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## CITIZEN JOURNALISM: A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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### **Introduction**

The idea that average citizens can engage in the act of journalism was long in existence and originated in the United States. Apparently, it was the awareness of the traditional journalists of their own weaknesses in covering the electoral event during the U.S. presidential election of 1988 that led to the emergence of a group of journalists who called themselves citizen journalists. This group of journalists became part of the public, or civic journalism movement, a countermeasure against the eroding trust in the news media and widespread public disillusionment with politics and civic affairs (Merritt, 2004).

Therefore, the discussions of public journalism focus on promoting journalism that is targeted at the people by altering the way professional reporters do their work. In addition, it is a fact that contemporary public journalism efforts are expensive, time-consuming and episodic. Unless if one knows or be informed of an incident, that is when the person as a journalist goes in. Unlike the practice of citizen journalism that is spontaneous, at least,

among those who are interested in participating to submit informative articles. Since not all reporters and editors buy into this form of public journalism, even while some oppose it outright, reaching out to the people from the newsroom has ever been a daunting task. Although, the movement that marked the inception of citizen journalism has never lasted longer because, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism closed its doors in 2003 (Merriitt, 2004).

However, with the advent of the technologies, the citizen journalist movement has been revived as the average person can capture news and distribute it globally. Scholar, such as Yochai Benkler, mentioned that the capacity to infer meaning, as entailed in encoding and decoding of human meaningful statements, as well as the capacity to communicate one's meaning around the world, are no longer the prerogative of few individual users, but millions around the globe (Benkler, 2007).

Congruently, Mary-Rose Papandrea advocated that the definition of journalist was no longer limited to the "freedom of the press" where the few organised entities engaged in the publishing business, but rather the freedom to publish using a printing press. As for the printers of 1775, it was the struggle for survival that prompted their engagement rather than the actual intention of newsgathering. Hence, in order to survive financially they dedicated most of their efforts printing materials for paying clients (Papandrea, 2007).

Further still, the invention of steam presses, engendered the beginning of mass circulation throughout the eastern United States. With this principal invention, the printing press could distribute newspapers to a huge population of readers at a token amount, hence the notion of the "penny press." Thus, by the passage of time, "journalism" became a common usage as newspapers began to be circulated en masse. Additionally, the demand for advertising for brand-name products also supported the creation of publications subsidized in large part by advertising revenue. However, as the late nineteenth century approached, the

concept of the “press” metamorphosed into a description of individuals and companies engaged in an often competitive commercial media enterprise (Papandrea, 2007).

### **Citizen Journalism: A Brief Background**

The term citizen journalism can be traced to the US in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Gillmor explicates that the roots of citizen journalism can be traced to the founding of the United States in the 18th century, when pamphleteers and other authors gained notoriety by printing their own publications. Just as well, the advances in the postal system, especially, its special discount rates for newspapers? carriage, along with the telegraph and telephone helped to distribute newspapers to people efficiently.

History has it that, the advent of desktop publishing in the late '80s allowed everyone to design and print out their own publications, but distribution was still limited to a few towns and cities. For example, in the modern era, video footage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in the '60s and footage of police beating Rodney King in Los Angeles in the '80s, to mention a few, were both captured by citizens on the scene. In newspapers, there were letters to the editor and op-ed pieces submitted by citizens, and several pirate radio stations hit the airwaves without the permission of the accredited authority. Also, with the rise of the World Wide Web in the '90s, anyone could set up a personal home page to share their thoughts with the world (Mediashift, 2006).

In the '90s, individuals, such as Professor Jay Rosen of the New York University helped spearhead the public journalism or civic journalism movement, in his attempt at getting mainstream reporters to serve the public. However, just as that movement started to fade away, the notorious 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. reignited citizen journalism. At that time in 2001, only a handful of tech-savvy audience were the earliest weblogs readers, however, after 9/11, many ordinary citizens became on-the-spot witnesses to the attacks and their stories and images became a

major part of the story afterwards. Consequentially, individual writers started to gain prominence and influence in the charged atmosphere after 9/11 (The Knight Community News Network, 2006).

