

MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND THE INTERNET

By Nadine Jurrat



Citizen Journalism and the Internet —An Overview

WRITTEN BY

Nadine Jurrat¹

Citizen journalists have become regular contributors to mainstream news, providing information and some of today's most iconic images, especially where professional journalists have limited access or none at all. While some hail this opportunity to improve journalism, others fear that too much importance is placed on these personal accounts, undermining ethical standards and, eventually, professional journalism.

This paper summarizes recent discussions about citizen journalism: its various forms and coming of age; its role in international news; the opportunities for a more democratic practice of journalism; the significance for mass media outlets as they struggle for survival; the risks that unedited citizens' contributions may pose for audiences, mainstream media, and citizen journalists themselves.

The paper ends with a call for a clearer definition of 'citizen journalism' and for further ethical, legal and business training, so that its practitioners continue to be taken seriously by professional media and audiences alike.

1. Nadine Jurrat is an independent media researcher.

Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines these changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policy-makers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world.

The project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switchover from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

As part of this endeavour, Open Society Media Program has commissioned introductory papers on a range of issues, topics, policies and technologies that are important for understanding these processes. Each paper in the **Reference Series** is authored by a recognised expert, academic or experienced activist, and is written with as little jargon as the subject permits.

The reference series accompanies reports into the impact of digitization in 60 countries across the world. Produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country, these reports examine how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide – news about political, economic and social affairs. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The **Mapping Digital Media** is a project of the Open Society Media Program, in collaboration with the Open Society Information Program.

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I. Introduction: The Rise of Citizen Journalism on the Internet and in Traditional News

Since the invention of the printing press, non-professional writers have shared information and highlighted perceived injustices through pamphlets and brochures. However, these early forms of citizen journalism had their restrictions: information could only be shared with a limited number of people, and only after a lengthy, and often costly, production process. With the coming of age of Web 2.0, sharing information with millions of “netizens” around the world within seconds has become a reality for anyone who can access the internet. As U.S. Senator Howard Dean once commented: “The internet is Gutenberg on steroids.”²

As a result, millions of non-professional journalists have been sharing their experiences online, bringing issues to the news agenda that were not—or could not be—covered by mainstream media. At the international level, this has been most apparent during times of crisis: eye witness reports on 9/11 or the violent crackdown on demonstrators during the contentious 2009 Iranian presidential election. Hence, many journalists and academics hail citizen journalism as a more transparent and democratic form of journalism, or as David Cohn, founder of several citizen journalism initiatives, states: “Citizen journalists are artisans who work in the unshaped clay of events before perception has been hardened, glazed and fired in the kilns of public discourse.”³

Others, among them many professional journalists, are more skeptical. One of them, the British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) political presenter and former political editor, Andrew Marr, said in September 2010 that “Most citizen journalism strikes me as nothing to do with journalism at all.”⁴

Both opinions are valid but at the extreme end of recent discussions. This paper will provide an overview of what is considered citizen journalism and how it is shaping national and international news agendas.⁵

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2. Cited in T. Fiedler, “Crisis Alert: Barack Obama Meets a Citizen Journalist”, in S. Allan and E. Thorson (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: global perspectives*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009, p. 211.
 3. D. Cohn, Broowaha.com, “About us”, 17 October 2010, available at http://www.broowaha.com/about_us (accessed 31 October 2010).
 4. Cited in “Andrew Marr attacks ‘inadequate, pimply and single’ bloggers”, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 2010, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/internet/8053717/Andrew-Marr-attacks-inadequate-pimply-and-single-bloggers.html> (accessed 5 November 2010).
 5. Citizen journalism has also been very successful at the hyperlocal level. See J. Schaffer, *Citizen media: fad or the future of news? The rise and prospects of hyperlocal journalism*, J-Lab, 2007, available at http://www.kcnn.org/research/citizen_media_report/ (accessed 4 November 2010).

II. Defining Citizen Journalism

Definitions of citizen journalism are as varied as the names it is known by: guerilla, networked, participatory, street, or open source journalism, to give a few examples. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis describe it as “[t]he act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.”⁶

In practice, this can range from commenting on an existing news piece to publishing an article, podcast, photo or video on a personal blog or on Twitter, a dedicated citizen journalism website like The Huffington Post or on YouTube, or on interactive websites that work as extensions to mainstream media, such as Cable News Network’s (CNN) iReport. On sites like CNN iReport, editorial gatekeeping is left to the audience: uploaded content will be published unedited as long as it is considered news (as distinct from advertising, for example) and respects principles of taste and decency. Other sites, such as the South Korean OhMyNews.com, only fact-check hard news contributions before publishing them; and then there are websites that operate like a traditional newsroom, also called pro-am ventures, such as The Huffington Post, where professionals edit all user-generated content (UGC) before publication.

