



10. Citizen Journalism: A Study of Reach and Impact

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Abstract

*Citizen journalism is a result of technological development. It is a form of journalism where non-professional individuals, influenced by their personal sense of duty and awareness, convert local events into information and disseminate them for the betterment of society. Under citizen journalism, also called citizen reporting, an ordinary person (who is not a professional journalist) plays a key role in journalism by sending timely news to a newspaper or TV channel. They present the news as they see and interpret it. In this form, the citizen acts as reporter, analyst, and editor — without requiring any formal training. This research paper examines the **reach and impact** of citizen journalism.*

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Mainstream Media, Alternative Journalism, Citizen Reporting, News Media

Introduction

In this age of the information revolution, journalism has shifted from a mission to a profession, and the tools of the trade have changed accordingly. Small cameras and recorders have replaced bulky equipment. Today, journalists can conduct sting operations undetected. With the internet, any citizen can now act as a journalist and post events as they perceive and understand them on blogs, websites, or social media—outside editorial guidelines. These narratives can also be shared



with newspapers, TV, or radio. This form of journalism is especially popular among tech-savvy individuals with a hunger for news.

In the 21st century, the term "Citizen Journalism" emerged. Here, a citizen actively engages in gathering, reporting, and analyzing news—even without formal training. For instance, in the case of Benazir Bhutto's assassination, a citizen journalist captured a man aiming a gun on a mobile phone, discrediting the government's claim that she died by hitting the sunroof. Similarly, during the 2004 tsunami, citizen journalists—mainly tourists and locals—played a key role in conveying the disaster's scale to the world.

Objectives of the Study

1. To provide an introductory overview of citizen journalism.
2. To study the reach and impact of citizen journalism.

Meaning and Definitions of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is a product of technological advancement. It refers to journalism performed by non-professionals who report events out of a personal sense of awareness and responsibility.

Dan Gillmor, in *We the Media and Grassroots Journalism*, defined it as: **"Citizen Journalism is the journalism by the people to the people."**

Simply put, it is the democratic form of journalism where citizens at the grassroots report news for others.

According to Preeti Patnaik (New York University Stern School of Business): *"With the lowering cost of publishing, the internet has enabled citizen journalism. While it demands fearlessness, most citizen journalists operate on their own terms."*

Mainstream journalism faces limitations—economic and legal boundaries often suppress expression. Affordable tech tools (computers, video editing, internet) have given ordinary people the means to express views not covered by mainstream media. It is a university without a campus—where anyone can learn or teach journalism.



Citizen journalism is collaborative—it involves citizens in information collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination. Shane Bowman and Chris Willis's report *We Media: How Audiences are Saving the Future of News and Information* says citizen participation aims to provide independent, reliable, and relevant information.

In this framework, an ordinary citizen—without training—acts as the reporter, analyst, and editor. Despite being vast and multifaceted, citizen journalism serves a growing role. No media organization, regardless of capital or efficiency, can cover all events. Citizen journalism helps fill this gap and allows citizens to actively participate in news creation.

In India, the journey of citizen journalism is still developing. However, with the Right to Information Act, it has gained momentum. Though promising, it also faces challenges. Mainstream media often criticize it for lacking objectivity, accuracy, and balance. Some bloggers post offensive content, which tarnishes the image of this form.

Modern Trends in Citizen Journalism

Journalism has evolved through constant experimentation. The late 20th century saw an explosion of tech-driven changes. The 21st century ushered in key trends that transformed media:

- **Sting Operations**
- **Casting Couch exposés**
- **Blogging**
- **Online Journalism**
- **Citizen Journalism**

These trends reshaped the appearance, style, and thinking in journalism. The industry faced intense competition for circulation and TRPs.

Sting Operation: Derived from U.S. law enforcement slang, this term entered journalism as covert reporting to expose corruption. In India, Tehelka.com popularized it. Operations like "Operation



Duryodhan" and "Operation Chakravyuh" gave new meaning to investigative journalism, though critics argue about ethics and invasion of privacy.

Key terms in sting journalism include:

- **Electronic Snooping:** Secretly recording conversations.
- **Operation PIN:** Creating fake websites to trap criminals.
- **Agent Provocateur:** Posing undercover to expose criminals.
- **Bait Car:** Vehicles with hidden cameras to catch car thieves.
- **ABSCAM and Cops in Shops:** U.S. operations that inspired global media.
- **Casting Couch:** Using bait to expose exploitation in entertainment.

Sting journalism is now common in electronic and print media. There's even a market for ready-made sting content.

Blogging: Blogging liberated journalism. Originating from "weblog" in 1994, it evolved into a powerful tool. By 2016, India had over a million blogs, mostly by the middle class. Blogs are open platforms where anyone can express views.

Online Journalism: By the 21st century, major newspapers had joined the internet. With lifestyle changes, many prefer reading news online. Online journalism reduced costs and labor while expanding reach.

Citizen Journalism has perhaps had the biggest impact—turning viewers and readers into news contributors.

Tools of Citizen Journalism

Media is essential for communication. Citizen journalism relies on various tools that make reporting affordable and accessible:

1. **Blogging**
2. **Mobile Messaging / Video Clips**
3. **Television**
4. **Print Media**



These tools, combined with rising literacy and awareness, have empowered citizens to share views and information.

Reach and Impact of Citizen Journalism

The rise of corporate and professional journalism reduced the space for the public. Mainstream media became rigid and self-important. Journalists started believing that only their interpretation was valid. However, the growing availability of information sources and the RTI Act challenged this. Today, mainstream journalists can't ignore or misrepresent stories. Citizen journalists have exposed biases in elite media and political manipulation.

Even though the term is new in India, mainstream media has started acknowledging it. For instance, when senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai launched his new channel, it prominently featured citizen journalism. CNN-IBN invited ordinary citizens to become "Citizen Journalists," encouraging them to submit news clips and footage.

Following suit, other channels like Star News, ETV, and Hindustan newspaper have initiated programs like "You Are Also a Journalist." Radio City FM has engaged citizens in reporting traffic and monsoon updates.

While we currently see only one form of citizen journalism, the future promises broader and deeper integration. Many truths about crime and hypocrisy have come to light thanks to citizen reporters.

Supporters say it's practical—news cameras can't be everywhere. So, if an alert citizen sends in real-time footage, what's the harm?

Critics argue it undermines journalism training and reduces journalists' value. It also raises questions about credibility.

The RTI Act has opened new possibilities. India can learn from global examples like *OhMyNews* in South Korea—a successful citizen journalism venture.

Blogs often address concerns across sectors. In mainstream media, some news platforms now invite readers to contribute comments or additional information to stories.



Possibilities and Challenges

Citizen journalism offers immense potential, but it also faces hurdles. Critics argue that it lacks objectivity, factual accuracy, and balance. While there's some truth in this, its popularity and influence continue to grow.

Conclusion

Journalism is a profession that thrives on experimentation. The rise of IT in the late 20th century triggered several new trends. Print and electronic media both felt insecure in this competitive era. Sting operations, casting couch exposés, blogging, online journalism, citizen journalism, and Wikipedia have transformed journalism's scope and ethics. Rights are being redefined. The most transformative trends include **sting operations** and **citizen journalism** under new media. Their reach and impact continue to grow.

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