

The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Opportunities and Challenges

Zejun Wang

China Three Gorges University, Yichang, Hubei, China

Abstract: *With the global popularisation of internet technology and the rise of social media, citizen journalism has become a widely discussed and rapidly developing form of news communication. Citizen journalism provides a platform for ordinary people to make their voices heard, making news reports more diversified and rich. In addition, the theoretical basis of citizen journalism includes civil society theory, participatory culture theory, public sphere theory, audience theory, etc., which lays the foundation for the development of citizen journalism. At present, citizen journalism has become an important part of journalism, providing the public with abundant news information. This paper aims to explore the conditions under which citizen journalism develops vigorously, analyze the characteristics, advantages and existing problems behind it, as well as its historical conditions and theoretical basis, in order to provide useful references for the future development of citizen journalism.*

Keywords: Citizen journalism, participatory culture, public sphere, mass communication, communication and social change.

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizen journalism, also referred to as grassroots journalism, participatory journalism or mass journalism, is linked to the rise of the Internet and the advancement of mobile phones and other portable media, and has experienced significant growth in recent years. These highly digital information technologies enable ordinary citizens to actively participate in the production and dissemination of relevant news, enabling them to assume a more critical role in society. At the same time, citizen journalism has challenged the status of mainstream media newsrooms and disrupted the original media ecosystem. Of course, it's not easy to define citizen journalism. Many scholars have made theoretical attempts to define citizen journalism. However, there is no consensus regarding the definition of citizen journalism (Kin & Lowrey, 2015, p. 311). The relevant literature commonly refers to these individuals as participatory journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers, aspiring journalists, non-profit journalists, and tweeters.

Through these aspects, it is not difficult to see that the flourishing of citizen journalism cannot be separated from the diverse needs of citizens, the increasing awareness of participation and the rise of social media. Citizen journalism can make up for the shortcomings of traditional media to a certain extent, meet people's more diversified news needs, and provide audiences with more comprehensive and objective news perspectives. With the improvement of citizens' awareness of participation, more and more people pay attention to social affairs and participate in news reports. This awareness provides a steady source of power for the development of citizen journalism. The rise of social media has provided abundant channels for citizen journalism to spread. Users can obtain information more conveniently and quickly, and it has also provided a bigger stage for citizen journalism to spread. In addition, citizen journalism can spread news events in a timely manner, so that the audience can better understand the news dynamics.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The concept of citizen journalism was first proposed by American journalist Dan Gillmor in 2002. He believes that citizen journalism is a way for ordinary citizens to report, comment on and disseminate news events in their spare time and by their own will. In recent years, both domestic and international scholars have extensively researched citizen journalism, concluding that the growth of citizen awareness and the surge of enthusiasm for participation signify the gradual integration of the participation ethos into the concept of citizen journalism.

The famous German playwright Bertolt Brecht recognized the potential Of Radio technology as a medium for collective participation, and in his 1932 "Theory Of Radio" the medium of expression should become a technology of communication and thus of participation. In other words, if it were capable of receiving as well as transmitting, enabling the listener to speak as well as hear, and fostering a sense of relationship rather than isolation, then a new

paradigm would be established, one in which the radio would move away from simply supplying content and instead organize its listeners as contributors.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, citizen journalism took the form of community newspapers, independent magazines, and underground publications. After the emergence of community radio, "community media" became a central concept in the field of media and communication, encompassing participatory media practices. The framework of other concepts includes "alternative media", "grassroots news", "mass news", etc. At this time, these media were usually founded by community members or independent journalists, and their coverage was often local news and special interest groups ignored by mainstream media.

In the early days of the internet, there was an increase in media participation and interactivity. The emergence of online news sparked predictions that the survival of mainstream media would be greatly affected. Some commentators view this as a serious threat to traditional news. Conversely, others perceive it as a new trend in the transformation and integration of traditional media. It is believed that online news will usher in a new era. Famous critic Marshall McLuhan has optimistically appraised electronic media for endowing people with a strong trust in online news. Such commendable behavior ventures to explore new possibilities. The social production process, with the masses themselves having actual means, enables greater participation in the development of the journalism.

Citizen journalism is also beginning to appear in online forums, blogs and personal websites. At this stage, citizen journalism is mainly presented in the form of text, and the content is usually the comments and opinions of media personnel on current affairs.

With the emergence of social media, citizen journalism has entered a new stage. Ordinary citizens can use social media platforms to publish photos and videos in real time, greatly improving the speed and scope of transmission, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, etc. In addition, the popularity of mobile devices encourages more people to join the ranks of citizen journalists.