Citizen journalists tend to bring themselves into the story; many see themselves as citizen activists. Some happen to be at the ‘wrong place at the right time’, such as the people caught up in Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, who emailed their personal accounts, pictures and videos taken with their mobile phones to mainstream media like CNN and the *New York Times*, as well as dedicated citizen news sites such as NowPublic.com. Others are very pro-active newsgatherers, who attend and report on specific events, ranging from local town hall meetings for a hyperlocal site, to protests at a G8 conference for Indymedia.org. Journalism is usually not their main occupation, and only few get paid for their efforts.

In contrast to traditional journalism, which brought news as a completed product to its audience in a vertical way, citizen journalism is a more horizontal and conversational sharing of news, which is “always unfinished,

6. S. Bowman, C. Willis, *We Media*, Reston, VA: The Media Center at The American Press Institute, 2003, p. 9, available at <http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/> (accessed 24 September 2010).

and continually under development”.⁷ Wiki journalism, as practiced on Wikipedia for example, is the most apparent form of this: it works on a web-based application that allows anyone to edit, remove or add content. Thus, the audience is not only connected vertically to people in power, such as editors and politicians, but also horizontally to each other, enabling them to mobilize.⁸ The flow of information is no longer controlled from the top. Readers are becoming reporters, citizens and journalists share one identity. This is why champions of citizen journalism, such as Dan Gillmor and Jay Rosen, acclaim it as the most democratic form of journalism, because, in principle, anyone with access to the internet can influence the news agenda.

Thanks to open source, user-friendly software, the technology needed to become a citizen journalist nowadays is very basic: electricity; a computer or mobile phone which can access the internet; broadband, if possible, to upload pictures and videos; and a digital camera or mobile phone with a camera. Software to set up a blog is freely available on wordpress.org or blogger.com, and pictures and videos can be uploaded to specialized websites such as YouTube or Flickr within minutes. In order for this content to be found, readers need access to a search engine, and pictures have to be tagged.

However, in order for citizen journalism to flourish, technological as well as cultural changes are needed. The formerly passive audience needs to contribute actively to the news; on the other side, mass media have to accept the value of UGC and learn to incorporate it in an effective way.⁹

7. A. Bruns, *Prodsusage: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content Creation*, presented at the Creativity & Cognition Conference, Washington, D.C., 2007.

8. J. Rosen, *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*, PressThink, http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html (accessed 4 November 2010).

9. D. Gillmor (2006), p. 14.

III. A Short History of Citizen Journalism

Some scholars trace the European and U.S. origins of citizen journalism back to 17th and 18th century pamphleteering.¹⁰ What makes it so much more powerful in the 21st century, however, is the speed, low cost and global reach with which topics can be brought to the national and international news agendas, including issues that those in power would prefer to be ignored. According to its advocates, this is one of the great democratic opportunities of citizen journalism.¹¹

At the same time, many mainstream media organizations are under financial pressure, especially the newspaper industry, and have cut jobs on investigative and foreign desks. In some countries, including the United States, many local newspapers are closing down. People increasingly feel that a highly concentrated and controlled mass media no longer provides the information relevant to their lives but are following commercial and political aims.¹² In countries with repressive governments, citizens become weary of the official news that is served up to them, as the internet provides an alternative source to state-controlled propaganda. This is where citizen journalists can fill a void.

Citizen journalism came to international prominence during times of crisis: the attacks on New York City and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 were the first time that people looked to the web for eye witness reports, some of which were also incorporated by mainstream news. Then, during the 2004 Asian tsunami, the term “citizen journalism” was used for the first time as photos and videos which tourists had uploaded on their personal blogs were used on television and in print. However, it was not until the 2005 London bombings that people affected by the attack sent their images and personal accounts to mass media, leading

10. See D. Gillmor (2006), pp. 1–4 for examples in the U.S.; also L. Salter, “Issues for Citizen Journalism”, in S. Allan and E. Thorson (2009), p. 178.

