



Citizen Journalism

A retrospective on what we know, an agenda for what we don't

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CITIZEN JOURNALISM

A retrospective on what we know, an agenda for what we don't

Melissa Wall

This article reviews the state of research on citizen journalism over the past decade. The key areas covered include the ways traditional journalism has responded to this phenomenon from its early criticisms and later clumsy embrace of citizen content; the promises and perils of hyper-local citizen journalism; the intersections of social media tools and individual citizen content creators such as those on blogs and Twitter; citizen journalism in the hands of activists; and the conditions for citizen reporting in authoritarian contexts. The article ends with recommendations for future research.

KEYWORDS citizen journalism; networked journalism; participatory journalism; social media; user-generated content

The Prelude

Before we get to the part where citizen journalism's terminology is debated, its impact dissected, its relationship to civic culture outlined, its failings laid bare and so on, let us take a moment to remember this: citizen journalism is now an essential part of news gathering and delivery around the world. Indeed, we would be missing events both global and local without access to citizens willing to produce this content. While citizen journalists may stand accused of measuring the world in coffee spoons, the fragmentary but sometimes powerful content they produce may contain words and images of death and survival, destruction and renewal, hope and despair; in sum, of some of the essential moments of life on earth. On particularly bad days, some of these amateurs even die in order to create "mere" citizen content.

In the article that follows, I summarize what researchers have discovered about citizen journalism. This includes its interactions with mainstream news media (where most research has focused); the identified virtues and faults of independent citizen initiatives, both collective and individual; and the alternative paths taken by activist citizen reporters, including those in authoritarian lands. I then propose new research directions for those studying this important phenomenon.

You Say Citizen Journalism, I Say...

Various researchers have attempted to definitively describe citizen journalism; however, a single definition has never been agreed upon (Allan 2009; Fröhlich,

Quiring, and Engesser 2012; Goode 2009; Nip 2006). Indeed, a research article might use one term (“participatory”) in its title while maintaining “citizen journalism” as a keyword (e.g., Fröhlich, Quiring, and Engesser 2012). Thus, while researchers such as Mortensen (2011, 65) suggest there is a “lack of clarity and conceptualization” in the term, others such as Cottle (2014) argue that alternative names often fail to adequately capture the phenomenon; for example, the commonly used term user-generated content (UGC) is often employed by large-scale professional news media to create a “stunted and proprietorial view” of citizen journalism that eliminates its potential civic virtues (x). In this article, citizen journalism is defined as news content (text, video, audio, interactives, etc.) produced by non-professionals. Such content may capture a single moment (e.g., witnessing an event), be intermittent (e.g., a Twitter feed), or be regularly produced such as by hyper-local news operators. In addition, this article will consider only digital citizen journalism as that matches the topic area of this journal. While this may position citizen journalism as a Northern project (Rodríguez 2014), many uses of citizen journalism in the Global South are also digitized. As Cottle (2014) suggests, citizen journalism remains a powerful term for this phenomenon, however imprecise and in need of further refinement, because of its connections to potentially active citizen participation in society.

Professional Journalism Responds to Citizen Journalism

Much of the research on citizen journalism has examined the ways it has interacted with professional news media. Initially, mainstream news outlets experimented with accommodating different modes of citizen content, and, mirroring this, scholars focused on identifying evolving typologies of participation (commenting on stories, message boards, polls, etc.) and what sort of procedures were developing in response to citizen participation (Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger 2007; Thurman 2008). Studies of these early interactions revealed that there was a less-than enthusiastic embrace by many traditional news outlets, as a “clash of cultures” erupted in which amateur content, fueled by a growing participatory ethos, conflicted with the perceived needs of professional journalists to maintain their authority (Hermida and Thurman 2008, 343). For example, UGC was viewed by the BBC mainly as source material for stories and, by some, as a resource-intensive sideshow that pulled journalists away from real reporting work (Wardle and Williams 2010). Indeed, the response by many news outlets appears to have been initially intended to contain expectations of audience involvement, to keep participation at low levels and on the professional’s terms.

