



## Citizen journalism and cultural migration of media: A case study of Cj.IBNLive

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The study has been carried out to draw inferences about citizen journalism trends in India and priorities of citizen journalists. It intends to find out if citizen journalists cover news, which is otherwise missed by mainstream media.

**Methodology:** The study involved Content Analysis of the pictures and videos posted on the citizen journalism website Cj.ibnlive.

**Findings:** Citizen journalists highlight the issues confronting them more than the issues that often hog the headlines in mainstream media. They particularly expose the indifference of authorities towards their plight.

**Social Implications:** Citizen journalism has given ordinary citizens a platform to draw attention to the issues concerning them. It has lent voice to people who otherwise had no means to convey their grievances or put their ideas across.

**Keywords:** Citizen Journalism, CNN-IBN, IBNLive, ICT, New Media

**Paper Type:** Research

### **Introduction**

New communication technologies over the years have driven a drastic change in journalism. From printing press to Internet, journalism has undergone transformations with each new medium coming into existence. New media has not only made dissemination of information faster, but has altered the direction of this information flow. Earlier professional journalists would solely take up the responsibility of disseminating news and information. But now, the situation is entirely different. No longer does information flow in one-way, top-down direction from media persons to passive audience. But the audience is now actively involved in journalistic activities. They not only respond to the content carried in mainstream media, but produce the content themselves. A technologically empowered audience has given birth to new form of journalism altogether, popularly called citizen journalism. This is seen as a cultural migration in the field of journalism.

### **Information and Communication Technology**

The term information and communication technology (ICT) is used to describe telecommunications, computing and related areas. It is used (over information technology or IT) to indicate the dynamism that can be achieved with the convergence of computing and telecommunications. ICT makes possible the fast and worldwide exchange of information, and has the capacity to revolutionise work processes, service delivery, etc (Sharma, 2006). In other words, ICTs are a diverse set of technological

tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information.

ICT is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer, and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. When such technologies are used for educational purposes, namely to support and improve the learning of students and to develop learning environments, ICT can be considered as a subfield of Educational Technology. The use of information and communication technologies in education makes teaching– learning process effective and interesting **(Kumar, 2009)**.

ICT has become, within a very short time, one of the basic building blocks of modern society. It has become an increasingly prevalent feature in many aspects of life in contemporary western societies, including education. Children growing up in these societies are likely to spend large amounts of time watching television and videos, many will have access to home computers, and all will encounter a wide range of technology in their day-to-day lives **(O’Hara, 2004)**.

Many of the momentous economic and social changes that have been experienced in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been facilitated by or are directly due to a dramatic increase in the capabilities and availability of information and communication technologies. The remarkable uptake of ICT has not only affected the technology and telecommunications sectors, but rippled through nearly every aspect of the economy and society in many countries. The increased impact of ICT is due to a dramatic increase in its power. ICT cover a broad range of technologies. While commonly associated with computers, the term also includes other informational media, such as handheld devices, television, radio and even print. To these information technologies can be added communications technologies, such as telephones and networks. While this definition hardly leaves anything out, the power of the term comes from the convergence of the ever-increasing information processing capabilities of computers and the information exchange capabilities of networks. It is the combined processing and networking power of contemporary ICT that has launched a global socio-economic paradigm shift when other, earlier technologies like radio and television did not **(Kozma, 2011)**.

### **Citizen Journalism**

With the advent of information and communication technologies and interactive nature of Internet, many people nowadays are participating in journalistic activities by way of capturing news and circulating it globally.

Cellular phones, digital cameras, Internet and blogging have made it possible for ordinary citizens to be journalists, who are thus termed as citizen journalists.

Citizen journalism is also known as public or participatory journalism and democratic journalism (**Baase, 2008**). It is the act of non-professionals, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires (**Bowman & Willis, 2008**). Citizen journalists are basically the audience, viewers or readers, who too want to share their stories and concerns in the society they live in.