11. Independent Media Centres (IMCs), better known as Indymedia, are one of the prominent examples of this. Founded after covering the anti-globalization protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle, they soon became a well-known—and often controversial—source for covering issues, campaigns and events that they believe are ignored by corporate media. The IMCs see themselves as carrying the tradition of radical pamphleteering from the 17th and 18th centuries to the 21st century, giving the marginalized a voice through their website. See L. Salter, “Issues for Citizen Journalism”, in S. Allan and E. Thorson (2009), pp. 178–180.

12. M. Deuze, “The Future of Citizen Journalism”, p. 259; C. W. Yang, “Citizen Journalism in South Korea”, p. 145 in S. Allan and E. Thorson (2009).

them to realize the potential of UGC in situations where their correspondents could not be present in time.¹³ As a result, many news outlets now encourage their audiences to upload pictures and information via their websites, or have created dedicated citizen journalism sites.

13. During the July 2005 bombings on London's underground and a public bus, media correspondents were not able to get underground to report on or film the effects of the blasts, or be at the scenes of the attacks on time. Some were there incidentally as they were caught up on their way to work, but most of the information available immediately after the attacks—including the most iconic images—came from ordinary citizens.

IV. Can Citizen Journalism be Better Journalism?

Advocates of citizen journalism hail it as an opportunity to improve journalism, making it more transparent and democratic as the audience can check the facts presented and easily correct or add to the original article. On citizen journalism sites such as Spot.us or Broowaha.com readers can also decide which stories will be investigated and where they will be placed on the site. During the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign, a citizen journalism TV channel called Current TV partnered with Twitter during the candidates' debates so that viewers could tweet their comments, which were shown live on screen.¹⁴

In times of economic crisis and decreasing audiences, particularly among young people, the vast majority of mainstream media has encouraged the active involvement of non-professional journalists in three main ways:

- encouraging comments on an existing news piece
- *crowdsourcing*, where a reporter asks the general public to provide additional information to complete a story, or to help check facts¹⁵
- uploading content through specific applications on websites or creating dedicated citizen journalism sites, such as CNN iReport.

This not only saves costs but makes the research process more transparent, leading to greater trust from the audience as well as brand loyalty. “Smart news organizations are engaging audiences and opening themselves up to the conversation our audiences clearly want”, says Helen Boaden, BBC Head of News. This engagement

14. Current TV was founded in 2005 by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and former politician and attorney Joel Hyatt, as the result of disenchantment with U.S. news networks. Available through cable in the U.S., the UK, Ireland and Italy, current.tv has led the way in creating a model of interactive viewer created content (VC2) and has won several awards, including an Emmy for Best Interactive Television Service in 2007.

15. One of the most efficient uses of crowdsourcing has occurred in the United Kingdom since July 2009, when the *Guardian* asked readers to look closely at their Member of Parliament's expenses and help verify the facts in 458,832 official documents indicating misuse of expenses claims; as of 2 November 2010, 27,249 readers have reviewed 221,850 documents at a cost of around GBP 50 for the newspaper.

also offers mainstream media a more varied catalogue of sources. The BBC has invested in a dedicated UGC hub, which deals with about 12,000 emails and 200 photographs and videos per day, on the basis that “someone out there will always know more about a story than we do”.¹⁶

Furthermore, citizen journalism can help “[expand] the ideological spectrum for news audiences”.¹⁷ Eye witness reports from ordinary people provide a variety of personal points of view, at times contradicting official statements. One of the most famous bloggers during the first years of the War in Iraq, for example, was Salam Pax (pseudonym), an Iraqi student, who through his blog “Where is Raed” gave an insight to his everyday life—including bombings and disappearances of people—inside Baghdad before and after the U.S. invasion, often contradicting the official statements of the U.S. and United Kingdom governments. He quickly gained a large number of regular followers, among them mainstream UK media such as the BBC and the *Guardian*, which regularly featured his reports. In contrast to other news stories, his accounts were very personal, making this international event less abstract for people outside Iraq.