Moreover, citizen journalism epitomizes the belief that the experiences of people personally involved with an issue present a different, but often more complete, picture of events than can be derived from the perspective of an outsider. Due to limitations of access and time, and in some cases ulterior motives to present just one side of a story, traditional reporting risks at least the perception of being skewed. By granting access to anyone to cover the news, citizen journalism presents a more personal, nuanced view of events and has the potential to cultivate communities of people with a common interest. Through blogs, citizen journalists have broken stories about political corruption, police brutality, and other issues of concern to local and national communities.

Research has shown that participation by readers improves the quality of the news, and such participation tends to increase the trust that the community has in the news (The Knight Community News Network, 2006). Citizen journalism forces contributors to think objectively, asking probing questions and working to understand the context so that their representation of events is useful to others. These activities get people involved in new ways with the world around them, forming a deeper connection with the subjects of their investigations. For students, these are the same kinds of activities that lead to deeper learning and to taking more responsibility for contributions made to a collective understanding (The Knight Community News Network, 2006).

### **Defining Citizen Journalism**

The term citizen journalism is a broad term and still shifting in meaning. Educause Learning Initiative (2007) explains that the term citizen journalism implies a wide range of activities in which

everyday people contribute information or commentary about news events. Over the years, citizen journalism has benefited from the development of various technologies. For instance, the pamphleteers of the 17th and 18th centuries, the telegraph, tape recorders, and television, each of which offered new opportunities for people to participate in sharing news and commentary.

But the advent of digital technologies, people now have unprecedented and unrestricted, sensor-ship free access to the tools of news production and dissemination. Citizen journalism encompasses content ranging from user-submitted reviews on a Web site about movies, novels, social events. Some sites only run stories written by users, while many traditional news outlets now accept comments and even news stories from readers. The notion of citizen journalism implies a difference, however, between simply offering one's musings on a topic and developing a balanced story that will be genuinely useful to readers (Educause Learning Initiative, 2007). Also, citizen journalism covers photos or video taken by a member of the public and published on a mainstream or personal news site, comment and opinion contributed to a news site or blog, additional content in the form of first-hand accounts of incidents or events and perhaps even a personal blog set up to cover a particular subject or location.

### **Citizen Journalism: Theoretical Background in Social Sciences**

The Knight Community News Network (2006) highlighted in the Missouri survey where researchers had documented their findings about both citizen journalism and neighbour-to-neighbour type contents. It was mentioned that, since the 1940s, communications researchers have endeavoured to explain the popular placement of some information over other information through the uses-and-gratifications model. The uses and gratification model is an approach that depicts the media in terms of how they meet the social or psychological needs of the person using that medium.

Accordingly, the model assumes an active audience and states that an individual has an identifiable set of needs and that the individual uses the media to fill those needs. However, four audience needs were identified in Uses and Gratification research. These needs are information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. While traditional newspapers address most of those needs, citizen journalism appeals especially to the integration and social interaction bloc by allowing individual expression among a group of similar-minded people (The Knight Community News Network, 2006).

Furthermore, the Missouri research team tested the efficacy of the theory in 2006 by surveying people registered as authors on MyMissourian.com. The survey quizzed these citizen journalists about their lifestyles and uses of other media. The results showed a marked difference from normal newspaper audiences as measured in national studies. The citizen journalism participants had moderate consumption of local media, but very little use of national media. The participants in the study were also highly driven by an interest in alternative political opinions and the desire to build community. This may be explained in part by the fact that the majority of respondents were married Baby Boomers who grew up in the Peace Corps/Vietnam War era (The Knight Community News Network, 2006).

A rising explanation for the citizen journalism phenomenon is social capital theory. Social capital is a blanket term for the networks, norms and social trust that allow coordination and cooperation in society. The social capital model says that a person's involvement in local groups or organisations builds trust with others in the community. One invests social capital to earn standing, but that investment also enriches the community and encourages investment by others who benefit from the initial investment. Robert Putnam linked this to the online phenomenon in his popular book, "Bowling Alone." Putnam theorized that the Internet is the new mechanism of "bridging and bonding" in society bridging together people of

different sorts while bonding or bringing together people of like backgrounds (The Knight Community News Network, 2006).