That said, some outlets, feeling pressured by the participatory *zeitgeist*, responded by creating certain kinds of limited spaces for citizen journalism. Among the early adopters, the BBC established Have Your Say in 2005 and CNN created iReport in 2006. As with these initiatives, some professional news operations tended to create clear separations between professional and citizen content, creating patterns of segregation for citizen journalism that have been called the “playground” model or the “UGC ghetto” (Domingo 2011; Jönsson and Örnebring 2011, 135). Regardless of where this content is

placed, some scholars see a mirage, labeling citizen contributions as an “interactive illusion” (Jönsson and Örnebring, 2011, 141).

In other cases, citizen journalists were not even welcome on the playground. Instead, their content was dismissed or roundly criticized, viewed as unethical, untrustworthy, too subjective and emotional, said to be of poor technical quality or simply of no real news value (Niekamp 2011; Pantti and Bakker 2009). Sometimes citizen journalism is described as simply too incomplete to provide a coherent picture of crucial news events (Nip 2009). Another line of research shows that non-professionals may not produce much “real” news, as they are interested mainly in soft or non-news items (Holt and Karlsson 2014; Jönsson and Örnebring 2011). Even in cases of crisis coverage, which is said to be citizen journalism’s key area of contribution, citizen content often has been more focused on sharing emotions than providing helpful facts or information (Nip 2009).

But the citizen–professional conflict was not simply about quality or resources, research overwhelmingly finds that most journalists do not want to abandon their routines or share their authority with outsiders (Lewis 2012; Robinson 2009; Singer and Ashman 2009). Such attitudes have been identified across studies of Western democracies and even among student journalists who were not yet professionals (Blaagaard 2013; Örnebring 2013). Thus, while outlets are increasingly using citizen content, they are creating new routines to shore up their positions and tamp down any expansion of the citizen’s role in creating news. For example, Pantti and Andén-Papadopoulos (2011) and Sjøvaag (2011) note that when using citizen content, television channels in Europe and the United States employ particular narrative strategies to ensure their continued control. In the United States, CNN blatantly attempts to maintain its authority by highlighting for audiences the fact that citizen content is unprofessional and cannot be verified, in what these researchers call “transparency as strategic ritual” (Pantti and Andén-Papadopoulos 2011, 103). This pattern is further identified by Örnebring (2013), who found that professional journalists in six European countries cited traditional claims to authority such as their expertise, ethics, and their institutional identity (as opposed to the supposedly lone citizen reporter) as key characteristics that set them apart from citizen journalists.

Collaborations

That said, other research has found a growing tendency toward working with citizen journalists, which is creating “pockets of collaborative journalism” (Canter 2013, 1106). This embrace, however, is uneven as seen in Canter’s (2013) study of UK journalists working in a newsroom that joined with a citizen journalism site. She found some reporters viewed citizen journalists mainly as sources for professionally produced reports; others, particularly editors, saw them as a second tier of reporters in which the citizen produces original content; much rarer, some professionals viewed them as collaborators. In a similarly mixed response, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti’s (2013a) interviews with professional journalists about their attitudes toward citizen-created visual content fell into three categories of varying levels of acceptance: resistance, in which professional journalists acknowledge citizen content as possible raw material for

their own reporting but reject collaboration; resignation, in which professionals feel they have to use citizen content as part of operating in a networked digital environment; and renewal, in which citizen content is seen as bringing new voices and perspectives into the news. In the US context, Ostertag and Tuchman (2012) studied the ways a citizen journalism site was incorporated physically into a local television news station in the United States, finding the citizen effort became increasingly more professionalized and less innovative to meet the expectations of funders and their professional collaborators.

Tiered Collaborations

Studies on Syrian activist citizen journalists' interactions with mainstream news outlets found tiers of intermediaries bringing about connections between citizen journalists and professionals (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013b; Wall and el Zahed 2014a; Sienkiewicz 2014). Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013b) described activists working as "brokers" or bridges who both identified key pieces of citizen reportage and also provided context for Western journalists with the aim of getting it placed within mainstream news. Wall and el Zahed (2014a) called the identification and incorporation of citizen activist video into a professional outlet's live blog, the "collaborative news clip," signaling a negotiation between the journalist ultimately posting to the news site and the activists helping identify and contextual the video. Sienkiewicz (2014) also describes an "interpreter tier" that may even consist of non-Syrian individuals who develop a track record tweeting or otherwise covering the story from afar, leading to their becoming a resource for professional news outlets (e.g., the Brown Moses' blog run by an unemployed British man with no personal connections to Syria.).