Citizen journalism initiatives can also fill a void in regions where mainstream media do not or cannot fully cover the news. In Mexico, the controversial El blog del Narco (blogdelnarco.com) is said to be run by an unknown IT student. The site publishes reports and at times gory images of the country’s war on drugs, which the mass media cannot cover for fear of attacks by the drug cartels or because they are already owned by them, and which the government does not always want to see published. Contributions about killings and street fights come from ordinary citizens as well as professional journalists who are not able to publish their articles in their usual outlets under their real names. For people living in the affected areas, this is their only source of information. The site draws around three million unique monthly hits.¹⁸

In repressive countries, eye witness reports and images taken by ordinary citizens are often the only testimony available and can help influence international politics. This was particularly apparent during the contentious 2009 Iranian presidential election, when foreign correspondents were banned from the country, local media was under governmental control and opposition journalists were imprisoned. The rest of the world—and indeed many Iranians—only knew about the demonstrations and the violent crackdown due to the images and reports uploaded on personal blogs, social websites or sent directly to international media. The video of the dying Neda Agha Soltan, a student who was shot by the Basij militia, became *the* iconic image for the opposition movement in Iran. The video was taken on a mobile phone, and to avoid censorship, emailed to an Iranian expatriate in the Netherlands, who uploaded it on YouTube and Facebook, and sent it to various international media outlets, which showed it immediately. Millions of people around the world watched it, and its popularity forced world leaders as well as the Iranian government to publicly comment on political developments in Iran.

16. Helen Boaden, BBC Head of News, quoted in S.Allan and E. Thorsen (2009), p. 4.

17. M. Wall, “The Taming of the Warblogs: Citizen Journalism and the War in Iraq”, in S. Allan and E. Thorson (2009), p. 34.

18. S. Ackerman, “Mexico’s Top Narco-Blogger Comes Forward”, *Wired*, available at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/09/mexicos-top-narco-blogger-comes-forward/> (accessed 28 April 2011).

V. The Risks of Citizen Journalism

According to Bowman and Willis, “the intent of [a citizen’s] participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires”.¹⁹ However, due to the fact that in general citizen journalists are not professionally trained—or simply do not have these intentions—not all contributions from citizen journalists adhere to ethical standards that can be expected of professional journalists. Moreover, citizen journalists, especially those who write, usually give a very personal and therefore often biased view of an event. Some clearly identify their intentions—political or other—such as Indymedia or The Huffington Post; many mainstream news organizations indicate UGC, and whether this content can be verified by other sources. But others place personal accounts of citizens alongside reports from their staff, making it more difficult to distinguish amateur and therefore unchecked content from professional content, which has been checked for accuracy, objectivity, truthfulness and fairness.

Many citizen contributors do not see themselves as journalists but rather as activists, and therefore do not believe they *should* adhere to media ethics. However, if their work is published in the media, it can have damaging effects, especially on sites where the editorial gatekeeping is left completely to the audience. One of the most striking examples for this was a report by an anonymous source, only identified as ‘johntw’, on CNN iReport on 3 October 2008 about Apple CEO Steve Jobs suffering a heart attack and being rushed to hospital. As there had already been concerns about Mr Jobs’s health, Apple’s stock prices sank to a 17-month low within minutes of the posting. Only when the blog Silicon Valley Insider rectified the information after having checked it with an Apple spokesperson, who had strongly denied the report, was the story brought to a halt and Apple’s stocks slowly recovered. The incident also damaged CNN iReport’s reputation, although the site clearly states that only content marked ‘CNN iReport’ has been vetted. While this “news item” might have been relevant, it was neither reliable nor accurate, and since the author was anonymous, he or she could not be held accountable or responsible.

19. S. Bowman, C. Willis (2003), p. 9, available at [http:// www.hypergene.net/wemedia/](http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/) (accessed 24 September 2010).

Many critics have stressed that anonymity in citizen journalism is one of its pitfalls, making it difficult and at times impossible to ensure that information is correct and that the author takes responsibility for the posting. However, in times when half of the imprisoned journalists around the world are online journalists,²⁰ staying anonymous can be vital in certain countries. The person who shot the video of the killing of Ms Soltan remains anonymous, fearing reprisals from the Iranian government, albeit having won the prestigious 2009 George Polk Award for Videography.

Governments and commercial entities have also woken up to the influence of citizen content on the internet and use it to promote their policies or products. In 2006, just ahead of the U.S. midterm elections, senators were caught ‘polishing’ their entries on Wikipedia to make them look more favorable. The George W. Bush administration used citizen journalists to promote U.S. policy in Iraq by targeting influential bloggers and giving them “special access” to certain members of the Department of Defense, inviting them to roundtables, providing images of the war, and even embedding some of them with U.S. troops. While replicating official statements without critical evaluation also occurs in mainstream news, untrained citizen journalists are often more vulnerable to be used as propaganda tools, especially if on the whole they support the cause. In 2006, the Department of Defense admitted that their press releases would be replicated without many questions asked by the bloggers they are sent to.²¹ El Blog del Narco (mentioned above) is also used by drug cartels as a propaganda tool, uploading comments and images to show their influence and to threaten each other.