Unlike older models of community that relied on face-to-face communication, the Internet social capital model theorized a virtual community where people interact without ever seeing each other. While Putnam did not specifically talk about citizen journalism, his social capital concept fits well with the 2006 Missouri study. Jeremy Littau, one of the graduate students who helped design MyMissourian, tested the social capital/citizen journalism link for his masters thesis and found that citizen journalism participation indeed predicted social capital production in the form of civic engagement, which can be measured as participation, volunteering, and activism. But the surprise was that there was no statistically significant difference between writers and readers on any of the measures, whether it was media use or community involvement. Citizen journalism seems to attract those highly involved in their communities both coming and going readership and writership (Litau, 2006).

Similar to watching the news and keeping abreast of current events, citizen journalism can have a positive effect on social capital. The rapid growth of social networking sites, for example, Facebook and MySpace suggests that individuals are now creating a virtual-network comprising of both bonding and bridging social capital. Contrary to face to face interaction, people can without any hindrances place their comments, reports, observations or even suggestions to others in a direct yet targeted fashion by placing them on their Facebook, where it can be easily accessed. Of course, this encourages a kind of selective exposure and reading of information from others by interested individuals in accordance to needs and desires. As of today, one cannot but agree that the Facebook is currently the most popular social networking site and allows many benefits to its users including serving as a "social lubricant" for those folks who otherwise found it difficulties forming and maintaining both strong and weak relationships with others.

This argument continues, although the preponderance of evidence shows a positive association between social capital and the internet. Critics of virtual communities believe that the Internet replaces our strong bonds with online "weak-ties"(Cummings, Butler & Kraut, 2002), or with socially empty interactions with the technology itself (Nie, 2001). Others fear that the Internet can create a world of "narcissism of similarity," where sociability is reduced to interactions between those that are similar in terms of ideology, race, or gender (Fernback, 1997). A few articles suggest that technologically-based interactions has a negative relationship with social capital by displacing time spent engaging in geographical or in-person social activities (Cummings et al., 2002). However, the consensus of research shows that the more people spend online the more in-person contact they have, thus positively enhancing social capital (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman, & Rainie, 2006).

In extension, social capital is said to be the sum of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986), or more simply, an asset that adheres in social relations and networks (Leana & Buren, 1999). Although the concept of social capital has a wide array of applications (Adler & Kwon, 2002), however, it suffices to limit its mentioning here to its application to social setting as demonstrated in the online interactions among like-minded individuals who engaged on Facebook and Youtube, Blogs and Twitter.

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community and encourages investment by others who benefit from the initial investment.

According to Putnam (1995), who theorized that the Internet would be the new mechanism of uniting individuals in society because of its “bridging and bonding” nature. The Internet is bringing together people of different sorts while at same time creating bonding or bridging together people of like backgrounds and likeminded. Unlike older models of community that relied on face-to-face communication, the Internet social capital model theorized a virtual community where people interact without ever seeing each other.

Although, Putnam did not directly speak about citizen journalism per se, however, his social capital concept was in congruence with the 2006 Missouri study of Jeremy Littau, who tested the social capital/citizen journalism link in his masters thesis and found that citizen journalism participation indeed predicted social capital production in the form of civic engagement, which can be measured as participation, volunteering, and activism. Amazingly, he found that there was no statistically significant difference between writers and readers on any of the measures, whether it was media use or community involvement. Citizen journalism seems to attract those highly involved in their communities both reader and writers alike (Littau, 2006).

### **Citizen Journalism and Social Security Issues in Nigeria**

In truly democratic states, where the peoples welfare, well -being and wholesomeness are the paramount concern of the state, the government, determinedly weaves a security network around the people in their various villages, towns and cities. National security starts with food security because a hungry man is an angry man”. The populace needs personal security from hoodlums, armed robbers, pen-robbers and muggers. Job security is important so that citizens can live meaningful lives and secure their homes, children, wives, ageing parents and kiths and kin.

At the academic level, national security is an intricate network of systems of defence measures, aimed at ensuring the safety of governments, the state and their nationals. Through overt and covert measures of military intelligence operations, under-cover disruptions of the sinister activities of men and women with misplaced consciences, the security of the people, their state and governments is ensured. Here CJ can play a vital role.