Citizens Respond

From the other side of the equation, research on citizen journalist's attitudes suggests that some value public interactions with their mainstream news counterparts (Robinson and DeShano 2011a). In other cases, citizen journalists who were offered limited participation in professional news operations could become disillusioned if the participation was not authentic, saying they felt taken advantage of (Borger, van Hoof, and Sanders 2014). Interestingly, in a project that allowed more interaction with professional journalists, researchers found citizens were dismissive of the content that other citizens produced. Also, in an initiative to teach community members citizen journalism, Robinson and Deshano (2011b) found some participants believed they lacked the authority to produce real news, and some of them also rejected content produced by peers as unprofessional. Complicating these findings even further is research on how the public responds to citizen journalism. Carr et al. (2014) found audiences who are skeptical of mainstream news and politics tend to trust citizen journalism more than professional news; however, Nah and Chung (2012) discovered that audiences rate professional journalists' execution of most of the perceived roles for journalists higher, except for the adversary role, which is positively associated with citizen journalists.

Co-option

A smaller body of research on mainstream–citizen journalists’ relationships takes a more critical approach. In examining CNN’s iReport, Kperogi (2010) argues professional media work to tamp down oppositional possibilities by citizens. Usher (2011) too warns against the damages caused when trying to professionalize citizen journalism. Both suggest that even when legacy news media claim to be embracing citizen content, they are in fact ensuring that it gets reshaped to follow professional values. Likewise, researchers suggest that professional incorporation may strangle the creative impulses that citizen journalism sometimes comes out of (Usher 2011).

Further, the issue of free labor is highlighted. Kperogi (2010) suggests that media such as CNN expropriate citizen journalist’s work. News outlets consistently fail to credit the citizen creators and in some cases enable or encourage contributions from dangerous situations that may lead citizen journalists to take great personal risks. Wardle, Dubberley, and Brown (2014) suggest that in the future citizens will not give away their exclusive content from crisis scenes but rather seek payments and acknowledgement, which may mean either a greater role for intermediary organizations such as Storyful or the creation of other protective mechanisms for individual citizens sharing content. In researching these developing practices, the ethics of placing citizens in danger is often overlooked in favor of indentifying the “dangers” of using unverifiable citizen content.

Hyper-local Deputy Journalists

Another form of citizen journalist often operates narrowly focused websites that cover local communities or niche topics too small for most traditional news media to bother with. These operations often see their journalism as a mission to improve civic life. Sites such as iBrattleboro.com (United States), MyHeimat (Germany), and Crikey (Australia) often formed because of cutbacks in local news or the belief that mainstream news outlets’ priorities left out news community members wanted to know about (Bruns, Wilson, and Saunders, 2008). These often not-quite full-fledged professionals—deputy journalists, if you will—do not reject journalism but instead want more of it. In the US context, these homegrown journalists, according to Jan Schaffer (n.d.), “have deputized themselves to systematically cover town news as best they can. Some have ‘beats;’ they have formulated rules of governance for their news enterprises; they have guidelines for content.” Indeed, Deuze (2009) argues that the only thing new about deputy journalists is a willingness among some to work without pay.

Ryfe and Mensing (2010, 36) also suggest that this category of citizen journalist shares much in common with professionals but they aim to “recover a kind of journalism ... they fear is being lost.” Thus, citizens producing neighborhood or other narrowly defined hyper-local journalism operate with values and practices akin to professionals but with some variations. For example, they rely on fewer official sources and provide alternative views of issues (Carpenter 2008, 2010; Reich 2008; van Kerkhoven and Bakker 2014; Williams, Harte, and Turner 2014). Research in the United States suggests that citizen journalism relies on more diverse sources in part because they have a narrower range of contacts (Carpenter 2010). Research in Israel also suggests they use fewer human sources because of their lack of access to traditional news

sources, filling the gap with friends, family, and their own experiences (Reich 2008). In the United Kingdom, they often opt to use fewer sources because the journalists see no need for them (Williams, Harte, and Turner 2014).

