio stations for giving voice to the villagers, marginalized people and slum dwellers. In such stations, ideally anyone from the community can enter the small community studio and talk on anything or sing or recite. In reality, programs, based on advantageous listening time of different segments (women, farmers, students etc.), are slotted in different hours of the day. Community announcements, festivals, rituals, events and development programs are reported while folk song, drama and many other entertainment programs are narrowcast. Such programs are mostly contributed and presented by community members themselves.

Citizen Reporting through Television Channels: CNN- News 18 introduced citizen   journalism project in 2006 in India. While in 2007 it launched half hour weekend show with repeat broadcasts. It is still in progress. Television offers lot of opportunities to a

citizen journalist. We often get video clippings in television news which are captured and sent by citizens. The cheap handycams have revolutionized capturing moments and events by the common man. Anyone going on a tour can capture video along with audio, and if interested send the same to a television channel along with a written backgrounder. Such acts of Citizen Journalism help channels in many ways. However quality of low resolution camera captures are not accepted by many channels.Citizen journalists often come across events and accidents as spectators and witnesses respectively. As many citizens are habituated to move with mobile phones with camera facility, and even with small video cameras, the number of citizen reports is increasing. Many channels have a policy to accept Citizen Journalism reports of a certain technical standard to increase their contact with the audience. Moreover, this increases diversity of coverage.

Satellite channels have their audience spread across vast geographical zones. To have a reporting unit including reporter and cameraman in every place is impossible due to huge expenses it involves. So Citizen Journalism has a great growth prospect in satellite channels. As citizen contributions are mostly unpaid, channels are ready to encourage such practices to some extent.
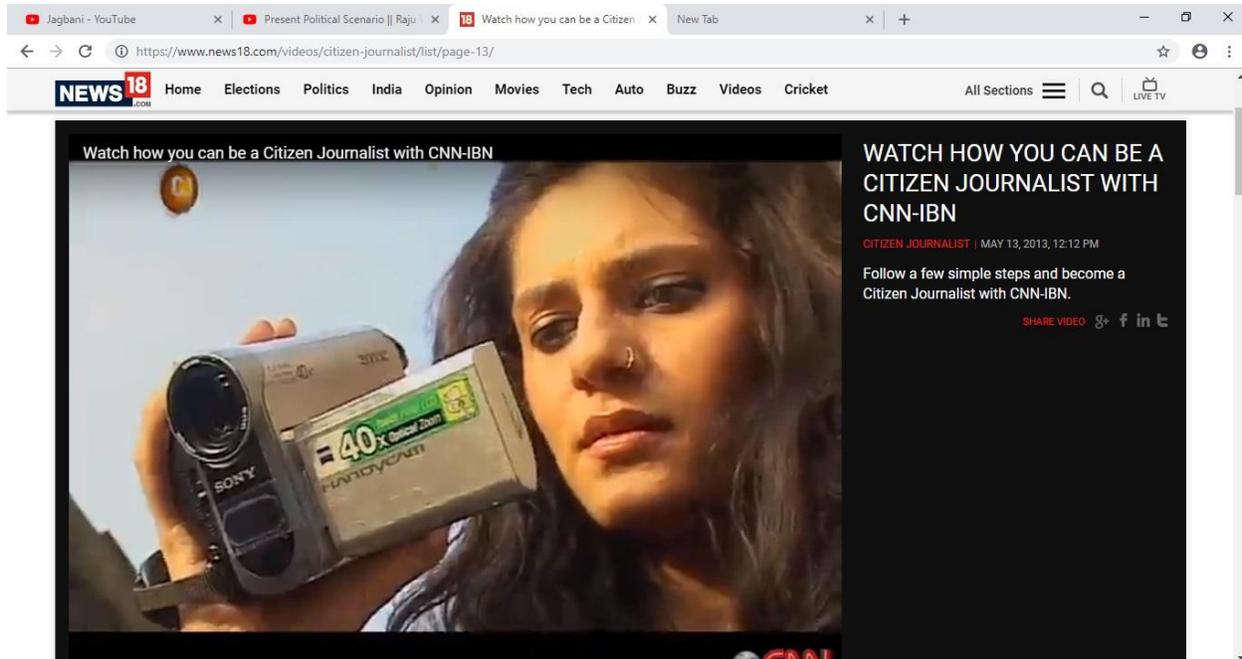
Online Citizen Participation: Techopedia explains Citizen Journalism as all forms of public reporting carried out online. This includes everything from blogs covering a local Little

League tournament to the online posts of citizens in countries where the national media is government controlled. When an event is too small for larger media to take notice or the media cannot report the facts without censorship, citizen journalism may be the only source of information on what is actually occurring behind the media blackout.

