Citizen Journalism: A Review of the Literature

This paper examines the depth of academic literature on Citizen Journalism. The texts used for this study have been taken in no particular order and then grouped based on their key themes. The review first addresses the theme of the emergence of citizen journalism, then moves to the definition of citizen journalism. Further, it touches on the interaction of citizen journalism with professional journalism, followed by the theme of relevance of citizen journalism.

Citizen journalism is not a twentieth-century phenomenon. The roots of citizen journalism date back to the eighteenth century (Barnes, 2012). However, it was in a different form than today. Barnes (2012) quotes Dan Gilmor in his paper, "Citizen journalism has existed in the form of independent community papers and newsletters since the eighteenth century" (Gilmor, 2004, cited in Barnes, 2012, p.17). From there, it developed alongside the postal system, the telegraph and the telephone, which later developed into the form we see today (2012, p.17).

In the case of independent citizen journalism, Wall (2015) writes that the first wave of independent citizen journalists were amateur news bloggers who primarily curated information by "gate watching" professional news, while only a few provided original content (2015, p.802).

The literature on the emergence and early citizen journalism is underexplored compared to the scholarship on citizen journalism in contemporary times. It should not be a surprise that citizen journalism's relevance has evolved and become "an essential part of news gathering and delivery around the world" (Wall, 2015, p.797).

Even though this subject is well researched, the term "Citizen Journalism" across the literature has blurred boundaries and multiple alternative names. Wall (2015) cites Mortensen, who suggests there is a "lack of clarity and conceptualization" in the term citizen journalism (Mortensen, 2011, cited in Wall, 2015, p.798). Swasy et al. (2015, pp.226-227) offer the alternative names found in the literature are:

Grassroots journalism, open-source journalism, participatory journalism, hyper-local journalism, distributed journalism, networked journalism, user-generated journalism and we-media.

This study also remarks that "citizen journalism" seems to be the most used term (2015, pp.226-227). Contrary to this, Wall (2015) refers to "user-generated content (UGC)" as the commonly used term (2015, p.798).

Wall (2015) admits that scholars have tried to describe citizen journalism but have failed to adhere to a single definition, as each incorporates different perspectives and concepts. Her definition of the term in the article is "news content (text, video, audio, interactives, etc.) produced by non-professionals" (2015, p.797) appears to be vague and broad. This definition is more oriented towards "citizenship" in citizen journalism; she emphasises the idea of non-professionals disseminating news content. The clarity of this definition seems limited compared to the definitions offered by Barnes (2012, p.16); he argues that citizen journalism is that:

People without professional or formal training in journalism have an opportunity to use the tools of modern technology and the almost limitless reach of the Internet to create content that would otherwise not be revealed, as this kind of journalism goes far beyond the reach of professional journalism.

In contrast to Wall's definition, he defines it in terms of journalism; he focuses on the journalistic aspects of citizen journalism: how different it is from professional journalism.

Also, Sienkiewicz (2014) describes citizen journalism's two-tier model as "amateur producers expose new truths via online technologies and mainstream media sources echo a small proportion of this information" (2014, p.692). This definition includes a space to explain how mainstream media react to the news from citizen journalists. However, this is not the case with every news report.

Scholars have studied citizen journalism and its interaction with professional journalism. An ample amount of scholarship has been done in this field to determine how professional journalism received citizen journalism, their differences, and their integration (Wall, 2015, p.798). Wall (2015) writes about how professional journalism responded to citizen journalism in its earlier stages. She connotes a "less-than enthusiastic embrace" by the mainstream media, criticized citizen journalism and views it as unethical, untrustworthy, emotional and subjective (2015, p.799). A similar research outcome was obtained by Williams et al. (2010). However, unlike Wall's research, Williams et al. focused especially on BBC and its reception of User Generated Content (UGC). He argues, "The BBC is more interested in showing its journalists what they can get from the audience than in encouraging collaborative news journalism" (2010, p.89). The results of both studies show a conventional attitude of professional journalism while interacting with citizen journalism; they also portray that professional journalists value traditional norms like gatekeeping more than welcoming a new set of practices.

Another set of research was in identifying differences between professional journalism and citizen journalism. Swasy et al. note the key differences between the two and write them as a part of the context, then conclude that the traditional notions make traditional reporting more credible than citizen news (2015, pp.226- 234). However, the sample of her study was recruited from classes at a journalism school; her survey participants were journalism

students, people who study and embrace the notions of journalism. It would not surprise if they have reported that traditional reporting is more credible than citizen news. On the other hand, Johnson and John III (2015, p.348) argue that:

> Citizen journalists who have worked in traditional media will indicate that traditional notions of journalism are more integral to their storytelling than those who have not worked in traditional media.

While comparing these two studies, Swasy et al. claim they have failed to incorporate the works of citizen journalists who were previously professional journalists. Also, Johnson and John III's argument invalidates Swasy et al.'s results and conclusion; this scope leads to the question of how ex-professional citizen journalists can be distinguished from traditional reporters if they embody traditional notions.

While most scholars tried differentiating and segregating citizen journalism from professional journalism, few focused on their integration. Barnes (2012) was one among them. Barnes's studies show citizen journalism and professional journalism can coexist to obtain the complete picture. He uses successful cases of collaboration, like the Southeast Asian tsunami of 2004 and the Haiti earthquake of 2010, et cetera, as evidence to support his claim (2012, pp.22-25). His study could fail to include instances where professional journalism and citizen journalism did not go well together. He could have included them and explained the steps for a successful collaboration. However, as a filling of some gaps in this research area, Lewis et al. (2013) write on how community newspapers negotiate the professional complexities posed by citizen journalism. This is a more detailed study with the inclusion of multiple perspectives of community newspaper editors towards the integration with citizen journalism. This study does not conclude if they can co-exist or not but takes a neutral position; "editors of community newspapers are thinking about citizen journalism" (2013, p.163- 176). This study, dated in 2013, appears obsolete with the evolution of the journalism industry.

Further, while covering most aspects of citizen journalism, scholars have not failed to answer the question, "Why is citizen journalism important/ what is its relevance?" Perhaps the first and most robust argument for its importance was given by McQuail (1987). He writes, "Communication is too important to be left to professionals" (1987, no pagination). From this basic idea, the relevance of citizen journalism has become a major focus in the research field. In most studies, this question is answered "unintentionally" as the research shall be on different areas, but in the end, it also reflects on the relevance. For example, Hanska-Ahy and Shapour (2012) examine how the collaboration between newsrooms changed from 2009 to 2011. However, they note the vital role played by citizen journalism in covering two of the significant events in 2009 and 2011: the Iran protests and the Arab uprisings, respectively.

Another significant leap forward in this area of research was undertaken by Campbell (2014). He identifies the gaps in theories of citizenship in this field and writes a paper on "theories construct citizen journalism as a tool for citizenship" (2014, p.1). This work intends to provide insights into the relevance of "dynamic and multi-faceted forms of citizenship at work within citizen journalism" (Campbell, 2014, p.12).

In conclusion, examining the depth of the literature of citizen journalism, the work intended to portray a landscape of the literature. Here are the findings of this literature review. Certain areas of citizen journalism turned out to be well-researched, while some areas needed to be explored more. The emergence of this phenomenon remains an area that needs more scholarship. Scholars have yet to theorize an exact definition of citizen journalism. Characteristics of citizen journalists who are ex-professional journalists need to be studied more to gain a clear and concise picture of them. Even though the journalistic aspects of citizen journalism have been thoroughly studied, its "citizenship" element remains understudied comparatively.

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