**Webopedia Online Computer Dictionary (2012)** defines citizen journalism as a term used to describe the movement of people and amateur journalists—basically any non-professional journalists—who provide photos, videos and written news pieces on evolving stories, often in collaboration with professional journalists.

Former Chicago Tribune publisher **Fuller (1996)**, in his book *News Values*, sums it up well: ‘The new interactive medium both threatens the status quo and promises an exciting new way of learning about the world.’ This deftly describes both camps of opinion concerning participation by the audience in journalism.

*“I understand the fears of those, who worry it may do damage to the way we think and govern ourselves, but this is no time to retreat to the monastery and pine away for the past. It is better to look for a renaissance. The newspaper business is more thrilling today than it has ever been, because the challenge is so great and so much is at stake. If we are clever enough and quick enough, we will find a way to use the new medium to attract an audience by giving it information that matters. If we keep our news values straight, we can continue to make a profit helping society remain open and strong.”*

At present a number of television channels, news portals and blog sites across the globe offer common masses a platform to be citizen journalists and share their stories with rest of the world. Infact, the number of such organisations is constantly increasing as the number of citizen journalists continues to rise.

### **Citizen Journalism in India**

The Internet has nowadays become a very powerful medium for citizen journalism in India. The first websites devoted to news in India—Samachar.com and Rediff.com—were set up in the mid-1990s by entrepreneurs Rajesh Jain and Ajit Balakrishnan. Traditional English and Indian language newspapers soon went online, and several other news

websites unrelated to media groups were set up. Hundreds of thousands of Indians have since then created their own personal blogs to debate a range of topics. Blogging has yet to reach Western levels, but there are indications that it is rapidly gaining popularity. Citizen journalism has influenced the reporting of crises, intervened in social and human rights issues, exposed political corruption (e.g. Tehelka.com), highlighted malpractices in mainstream media (e.g. the Pen Pricks blog), and voiced issues of concern to women in a male-dominated society. The internet has enabled civic society groups to enhance awareness of events and issues, evoke reactions and coordinate protests in different parts of India. The reporting of the Mumbai rains in July 2005 was high-water mark, as commentators remarked that it signaled the beginning of internet-based citizen journalism in the country. Several websites published the eyewitness accounts of the incessant rains, updating them regularly with information and advice for help. The news portal Rediff.com, which registers a large number of hits from within India as well as outside, also became a crucial link for rescue acts. The key source of breaking the news on the rains was no longer the radio, television, or the press, but a news portal (**Sonwalkar, 2009**).

Many observers have argued that citizen journalism on social media came into its own in 2008 following 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, when Twitter (an online social networking and microblogging service) became an important source of news on the crisis. Blogs too have become important tools for citizen journalists to write on the issues they want to highlight. In India, there are a number of citizen journalism blog sites at present that include Newmeback.com, Citizenjournalistofindia.blogspot.com, Instablogs.com, Citizensreport.in and so on.

News portals have further widened the parameters of public participation. At present various citizen journalism websites are operating in India. Prominent among them are MeriNews, MyNews, Cplash, WorldSnap News, The Viewspaper, Purdafash and Inewss.

MeriNews is the first Indian news portal wholly devoted to citizen journalism. The term MeriNews means 'my news' in Hindi. It was set up by its founder and editor Upadhyay in 2006 with the motto: "Power to People." He called his website a 'product with a mission; a people's news platform of the people, by the people, for the people, providing power to the people and empowering democracy (**Sonwalkar, 2009**).

On the other hand, citizen journalism is yet to take off fully in Indian newspapers. The reason for this can be that writing to newspapers has its limitations, such as circumscribed space and a newspaper's inability to reproduce more than a small fraction of the mail it receives. Sunil Abraham, director, Centre for Internet and Society (CIS India), believes traditional newspapers too should empower citizen journalism and

expose their primary research databases, such as photos, video and audio recordings, and documents to the public using web technologies **(Abraham, 2012)**.