Those lacking a commercial imperative are said to be more attuned to their own community, aiming to get others to care about what happens in their neighborhoods (Robinson and DeShano 2011a). However, this does not mean hyper-locals are a small-town phenomenon; Fico et al. (2013) suggest that in the United States they are more likely to be successful if they are located in large urban areas or are focused on a niche topic that attracts a geographically dispersed audience. Ryfe and Mensing (2010) argue that they show greater interest in having the community participate in the production of their news and view the hosting of conversations about their communities as a key responsibility. However, other research found hyper-local citizen journalism sites actually supplied fewer ways to interact, suggesting such sites may not be more interactive or welcoming to community participation (Lacy et al. 2012; van Kerkhoven and Bakker 2014; Williams, Harte, and Turner 2014). Lacy et al. (2012) attribute this shortfall to a lack of resources (human and financial).

Finally, many hyper-local or niche journalism initiatives have not been sustainable. They continue operating as long as their proprietors have the financial ability and energy to keep them afloat but can collapse as quickly as they launched. Sometimes they are even victims of their own success: some deputy journalism sites have been subsumed into mainstream news media (“Crikey” in Australia, “538” in the United States, etc.) or their creators brought into mainstream outlets to launch new initiatives (Bruns, Wilson, and Saunders 2008; Robinson and DeShano 2011a). In other cases, large media companies have bought up networks of hyper-local journalism sites as potential money-makers. In the United States, AOL acquired a hyper-local news company, Patch, and then launched a national network of 900 local news sites; researchers found the corporate-owned hyper-local sites relied on official sources and failed to engage their communities (St. John, Johnson, and Nah 2014).

Technologies of the Self(ie): Social Media and the Individual Citizen Journalist

Individually produced citizen journalism in the twenty-first century has often consisted of social media-hosted content, starting with the surge of blogs, then later YouTube videos, Twitter posts, etc., as ordinary people enacted “technologies of the self” to narrate their own versions of events (Foucault 1988; Papacharissi 2009; Siles 2012). Corporate platforms particularly facilitated a form of individualized citizen journalism that generates its meaning through engagement with other members of the public, who co-create content through commenting, linking, sharing, etc. (de Zúniga 2009; Meraz 2009).

The first wave of these independent citizen journalists using social media platforms were the amateur news bloggers. They pioneered different narrative styles characterized by speed and a subjective voice that often challenged the mainstream news versions of events (Robinson 2009). While some provided original content, Bruns and Highfield (2012) suggested that many were primarily “gatewatching” professional news, with an aim to curate information as it was released. These qualities continue to

characterize citizen journalism produced by using the social media tools that followed blogs such as Twitter. Citizens once running their own blogs as independent editors often dropped these labor-intensive sites for social networking sites such as Twitter, which require fewer skills and commitment than it takes to run a blog. More recently, we have seen the rise of the Twitter citizen journalists as well as the more one-off witnesses, who snap a photo or video of a dramatic event and post it to a social networking site (Mortensen 2011).

Whatever the social media tool, a mixing of professionals and amateurs has taken place in a space not controlled by the traditional news media, or what Bruns and Highfield (2012, 9) call a “shared space of news produsage.” This was a potentially radical break from the traditional way professional journalists maintained authority and control of the news. Some observers such as Hermida (2013, 298) argue this leads to “the collaborative co-creation of news.” However, the content streams from ordinary people and those from professional journalists have not always blended as he envisioned. Instead, first with blogging, then in the rise of the Twittersphere, the professionals’ social networking streams often seem to become the leading sources of information, replicating their dominance of media narratives.