As a result, the audience needs to be particularly careful when evaluating content from citizen journalists. While much of the credibility of citizen reports stems from being imperfect and biased, especially in the blogosphere,²² the fact is that the audiences have to stop being passive recipients of information and become active users of news if they want to benefit from citizen journalism, checking the facts they are given with other sources, online and offline. Dan Gillmor calls this creating a “hierarchy of trust”.²³

In contrast to professional journalists, who should always identify themselves as such and not report on anything discussed ‘off the record’, citizen journalists may not see themselves as bound by the same professional standards. This became apparent during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign in a scandal later named “bittergate”. Mayhill Fowler, one of the Huffington Post’s “OffTheBus” bloggers, reported on comments by Barack Obama about bitter working class voters, made during a fundraising event.²⁴ The event was closed to the press; Ms Fowler had been invited as an Obama supporter. When she reported the comments, she created a media frenzy which was seen as harming Obama’s presidential ambitions. This controversy raised questions about the definition and obligations of a journalist.

20. See Committee to Protect Journalists, *Annual Report 2010*, New York, 2009; available at <http://cpj.org/about/CPJ.Annual.Report.2010.pdf> (accessed 24 September 2010).

21. M. Wall (2009), pp. 37–39.

22. S. Allan, *Online News*, cited in M. Wall (2009), p. 36.

23. D. Gillmor (2006), p. 189.

24. OffTheBus was an experiment by Huffington Post founder Arianna Huffington and journalism professor Jay Rosen during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, where citizen journalists followed the Democratic candidate’s campaign across the country.

While there were no legal implications for Ms Fowler or The Huffington Post, citizen journalists are not immune from legal action. Examples of citizens being imprisoned for their critical reporting in repressive countries might be extreme but copyright, libel and so-called security laws transcend national boundaries and can potentially affect anyone publishing online. Whereas professional journalists often enjoy specific privileges, such as protection against libel charges and protection of journalistic material, citizen journalists generally do not qualify for these rights, particularly if they do not adhere to basic journalistic standards.²⁵

25. For legal guidelines, see *The Handbook for Bloggers and Cyberdissidents* on www.rsf.org (available in various languages) (accessed 24 September 2010).

VI. Forecasts

With Twitter, YouTube and other similar sites dominating the space of immediate, uncensored comment and video, many citizen journalism news websites have taken steps to become more professional and transparent. They have set up advisory boards, hired professional editors and laid down editorial guidelines, ensuring greater accuracy and credibility. As a result, many have seen an upsurge in users and were able to raise more funds through advertising.

The rising quality of some citizen journalism, along with the impact of the financial crisis on the so-called legacy media, have created fears that UGC might even come to replace professional journalism. However, recent studies have found that while citizen reporting is increasing in niche markets, i.e. on specific topics or at the hyperlocal level, it is merely complimenting mainstream national and international news. As the majority of citizen journalism news sites depend on voluntary contributions from people whose main occupation is not journalism, they cannot always be timely or relevant. Furthermore, many traditional news sites are more interactive than their citizen journalism counterparts. As long as citizen news sites do not have access to resources on the scale of mass media, they will not be able to replace them.²⁶

Instead, there will be ever closer cooperation between citizen and professional journalism, which may indeed lead the so-called legacy media to become “mutualized news organizations”, in a phrase coined by *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger.²⁷ Citizen journalism still largely depends for its topics on mainstream news. Many citizen journalism sites now have content-sharing agreements with mainstream media or news agencies; others have been bought by big media organizations, such as Slate, which was purchased by the owners of the *Washington Post*,²⁸ NowPublic.com, which was bought by the Clarity Digital Group,²⁹ or most recently

26. S. Lacy et al., “Citizen Journalism Web Sites Complement Newspapers”, *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol.31, No. 2, Spring 2010, pp. 34–46; M. Deuze, “The Future of Citizen Journalism”, in S. Allan and E. Thorson (2009), pp. 255–264.

27. Rusbridger, Alan, “The Hugh Cudlipp Lecture: Does Journalism Exist?”, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/jan/25/cudlipp-lecture-alan-rusbridger> (accessed 25 November 2010).

28. Slate, “About us”, 9 June 2009, available at <http://www.slate.com/id/2147070/> (accessed 22 December 2010).

29. Wikipedia, “Now Public”, 2 November 2010, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NowPublic> (accessed 22 December 2010).