### **Citizen Journalism Initiative by CNN-IBN**

The concept of television citizen journalism was started in India by Cable News Network-Indian Broadcasting Network (CNN-IBN), an English-language Indian television news channel. In 2005, the news channel provided the citizens of India a platform to articulate the issues concerning them, like corruption, politics, education, health, society, so on and so forth. The trend was later followed by several other media organizations.

In 2007, CNN-IBN took user-generated content to a new level by airing the series, 'The Citizen Journalist Show: Be the Change' that has been inviting the citizens to use the show and the power of media to raise their issues. Since then, scores of people have sent in video reports, photographs and posted blogs to report on a variety of issues and from across the country. The reports are mostly based on local issues, or are local repercussions of national issues. The show bagged the *Indiantelevision.com's* News Television Award 2012 in social awareness category. The award is being endorsed by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

CNN-IBN in partnership with Idea, an Indian mobile services operator, introduced the Citizen Journalist Awards in 2007. The award is an initiative of IBN Network to recognize the efforts of individuals, who dared to fight corruption and uncover the truth **(Cjkhobar.ibnlive)**.

Some other news channels as well have experimented with their own citizen journalism initiatives. The Hindi language news channel IBN-7, the sister concern of CNN-IBN, too has been aggressively marketing its show 'Citizen Journalist'. The programme is a stage for citizen-journalists around the country to conceive, document and present a story of social and political relevance on national television. As per the editor-in-chief of IBN-7 and CNN-IBN, the idea to initiate citizen journalism on both channels was "to build a citizenry that is engaged with public life" **(Rajagopalan, 2006)**.

Later other television channels too followed the suit. MTV India came up with 'My India Report' to endorse citizen journalism. On English language news channel NDTV 24x7, text messages from the viewing public have forced courts to re-open long-standing unresolved criminal cases and expedite the delivery of justice. After the 2004 tsunami hit Eastern and Southern Coastal India and in the wake of the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, eye-witness accounts sent in by SMS supplied early facts about

the incidents. They have often exposed inadequacies in disaster management and emergency facilities on the spot.

In January 2011, another Indian English language news channel NewsX launched community journalism show, 'Speak Out India'. The programme telecasts content sent in by community journalists from all across the country, including under-covered areas, such as slums and villages.

### **Cj.ibnlive.in.com**

The Indian television news channel CNN-IBN has been inviting photos and videos from citizens to be carried on its citizen journalism website Cj.ibnlive (<http://www.cj.ibnlive.in.com>) since 2007. Every day, people across India and the world share stories of the events happening near them and personal opinions about issues in the headlines. The current study analyses the content uploaded on this particular site.

The content is selected on the basis of certain criteria and 'community guidelines' set by CNN-IBN. One has to be at least 13 years old to participate. The images and videos should be original. CJ reports should be about real events or real opinions on events. If someone is posting material they think may be difficult for sensitive audiences, they are advised to warn CNN-IBN by adding 'discretion advised' to their post, who then in turn add a warning with the post.

CNN-IBN does not welcome or publish following:

- Content that infringes someone's copyright
- Content that is not based on facts,
- Spam or repeated uploads that flood the site with duplicate versions of the same or similar content
- Obscene/lewd content
- Content that advocates violent behaviour, content that contains violent images of killing or physical abuse that appear to have been captured solely, or principally, for exploitive, prurient or gratuitous purposes.
- Content that advocates dangerous, illegal or predatory acts or poses a reasonable threat to personal or public safety.
- Hate speech/racially or ethnically offensive content.

If someone posts something that violates the Community Guidelines, moderators remove it from the site. And if the CJ posts more than three pieces of material that needs to be removed from the site, their account is disabled (**Cj.ibnlive**).