Consider the Arab Spring. Research suggests that despite a flood of citizen content via social media from places such as Egypt, mainstream news outlets dominated the coverage (Aday et al. 2013). Professional journalists continued to gate-keep content; citizens were forced to “manage their own stories in line with traditional media sources” to gain coverage (Ali and Fahmy 2013, 56). Yes, citizen content reached international audiences but by conforming to professional news expectations. Yes, citizens had potential access to global audiences but their route was controlled by mainstream news outlets. More optimistically, Murthy argues that there is room for professionals and amateurs on the same platforms such as Twitter where they can produce “multiple journalisms” (Murthy 2013, 52). Like Hermida, he sees a mutually beneficial co-existence allowing the intermingling of citizen and professional news, each with their own practices and norms, which ultimately shape the others’.

The Resistance

Another type of digital citizen journalism operates in well-defined resistance to the existing political and social systems within which it is embedded. It is usually collective in nature, bringing together activists opposed to existing power structures. One of the most important, earliest examples was the Independent Media Center (IMC) movement, a radical, anarchist-inspired project that grew out of grassroots opposition to global corporate control of the world (Downing 2003; Platon and Deuze 2003). The IMC was built on a model of open access in which anyone could submit content without gatekeeping taking place. Activists wrote their own code, so they were not reliant on media corporations to provide platforms. The IMC was also directly tied to social movement actions in the streets.

In this way, the IMC offered a different path for citizen journalism, one followed in part by other grassroots uprisings such as the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring. However, these later movements showed less concern about using social media tools produced by corporate entities such as Twitter. The Occupy movement in

particular ran its own news operations in part via Twitter teams. DeLuca and Lawson (2014) suggest that resisters can deploy these corporate media tools in new ways, such as with Occupy where the cell phone became a “hub in a distributed network” (369), creating new news spaces on Twitter, Live Stream, and Storify. Ultimately, these researchers argue the resisters made “institutional journalism irrelevant” (369). But are these citizen journalists actually operating outside of the mainstream news system? Anderson (2013) argues that citizen journalism needs to be viewed as part of an overall media ecology; that it is not easy to separate resistant citizen journalism from traditional news media even when it seems to operate independently.

Authoritarian Contexts

Much research on citizen journalism fails to take into account non-Western political and social settings, leading to a narrow and perhaps distorted view of what citizen journalism is or could be in different parts of the world. As with most media research, generalities are consistently based on the US and Europe experiences, which make up a small portion of the world’s media systems. Yet Rodriguez (2014) reminds us that there is a difference in understanding what citizen journalism is between the Global South and the North, with the former emphasizing non-digital media and a more professionalized activist journalism. These differences can extend to the very idea of citizenship. As Khiabany and Sreberny (2009) have suggested, the concept of citizenship is often based on the Western democratic model and fails to take into account the range of relationships between the state and its subjects in different parts of the world. Moyo (2014) argues that citizen journalists in repressive countries may be creating new forms of citizenship merely through their work.

Another major difference is that citizen journalists face serious challenges in some part of the world, with restrictions on what they are legally or politically allowed to report (Guo 2014; Moyo 2009; Xin 2010). In authoritarian environments, citizen journalism is viewed as a radical threat to the status quo; it can be significantly more dangerous for its practitioners and punishment can include blockage of their site or account, physical harm, imprisonment, or even death. Interestingly, this tends to be less of a focus for scholars who often leave the collection and understanding of such information to groups like Reporters Without Borders. Likewise, assumptions based on the North leave out other challenges citizen journalists may face, such as less access to technology, internet filtering and censorship, monitoring and tracking, etc. (Sandu 2012).

New Space for News

Citizen journalism may create an alternative public sphere, according to Guo (2014) or, in certain periods of significant political change, an entirely oppositional news system, which Wall and El Zahed (2014b) call a “pop-up news ecology,” a temporary media environment fueled by the rise of citizen journalism. Even in non-authoritarian countries, non-state actors can impose an authoritarian-like hold on the traditional news media, so that citizen journalists seek to create alternative systems. This has

happened in Mexico where high levels of drug cartel violence against journalists have led to the creation of Twitter citizen war correspondents who have stepped into roles abandoned by the mainstream reporters (Monroy-Hernández et al., 2013).