Intelligence per se, has political or military has strategic components, which are associated with statecraft, governance and security. Every sovereign, independent, state must train, sustain and nurture men and women to serve in its security and intelligence outfits. Therefore, in this regard, it is paramount to elucidate that citizen journalism allows for veracity in news reporting where traditional journalism, due to limitations of access and time, and in some cases, the ulterior motives to present just one side of a story, tradition and professional reporting risks the perception of being skewed. Therefore, by granting access to anyone, absolutely any willing individuals, to cover the news, citizen journalism presents a more personal, nuanced view of events and has the potential to cultivate communities of people with a common interest. Through blogs, citizen journalists have broken stories about political corruption, police brutality, and other issues of concern to local and national communities.

It should be noted that the methods used in security operations are varied, for example, infiltration, intrigue, subterfuge, deception, rough tactics, wire-tapping, defence intelligence and military action. Thus, common people in society can be used to infiltrate any public sectors where there rampant corrupt practices and report back, as citizen journalists, to the office of law enforcement agents for appropriate and effective actions. As for Military intelligence, it operates both general and specific intelligence systems. It is mainly about gathering information on the plans of the enemy, demonstrators, terrorists and other dangerous people.

Recruitment into defence and all other state security sectors needs scrupulous assessment of the recruit's intellectual sharpness, smartness and patriotism. Individuals with the best grades should be deployed not those, who got ranks by federal character. For instance, it was the failure of military intelligence in Jos that led to the blood let that was experienced their recently when the system of early detection failed. A corps of strategic, street-corner operatives, or individual citizen willing to participate in news reporting would have detected the movement of armed men into the affected villages.

### **Citizen Journalism and Nation Development**

Initially, the belief that radio, television, and newspapers could be used by the government of a country to help build a nation was paramount but was construed wrongly. When governments in many developing countries of the world misinterpreted this to mean that they could monopolise control of the media by using their authority to inform the media what was cogent to be disseminated to the people. This is a kind of top-down approach, which would disenfranchise the people and the media. As a result, such expected growth or change was temporary even non-existence in some cases.

According to Moore and Gillis (2005) who related that it is people rather than the government that play important roles in a nation building when emphasising social development communication, not of government by itself. Thus, if people do not want to develop, they do not and nations do not develop, no matter how much efforts the government put to tell the media to develop them. In fact, this marks the point of contention where the theory and the practice of development communication are at loggerhead. It has been commonly shown that the Media were often used to support governmental agenda instead of being used to create cooperative and collaborative arenas, to provide succour to the people's agenda, or to integrate efforts in the direction of developing a community identity.

Precisely, one cannot but agree that the improvements in literacy, health, poverty, education, and political awareness are all elements of nation building, and of people building. While governments of developing countries attest that these issues are paramount, but it might be the government's heavy-handed manipulation and control of the media that led to lack of media support of initiatives in development communication agenda of the nations.

According to UNESCO (1984), the New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO) about democratisation of the media, it was indicated that it is a matter of human rights, the right to communicate is an extension of the advances toward liberty and democracy. "Extension of these communication freedoms to a broader individual and collective right to communicate is an evolving principle in the democratization process" (UNESCO, 1984, p. 215). Democratizing the media cannot be simply additional facilities. It means broader access to the media by the public, "the free interchange of ideas, information and experience among equals, without dominance or discrimination" (UNESCO, 1984, p. 216).

There are three terms that are used, often interchangeably, to represent this journalism concept: public journalism, civic journalism, and community journalism. All three terms have, as a common basis, the idea of the journalist as a member of the community gathering new stories for the civic good...for the public good...for the community.

Analogically, when the media are democratised, they serve the people and people then use them to obtain the information they are interested in so that they can improve their daily lives and their community. In order for that to happen, the people must participate in determining the focus of the media, even by reporting on their own issues of cogent importance to their community. There is not necessarily a hierarchy in this process. Journalists are citizens themselves. They are servants to, or partners with, the people of the community. All people are

considered equal and central to the purpose of the media. In order to do its job properly, the media may have to go far outside of urban centres to reach all of the constituencies that they are to serve.