### **Review of Literature**

Citizen journalism is a concept variously seen as either the revolution in the field of journalism or the end of the literate media world. So far many studies with regard to status of citizen journalism in media have been

conducted in the recent past. While some studies focus on the emergence of citizen journalism, others underline the role of citizen journalists and bloggers in highlighting the issues concerning them. Media researchers have put forward mixed views about the impact of citizen journalism on the traditional journalism and society at large. Some of the earlier work underlined the positive side of citizen journalism. **Schaffer (2006)** observed that citizen journalism was emerging as a form of 'bridge' media, linking traditional forms of journalism with classic civic participation. He argued that citizen journalists were occupying civic spaces, where professional journalists would only squirm. As many as 98 per cent of the respondents in a web survey stated that the emergence of local news websites with content built from community members was a good thing, even though it may not all be the kind of journalism and finished stories one may see in a newspaper. **Bentley's (2008)** work suggested that traditional journalists should overcome their fear and skepticism about citizen journalism, as it can never replace professional journalism. He argued that citizen journalists don't want newsroom jobs; they just want to say something, because those on the professional side are too busy with the big stories to see the little items that mean so much to people. **Carpenter (2010)** argued that non-professional online citizen journalists tend to publish more diverse content than established, traditional media organs. The researcher found that online citizen journalism content adds to the diversity of information available in the marketplace. **Mutsvairo (2012)** concluded that participation in citizen journalism remains dependent on access to information and communications technology, in particular for Africans. But the increasing adoption of mobile phones and, in recent years, mobile Internet services, is lowering this technological barrier. Particularly in times of crisis, when reports from conventional media are absent, citizen journalists are relaying critical information. Blogs and microblogs are not merely news platforms, but also means to express emotions and spaces for discussion. Some studies, however, have taken a different approach by looking at risks and negative aspects of citizen journalism. They concluded that citizen journalism has a posed threat to mainstream media. **Schultz and Sheffer (2009)** argued that media outlets have ceded almost total control of the content and distribution process to citizen journalists, who are motivated more by self expression and a desire to change public opinion than they are by traditional journalism. A survey of citizen journalists was conducted to assess what, if any, impact they are having on traditional news values, such as balanced reporting, double checking facts and ethical reporting. Similarly, **Bruns (2009)** stated that citizen journalism had so far failed to translate into participation by a more representative cross-section of the overall citizenry. He feared that it may lead to the

disappearance of many professional journalism institutions without sufficient replacement. He, however, acknowledged that it may lead to the development of sustainable hybrid models, which combine the best of professional and citizen journalism to free up paid journalism staff to create content, add value to citizen journalism content, and curate the combined product.

**Corrêa and Madureira (2009)** observed that credibility of information was one of the major challenges posed by citizen journalism. From a qualitative analysis of the leading Brazilian web portals, they concluded that mere reporting on a personal experience was insufficient to turn a story credible, without an investigative work by journalists inside the portals' newsrooms. Citizen journalists, they felt, generally did not bother to look for sources of information or clarify their techniques of investigation. **Vanderwagen (2012)** studied the impact of Twitter, as a vehicle of citizen journalism, on journalists in South Africa. He argued that the normative role of the journalist as gatekeeper had been challenged by citizen journalism and Twitter. Sometime back, citizen journalists utilized Twitter to break and create news in South Africa and globally, resulting in a shift in the way journalists source and distribute news. While news is widely available on the social media network, the role of the journalist to be fair, accurate and thorough is heightened by the volume of possible and potentially non-credible news sources. Some studies saw a co-relation between citizen journalism and mainstream media. **Johnson (2009)** examined 329 posts made by citizens to CNN's iReport.com about the 2008 presidential elections. A content analysis showed a correlation between stories posted on iReport and stories covered by traditional media. The top stories covered by traditional media were found to be the same stories written about by citizen journalists. **Leach and Gilbert (2010)** examined the interplay between traditional newsrooms and non-traditional media in three different markets. They looked at how Fourth Estate journalists interacted with Fifth Estate media practitioners and explained similarities and differences in how information was collected and presented online. Several examples of traditional media and new media relationships were identified. The study evaluated whether Fourth and Fifth Estate entities can co-exist and asked: "What is the outlook for marriage, or at least a lasting relationship, between traditional media and new media?"