For instance, **www.merinews.com (a citizen's journalism news site)** underlines on what it stands for, "Emanating from the need to empower democracy by providing a media to the people of the country to communicate with one and all, www.merinews.com is an effort to provide one such platform to interact and express. It is a news platform for collective wisdom." The site further says it is 'based on the concept on participatory media and citizen journalism, which transcend beyond the limitations of conventional media and allows citizens of the country to report, read, write, comment and debate news, views- happenings they find significant. In unique ways, it provides the tools of informing and opinion shaping to the people- in both text and visual forms.'

Recollect any disaster like the Mumbai terror attack, the tsunami or the recent earthquake in Japan. You will recall that many television channels were inviting citizens to send videos or mobile clippings from their respective areas. Increasingly, many channels have special programmes which encourage video or mobile clippings for some unusual events by a citizen journalist. New Media has given huge popularity to the concept of citizen journalism. If anyone has a computer and connectivity along with camera, videocam and transfer cable, he/she has all the capability of contributing as a citizen journalist. New media services of message exchange and dissemination are many and evolving. It started with electronic mail (e-mail), continued with bulletin board system, and is continuing with these two besides utilizing new formats such as instant messaging, short message service(SMS), multimedia message service(MMS), social networking, really simple syndication (RSS), chat room, web slicing etc.

Mobile Journalism: Mobile journalism is an emerging form of new media storytelling Where

reporters use portable electronic devices with network connectivity to gather, edit and distribute

news from his or her community. Such reporters, sometimes known as mojos (for

mobile journalist), are staff or freelance journalists who may use digital cameras and camcorders,

 laptop PCs, smart phones or tablet devices. The mobile is the best device for citizen journalism

also. Most of the Citizen Journalists use Mobiles to shoot or capture the stories. Later they

forward the stories through mobiles to the media.

Importance of Participatory Practices by Citizens or Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism and participatory practices by Citizens are changing the whole concept of traditional journalism. With the recognition of citizen journalism, the domination of the media as the gatekeeper of news is threatened not only by the new technology but by the very audience it has been serving. The traditional hierarchical approach of media organization meant professional journalists constructing news and the public consuming it. The media as the gatekeeper would decide what would go and what would not. Citizen journalism is an attempt to ensure that the audience is no longer passive. It is an attempt to open the gate to enable ordinary citizens to construct stories. An advantage of providing space for readers' comments is that it could bring up points which could have been missed by the journalist. The photograph sent by the citizen reporter can enhance the story of a full time Journalist. Many newspapers/magazines develop databases of volunteer citizens who could be contacted for interviews by reporters. The citizen's blog postings can highlight new posts to the various blogs as they are published. Citizen blogs can cover issues and areas not covered by the news staff. While the site editors of the newspaper could constantly watch the citizen blog postings and from amongst them select the best that could be highlighted on the main blog page. The newspaper being published locally invite some prominent local citizens and even some important personalities to start blogging under its brand name. This will not only enhance the image of the news site but also facilitate some quality writings. An important advantage of such stand-alone citizen journalism sites is that there are spaces for citizens to write on issues which the local mainstream media would ignore. WikiNews represents a new category of citizen journalism initiative where readers are the editors. It is a spinoff of the famed Wikipedia public Encyclopedia. It allows anyone to write and post a news story and anyone to edit a story that has been posted. Sometimes citizen-posted videos and photos are the only visuals available to news editors during the first few hours of an incident.

Some citizen journalists have gained so much popularity for their reporting and commentary that they can reach a much wider audience than traditional news outlets.

The community finds the citizen stories more interesting as it comes from the common citizen. Many Citizen Journalists have exposed political corruption, failure of administrators and bureaucratic lethargy. Thus Citizen Journalism is going to make a significant difference to our lives. Since its approach is development centered and it helps to reduce the gap between community, administrators and media.

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