Guo (2014) argues that at minimum citizen journalists may break stories that the professionals then follow up on, if in a more watered down version. In China specifically, the rise of Weibo, a Chinese version of Twitter, has helped citizen journalists become less dependent on professional news' amplification; however, they are still unable to sustain long-term coverage of stories on their own. As Xin (2010) notes, breaking through government influence on the news media in places like China remains difficult. Yet, in some ways, these tendencies sound similar to those in much freer environments.

Citizen journalism, especially in countries where authorship is anonymous, may become another form of propaganda (Al-Ghazzi 2014). While this may be true in any country, in places where information is tightly controlled or manipulated, it can potentially spur ethnic, religious, and other forms of violence. For example, Xin (2010) found that some citizen journalism in China works to reinforce xenophobia or neo-nationalism. In still other cases anonymity may be necessary for safety reasons and researchers studying citizen journalists in these environments may need to make ethical decisions regarding what information they reveal (Metaxas and Mustafaraj 2013).

Applying a post-colonial framework to citizen journalism in Syria, Al-Ghazzi (2014) warns that in conflict-torn areas citizen-produced media can be tools for war and torture and that even the term "citizen journalism" is loaded with Western ideologies, which treat each word as universal. Indeed, Carter, Maher, and Neumann (2014, 15, 17), studying social media streams of foreign fighters in Syria, found a tier of citizen "disseminators" described as "freelance" and sources of "reliable information" that appear to straddle a thin line between citizen journalist and citizen propagandist. Thus, citizen journalism and its mutations need to be understood within the political/social and economic systems in which it operates rather than always assuming the position of a Western democracy.

Finally, Moyo (2014) insists that citizen journalism must align with social movements, and remain deinstitutionalized and de-professionalized, particularly in authoritarian situations. Alexanyan (2014) also argues that citizen journalism in semi-authoritarian environments such as Russia must be directly connected with civic action such as documenting a litter problem or helping coordinate citizen responses to disasters when the government refuses to act. Otherwise, Moyo (2014) warns, even those with progressive aims may end up replicating the existing power structures. Indeed, he finds much citizen journalism in Western democracies co-opted by professional journalism. Thus, he urges Southern-based citizen journalists to avoid imitating Northern models. Contrary to this point of view, Palmer (2012) suggests savvy citizen activists in authoritarian countries may use the power of corporate media, particularly global entities, to claim international attention for their causes.

Future Research

Despite a growing body of research about citizen journalism or related forms, there are gaps in what we know. In what follows, I lay out a series of areas that need greater attention.

- Research on citizen journalism needs to examine the influence of *platform socialization*. How do both (1) social media and (2) their communities of users school others in logics specific to those forms? Some practices are encouraged or enabled by the platforms (140 characters per tweet), others develop as user-created routines (#FF—Follow Friday). In an example of the former, Moyo (2014, 274) argues that bloggers on a hosted website “take thematic cues from the website” and in that way remain controlled by the corporate media system. In terms of the latter, Veenstra et al. (2014) argue that on Twitter, an “aggregate form of reader responses” may serve as a filter, highlighting or de-emphasizing information in a real-time shared gatekeeping role; a citizen-created norm (re-tweet) may become an automated feature of the platform. Such findings are likely to become more important as social networking sites continue as key platforms for citizen journalism.
- The ways citizen journalism intersects with *race, gender, class, and other categories of marginalization*, including language is understudied. For example, Mahrouse (2012) examined mainstream news media responses to citizen journalists in Canada and found professionals gravitated toward white Western citizens rather than their Arab counterparts in Palestine. Previous research shows that existing patterns of exclusion do not necessarily disappear online. Harp and Tremayne (2006) found the blogosphere was dominated by male bloggers and Meraz (2008) discovered that the top news blogs were written by men and were more often cited by mainstream news outlets. Berger (2011) probed the ways that professionalizing citizen journalism could limit participation by marginalized youth in South Africa, while Thiel-Stern (2013) found teaching girls to tell their own stories through citizen journalism rather than aiming for professional news practices produced more meaningful work. Such findings suggest important directions for researchers to turn.
- Citizen journalism has consistently been labeled a site of *innovation*. Robinson and DeShano (2011a) found mainstream journalists incorporate journalistic practices that are first experimented with by citizens. Flew and Wilson (2010) describe citizen journalism as Research and Development for mainstream journalism, a place to reimagine and reinvent practices and platforms. DeLuca and Lawson (2014, 371) characterize Occupy’s media use as “hotbeds of innovation.” Projects do not need to be permanent or long-standing to produce important new ways of creating journalism. What are the conditions that lead to innovative practices by citizen journalists? How do the practices and tools they pioneer then spread? At what point does the acceptance of their innovations become an act of domestication that potentially appropriates citizen creativity and originality?
- The focus on mainstream news media has meant many other *organizations that practice or support citizen journalism* have received less attention. For example, few studies have considered the pioneering Global Voices site established by Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca MacKinnon to bring together citizen voices from around the world. New enterprises such as Storyful that focus on locating and verifying citizen journalism need to be assessed. Case studies of enterprises such as Demotix that started out as a citizen photojournalism platform and morphed into an online photo agency might provide additional insights into the ways citizen journalism becomes institutionalized.