It is, thus, concluded from the review of previous research work that it is neither possible, nor feasible for citizen journalists to replace professional journalists. However, whenever they report something, which is genuine and newsworthy, but beyond the reach of professional journalists, their role should be accepted and acknowledged.



### **Objectives**

- To assess role of citizen journalism in fostering people's voice.
- To study nature of updates on Cj.ibnlive.in.com and identify dominant themes.
- To find out if citizen journalists cover news otherwise missed by mainstream media.

### **Methodology**

Case Study method was used for the research. The citizen journalism website Cj.ibnlive has been the mainstay of the study.

The objectives set for the current study were achieved by Content Analysis method. The study involved Content Analysis of the pictures and videos posted on Cj.ibnlive. The analysis was made about the nature of updates to draw inferences about trends of the citizen journalism sites and priorities of citizen journalists in terms of issues raised.

The study covered a period of two years from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2011. The period was selected to study the latest trends in citizen journalism.

### **Sample**

Cj.ibnlive (<http://www.cj.ibnlive.in.com>), the citizen journalism website of the Indian television news channel CNN-IBN, has been selected as sample for the study. The reason for selecting it as sample is that it is one of the most visited and popular citizen journalism websites in India.

### **Findings**

During the reference period, overall 238 citizen journalism updates were carried by Cj.ibnlive.in.com that included pictures and videos.

### **Update Type**

Among all, 184 were pictures updates, 52 were video updates, while two were picture-cum-video updates. Most of the picture updates carried multiple images. All the pictures were accompanied by captions, while many pictures and some videos were supported by text that went beyond the ideal length of a standard caption. The text provided detailed background of the pictures and videos and explained the context in which they were shot.

### **Update Themes**

The update themes were divided into 21 categories, viz official negligence, offense, corruption, accidents, civic amenities, health, environment, sports, off-beat, science, natural calamity, transport

system, politics, social issue, civic responsibility, religion, education, entertainment, weather, miscellaneous and CJ impact.

### **Theme Content**

Maximum number of updates (52) highlighted negligence of authorities in carrying out their professional duties. These updates revealed official negligence towards wastage of resources like water, electricity and public capital, damaged infrastructure, dog menace, substandard construction, faulty traffic signals, lack of facilities at railway stations and in trains and so on. This category was followed by offense (24), which revealed law violation by public as well as law enforcers. The updates mainly highlighted violation of traffic rules, usage of illegal car registration number plates, smoking at public places and encroachment of a public place. 5 of the updates exposed law violation by police officials and authorities.

Corruption formed another major category, with 21 updates devoted to the theme. Majority of these updates reflected support for social activist Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement and Lokpal Bill. Some other issues highlighted were stamp paper scam and bribery on part of police and other officials. The next most dominating category was that of accidents that carried 17 updates. These updates were based on hard news that covered road and train accidents, air crashes and fire incidents. Civic amenities was another major category comprising of 16 updates. Some of the issues highlighted through pictures and videos were deplorable condition of roads, depilated drainage system, water scarcity and shortage of electricity.

Health carried 13 updates that revealed awful condition of hospitals and health centres, medical negligence and marketing of unhygienic food. Another major category was environment that carried 12 updates. These mainly highlighted deteriorating condition of water bodies, illegal garbage disposal, plastic menace and illegal encroachment on lakes. Some other major categories included sports (11), off-beat (10) and science (8). Natural calamity and transport system included 7 updates each. Politics carried 6 updates based on election rallies and protests by political parties. 6 updates were based on social issue that highlighted poverty, child labour and racial discrimination.