Citizen journalists may cover rural and urban areas, know how the people feel, and share information that is important with other citizens of the community. It is the use of information to achieve greater participation of citizens that is essential to their growth, empowerment, and sustainability. These are laudable goals and are important to both nation and community self-determination and self-improvement. These are the goals that journalists should strive for in their daily work; this is the link between developmental communication and community journalism today. Relationships must be forged between the media and the citizens as equal participants in this entire process. The focus is to be less from the mouthpieces of business, industry, and government and a more citizen-centred approach to developing stories by editors and producers as well as reporters in the field. The print media or broadcast station, regardless of who owns it, will become integral to people's lives and integral to the community.

### **Citizen Journalism and Socio-Political Corruption in Nigeria**

Based on the previous illustrations, this concept of community journalism can be taken further where a journalist as an important member of the community may get involved in newsgathering for the civic good by engaging in the following services:

*Community Whistle Blower:* The press has also helped in unearthing corruption through investigative reporting thereby prompting anti graft agencies to launch investigation into such matters. A ready example is the allegation of financial impropriety levelled against the former Deputy National Chairman of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP Chairman). He was alleged to have spearheaded a monumental mismanagement of the funds of the Nigerian Port Authority

(NPA) when he was Chairman of the Authority. Although the investigation was conducted and concluded by EFCC under erstwhile Chairman of EFCC, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, it is doubtful if the report could have seen the light of the day given the closeness of the accused to the seat of power, if not for the exposure of the investigation and its conclusions by *The News* magazine and related reports by many other news media.

Another very relevant case is the allegation of secret telephone conversation against Chairman Justice Thomas Naron and members of the Osun State First Elections Tribunal who were said to be involved in secret telephone conversation with one of the counsels in the matter before them. This is regarded as illegal, unethical and a gross misconduct in administration of justice. This report has opened a new window in investigative journalism from the angle of advantages offered by the mobile phone technology. In this regard, individuals and community members who have witnessed any dubious transaction can clandestinely give their accounts or write it up for posting on the blogs of national security agencies.

*Corruption Deterrent:* The very consciousness among the people that there exists a vibrant group representing the *press* that is ever watching to report corruption could be a deterrent to corruption inclined officials and individuals. Transparency International noted recently, "A tradition of hard-hitting investigative journalism may, for instance, place an indirect check on corruption that might otherwise take place in the absence of informed public debate" (Transparency International, 2009).

*Generation and Sustenance of Public Support for Anti-Corruption Agencies:* A symbiotic relationship often exists between the press and the anti-graft agencies, that is, the ICPC and the EFCC. While the press depends on the agencies reports and findings to put together news reports, the agencies also enjoy adequate public presence and coverage. The reports of activities of the agencies have mobilised support for them and their officers to the extent that they have gained national attention.

*Partnership with Civil Society Group:* The constant exposure of corruption by the Nigerian print media has encouraged uncountable number of the Civil Society Groups in the country to join and identify with the anti graft war. The reports in the media about corruption have provided these groups with the needed tools to demand prosecution of leaders perceived as corrupt and to demand greater transparency in government business.

*Identification of Areas Prone to Corruption:* The print media in recent years have also been proactive in identifying controversial and unexplained wealth of leaders thereby igniting public interest and concern. However, there has not been any specific incident to be cited, however, but it is a veritable reference material for future investigations into such matters. The Nigerian Press is exposing some government officials and leading politicians who have acquired properties far above their earnings regularly. Thanks to many citizen journalists who blow draw attention and then about sharp practices of government officials.

*Sustenance of Anti Corruption Momentum:* The adequate and unrelenting reporting of corruption and activities of anti-corruption agencies have been sustaining the fight against graft. In this regard, many ordinary Nigerians believe that, if not for the watchdog role of the press and self-appointed citizen or community journalists, the anti-graft momentum may have died down. In this way the press has been sustaining the war is the unearthing of anti graft cases, which would have been buried. Likewise, prominent journalists, especially columnists usually make frequent references to such cases and in a way putting pressure on anti-graft agencies to revisit the cases and commence prosecution after having investigated and established the cases.