- While methodologically, Reich (2008) and Robinson and DeShano (2011a) have laid a groundwork for *ethnographies* of citizen journalism, more needs to be done. Likewise, independent citizen journalism environments need to be examined such as the practices within self-styled kitchen-table newsrooms or by citizen journalists who are simply on the streets.
- While the dominant theories used to examine citizen journalism are the sociology of journalism, the public sphere, and convergence cultures (Borger, van Hoof, and Sanders 2014), *other frameworks* might enhance our analysis. For example, Lefebvre's conception of the production of space provides a means for looking at the changing physical dynamics related to online reporting (Robinson 2011). This is especially important as citizen journalism tends to take place in contingent places (for instance, a great deal of citizen journalism takes place in public spaces). Hampton, Livio, and Goulet's (2010) term the *public realm* might help us rethink public space as produced by citizen journalists and its potential for public engagement. Other potentially helpful spatial concepts include *loose space* or *in-between space* in which threshold areas encourage improvisation and spontaneous interactions, producing a new interpretation of urban space and potentially new identities; and *spatial entitlements*, in which marginalized people lay claim to space (Franck and Stevens 2013; Johnson 2013).

Conclusion

While the future of the term, "citizen journalism," may be uncertain as other appellations become more frequently used (participatory journalism, or networked journalism, for example), the act of ordinary people creating media content that includes information ("news") has become a commonly accepted practice around the world, viewed by millions as alternative, authentic news or even simply as an everyday practice (Holton, Coddington, and de Zúñiga 2013). Likewise, this phenomena is now so intertwined with the workings of the professional news media that it is hard to imagine citizen journalism—or whatever one wants to call it—disappearing. Lest we forget, journalism is merely one set of practices within a network of activities that make up society. Citizen journalism reflects a broader paradigm shift toward more participation by more untrained people across many areas of society (consider the citizen scientist movement, or the incorporation of audience content into professional art projects, etc.).

Of all the terms used to describe this practice, citizen journalism has become the touchstone term for the last decade precisely because it reflects an ongoing normative belief that news is connected to a potentially positive form of civic behavior, which in turn harkens toward the long-standing idea that journalism is intimately tied to democracy. While Zelizer (2013) has proposed that democracy's connection with journalism is past its sell-by date, this is actually an anxiety for scholars located in liberal democracies where citizenship and democracy are sagging under the weight of neo-liberal economic systems. Indeed, those same ideologies have attempted to commodify citizen journalism to the extent that we risk giving up on its possibilities. Yet accounts of citizen journalism in non-democratic contexts would suggest that its very claim to enact

accountability are what make it such a threat to authoritarians and other oppressors with softer faces who would seek to strangle those inclinations. Finally, dismissing the “citizen” from ordinary people’s content production is an act of pessimism that suggests the scholarly world is too removed from the streets to appreciate what is happening there. Rather than accept the fear that citizen journalism promises too much or describes a world we cannot create, let us instead embrace high expectations for ordinary people hoisting their cell phones not just as recorders of natural catastrophes and sudden eruptions of political actions but as beacons that light the darkness amidst disaster and bravely expose the fearsome shadows of oppression.

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