3. RESEARCH DISCUSSION

3.1 Conditions for Citizen Journalism to Thrive

In the writings of Innis (1950, 1951) and McLuhan (1964, 1989), the emphasis is on the significant role played by information and communication technology in social and historical shifts. Specifically, McLuhan (1964) devotes himself to examining technological outcomes on popular culture and how these results impact human conduct and its associations in society (Mapudzi, H&Osunkune, 2017). The maxim 'the media is informative' aids in comprehending how digital media can assist 21st century individuals in contributing positively to the advancement of news.

Habermas's (1992) concept of the public sphere is also very important for citizen journalism. He elaborated on an ideal, rational and open public space in which citizens can freely participate in discussions and supervise and restrain political power. The success of the public sphere fosters the growth of citizen journalism and is essential to the functioning of a democratic society. This implies that the dominant view of the media involves enabling the Habermasian model of rational public debate. Meanwhile, citizen journalism has shown to be a feasible substitute public space (Gillmor, 2006).

The technical conditions and theoretical support for the development of citizen journalism have been introduced above. Next, I will talk about the social conditions for the prosperity of citizen journalism. A journalist's role varies each day, involving editing and decision-making based on criteria such as relevance, significance, and visual appeal. In the process, the shortcomings of professional media are revealed. Journalists may face limitations and external pressures that affect their choice of news coverage, leading them to prioritize certain social issues that align with their established norms of newsworthiness while disregarding others. Under these conditions, citizen journalism came into being.

In addition, the perfection of laws and regulations, the popularization of journalism education and the change of social environment also promote the prosperity of citizen journalism. It is foreseeable that citizen journalism will continue to play an important role in the future, providing people with more diversified news reports.

3.2 Advantages and Problems of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism can spread quickly and has strong timeliness, which is helpful to the reporting of emergencies and hot issues. The communication model of the 21st century is characterized by less trust in authoritative information, while mass media consumption is more welcomed, taking advantage of the online world to become news producers. Mainstream journalists cannot be everywhere all the time. This is where citizen journalists come in. They gather breaking news, dig up the news from a compelling Angle, and citizens use their mobile phones to quickly record what is really happening. Citizen journalism provides more diversified opinions and perspectives, enriches the content and form of news reports, and complements and complements professional journalism.

A typical case is the occurrence of the tsunami in South Asia in 2004, which made the term "citizen journalism" rapidly popular. Many people were killed and injured, but mainstream journalists were not around because of the sudden events and relied heavily on "amateur content" to tell stories about what was happening in the affected areas. A large number of first-person accounts, photos taken by mobile phones or cameras, and video content were released, and citizens told the story from different perspectives, which enriched the reporting of related events and made it more inclusive and complete. In this respect, Rushkoff (2003) highlights that interactive technologies may point towards a glimmer of hope for revitalising authentic civic participation. It's not hard to see that citizen journalism is often better able to tell stories that have been marginalized by mainstream news, which gives a voice to the voiceless, which helps democratize journalism to some extent, making reporting more transparent and credible, and letting the public know what's going on.

Of course, citizen journalism still falls short in many ways. For one thing, it is uneven in quality, unreliable and prone to misreporting. In communication research, it is widely recognised that the credibility of a source can significantly affect the way information is interpreted. The message itself is evaluated based on the reliability of the source (Eastin, 2001). Secondly, citizen news may be used to spread rumors and incite social conflicts, which will greatly affect the stability of society. Some individuals view citizen journalists in a negative light, suggesting that they produce and share subjective, egocentric, lightweight, or locally-focused content on social media platforms (Holt & Karlsson, 2015). Finally, due to the lack of journalistic training, professional knowledge and organization, citizen journalists may violate others' right of privacy and reputation when reporting, and cause legal disputes, even though they may not be aware of these rules. Although professional journalists do not fully agree with the new forms of journalism, citizen journalism has gained great recognition in the society because of the importance of journalism itself and the Internet.

4. CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the development process, dissemination mechanism, and impact of citizen journalism, and proposes the conditions for promoting the prosperity of citizen journalism, which can flourish under certain historical conditions and theoretical basis. The popularization of internet technology and the rise of social media have provided communication channels and platforms for citizen news, enabling it to be quickly and widely disseminated. The proliferation of varied news concepts and increased citizen participation awareness have facilitated the growth of citizen journalism, motivating more individuals to engage in news reporting and dissemination. The emergence of the self-media era presents an opportunity for robust growth in citizen journalism, allowing for its presentation to the public in a more diverse and content-rich form. These conditions jointly promote the rapid development of citizen journalism and provide more possibilities for the news industry to develop. Although citizen journalism faces many challenges in its development process, its unique value cannot be ignored. In the future, citizen journalism will achieve greater development in a constantly evolving media environment.

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