Among others, civic responsibility and religion carried 4 updates each, while education, entertainment and weather carried 3 updates each. Some other themes covered were heritage, tradition, arts and agriculture that carried 1 update each, while aviation carried 2 updates. These formed the Miscellaneous category.

Apart from these, there was an update on CJ impact. The picture showed an illegal encroachment being demolished after a citizen journalist

highlighted the issue on the website under study. The caption of the picture was 'Impact Of CJ Changes Scenario Outside Byculla Station.'

### **Conclusion**

Citizen journalism, especially CNN-IBN initiative, has given ordinary citizens a platform to draw attention to the issues concerning them. It has literally lent voice to people who otherwise had no means to convey their grievances or put their ideas across. Citizen journalists are more curious to report about the grave and hidden issues that lie right under their nose, which is the actual purpose of citizen journalism. They highlight the issues confronting them more than the issues that often hog the headlines in mainstream media. They are keener to highlight official apathy towards their plight in their vicinity than political drama elsewhere. Violation of traffic and other rules in public, especially on part of police officials and other law enforcers, is what citizen journalists are actually concerned about rather than gossips of entertainment world or records being broken in sports. Citizen journalists participate with full enthusiasm in anti-corruption campaigns. Lack of civic amenities, like roads, water and electricity, poor health services and deplorable condition of water bodies are among other concerns that compel them participate in journalistic activities.

Citizen journalists mostly highlight the issues that are often missed by mainstream media. It is not possible for mainstream journalists to be omnipresent and thus report/capture everything that's newsworthy. Situations like a traffic police officer taking bribe from a driver who broke traffic rules, a citizen driving a car with an illegal registration number plate, street children eating leftover food of a grand sports event or five people travelling on one bike are often missed by journalists, more so because these are short-lived moments. These, however, are grave issues and make newsworthy scenes. Here comes into picture the role of citizen journalists, who can report the incident on spot by way of capturing it and writing about it. And for all this, they do not require to carry professional still or video cameras and other gadgets, which are necessary for professional journalists. All citizen journalists need is a pen and a notebook, a camera phone and internet connection that enable them share their stories with rest of the world.

Citizen journalism can have impact as well. One of the updates depicting CJ impact, wherein an illegal encroachment is shown demolished after being reported by a citizen journalist, proves that citizen journalism can not only help highlight issues but bring change for better.

## Recommendations

In order to encourage ordinary citizens participate in journalistic activities, the established news organisations, be it electronic, print or online, should take up citizen journalism initiatives on the lines of CNN-IBN. They should entertain original and newsworthy submissions from citizen journalists and encourage them to continue with participatory reporting. Such initiatives will help common masses highlight the issues concerning them that are otherwise and often missed by the mainstream media. They can also help them bring change for better. Citizen journalism initiatives by established news organisations can have more impact than less popular organisations, for the former are usually followed by a large number of people. But at the same time, the news organisations (like CNN-IBN) should implement gate-keeping for the citizen journalism content so as to do away with matter that is offensive in nature or that goes against journalistic ethics. Citizen journalists too should uphold journalistic ethics while reporting a situation. They should try and follow the guidelines laid down by the Press Council of India for journalists.

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Ms. Rabia Noor is currently pursuing her PhD in Mass Communication and Journalism from Media Education Research Centre, University of Kashmir, India. She was awarded M.Phil in the same subject in 2010.

She has worked as correspondent with English daily, *Greater Kashmir*, for five years from 2006 to 2010. She was awarded the prestigious fellowship for female journalists, *Sanjoy Ghose Fellowship* (2007-'08) by Charkha Development Communication Network. Her fellowship stories were published by many reputed national newspapers and magazines that include *Tribune*, *Yojana*, *Hindustan Express*, *In Dino*, *Kanz-ul-Iman*, etc.

She has also taught at Department of Journalism, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora and has served as Editor of the IUST's campus newspaper, *The Echo*.

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