The Huffington Post, which was sold to AOL for US\$ 315 million. While there are disputes about the term citizen journalism—and many citizen journalists agree not to be called journalists—participatory journalism is here to stay as long as ordinary people feel the need to share their experiences online. Technological advances, especially in the mobile phone industry, facilitating video uploads directly to citizen journalism websites, will increase the speed of eyewitness reporting.

Credibility and trustworthiness cannot be easily achieved; they need to be pursued with determination; and even when this goal is achieved, economic viability does not necessarily follow. Oh Yeon-ho founded OhMyNews.com in 2000 as a purpose-built platform for citizen journalism, on the premise that the quality of a news piece determines how well it is received.³⁰ He succeeded in making OhMyNews one of the most influential news providers in South Korea, but not in putting it on a sound business footing.³¹

In order for citizen journalists to continue providing relevant information for the general public, training in ethical standards and legal pitfalls in the context of personal reporting should be made more widely available. In 2007, OhMyNews opened a citizen journalism school outside Seoul. The citizen video site SmallWorldNews.com has recruited and trained locals in Iraq and other conflict zones to become documentarians. Other organizations, such as the U.S. based Knight Foundation and Open Society Foundations (OSF), also support the democratic potential of citizen journalism by providing guidelines, discussion forums and citizen journalism training online, on the ground, and in cooperation with journalism schools.³²

Furthermore, a range of viable business models need to be developed so that citizen journalists can spend more time investigating a story. There are some promising examples, such as The Huffington Post raising US\$ 20 million since 2006 to cover more local news and ‘hire’ more paid citizen journalists for investigative work, or Spot.us where the audience can sponsor an investigation, but it is too soon to tell whether these will be successful in the long term.³³ In any case, reliable, truthful and accurate content is essential for a successful business model.³⁴ Finally, but maybe most importantly, the term “citizen journalism” itself needs to be more closely defined as it currently includes anyone uploading UGC which is considered ‘news’ by someone in the world. A new definition might start from the truism that—however much training they may receive—citizen journalists are citizens first and foremost, not trained journalists; and this should shape our expectations of what they do, and of its value.

30. R. Hauben, “OhMyNews and 21st Century Journalism”, 9 September 2009, available at http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=246787&rel_no=1 (accessed 23 December 2010).

31. OhMyNews is struggling to raise funds to cover its operation. See <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/time-running-out-for-ohmynews-members-club/s2/a536382/> (accessed 10 December 2010).

32. Open Society Foundations, “Media & Information”, n.d., available at http://www.soros.org/initiatives/mena/focus_areas/media; “Civic Journalism and Open Media Conference”, n.d., available at http://www.soros.org/initiatives/information/events/civil_20070321 (accessed 22 December 2010); Knight Foundation, “What We Fund—Digital Media and News in the Public Interest”, n.d., available at http://www.knightfoundation.org/programs/journalism/what_we_fund/priority_detail.dot?id=132830 (accessed 22 December 2010).

33. South Korea’s OhMyNews, one of the first, most established and influential citizen journalism websites, is struggling to raise funds to cover its operation. See <http://www.journalism.co.uk/news/time-running-out-for-ohmynews-members-club/s2/a536382/> (accessed 10 December 2010).

34. IDATE, TNO and IvOR, *User-Created-Content: Supporting a participative Information Society*, 2008, p. 290.

Further Reading

- S. Allan and E. Thorson (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: global perspectives*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009.
- A. Bruns, *Producersage: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content Creation*, presented at the Creativity & Cognition Conference, Washington, D.C., 2007, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.105.3421&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- M. Deuze, A. Bruns, C. Neuberger, “Preparing for an Age of Participatory News”, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2007, pp. 322–338, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512780701504864>.
- D. Gillmor, *We the Media*, Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2006.
- [Http://international.ohmynews.com/](http://international.ohmynews.com/) for updated articles on citizen journalism from around the world.
- J. Rosen, www.prssthink.org.

Mapping Digital Media is a project of the **Open Society Media Program** and the **Open Society Information Program**.

Open Society Media Program

The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

Open Society Information Program

The Open Society Information Program works to increase public access to knowledge, facilitate civil society communication, and protect civil liberties and the freedom to communicate in the digital environment. The Program pays particular attention to the information needs of disadvantaged groups and people in less developed parts of the world. The Program also uses new tools and techniques to empower civil society groups in their various international, national, and local efforts to promote open society.

Open Society Foundations

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 70 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

For more information:

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