### **Citizen Journalism and Election Monitoring in Nigeria**

Osaе-Brown (2011) wrote about a strong urge among Nigerians especially the youth to have a free and fair election. For the first

time in Nigeria's history, more young people registered in the 2011 voters' registration exercise.

Since a large number of youths registered to vote in the April 2011 elections, the April elections had been more monitored through mobile devices. Hence technology has played a greater role in the elections. With 87 million handsets in the hands of Nigerians, most of whom were young people, who were social media inclined (citizen journalist in the making), for the first time, Nigeria's 2011 election was transparent even if some agents had not wanted it to be. The reason for this is that political parties had mobilised all young people to monitor the counting of votes at each polling stations in their areas, and the results were to be announced online immediately while they were also encouraged to take pictures for online uploading.

The most unprecedented scenario on Election Day was that millions of young people uploaded images of activities going on at the polling centres in their localities. Those who planned to snatch ballot papers had found it difficult to do so as their images would be posted on *Facebook* and *Youtube*, Blogs and *Twitter*, should they attempt to do so.

In addition, the Police would have had to be on the watch out as any brutality or unfair play would be reported on the social media. For the first time, it was not just the TV Camera or the photojournalist who were on the watch out. It was every Nigerian. Hence, without help from the government, the April 2011 Election was largely seen as transparent even by foreign observers.

Therefore, a good number of the votes on Election Day were counted. This meant that candidates had to sell themselves to voters. Contestants were voted for based on their perceived beliefs and sentiments. It was based on these that some political analysts concluded that Nigeria's 2011 election would likely end in a runoff.

## **Citizen Journalism and Other Issues of Concern to Local and National Communities**

### *Limitations of the Nigerian print media in the war against corruption*

Despite the commendable contributions of the media to the anti-graft war, it is however important to point out that the level of development of the Nigerian printed press may constitute hindrance to the effective performance of its roles as a major anti-corruption watchdog. The level of the industry's economic development, for example is still poor. Most media organisations are under-capitalized. To survive, most media houses depend heavily on advertisements from the same institutions and governments they are to watch. In addition, in some media houses, many months of salaries are owed staff and where regularly paid, they are too low for any meaningful existence. This near-beggar status of media houses and their staff cannot ensure strict adherence to the ethics of the profession.

Therefore, citizen journalism would alleviate and minimise the financial and economic dilemma that traditional journalism is currently engulfed with. Closely related to low economic strength is the issue of corruption in the media as well. Corruption in the media takes the form of accepting gifts from individuals, corporate bodies as well as governments and agencies of governments. Extreme cases are when journalists expect gratifications, especially in form of brown envelopes, for covering assignments and writing reports. These and related unethical conducts are prevalent in developing countries, constituting a great impediment to the exercise of functions assigned constitutionally to the media. Business, political, group and personal interests of media owners are sometimes very important constraints to media professionalism. In situations where media ownership is concentrated and not diverse enough, it is easy to prevent news items injurious to the health of such interests from seeing the light of the day.

Another very important limitation to effective fight against corruption, which is often overlooked, is the closeness that often develops between the press and anti-graft agencies. It is observed earlier that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Such relationship often leads to closeness and the problem is that when corruption creeps into such anti-grafts agencies, of course this is very possible, or other forms of scandal breaks out, it may be difficult for the media to report such with the same commitment and intensity required. Here a conscientious citizen journalist could be counted upon for an expose.

There is also a need for adequate training for many journalists. This would allay the fears of some critics, which stemmed from citizen journalists being referred to as quacks.

### **Criticisms against Citizen Journalism**

Citizen journalists may be activists within the communities they write about. This has drawn some criticism from other traditional media institutions. For example, citizen journalism proponents have been accused of abandoning the traditional goal of 'objectivity'. Many traditional journalists view citizen journalism with some scepticism, believing that only trained journalists can understand the intricacies and ethics involved in reporting news.

One academic paper by Vincent Maher, the head of the New Media Lab at Rhodes University, outlined several weaknesses in the claims made by citizen journalists, in terms of the "three deadly E's", referring to ethics, economics and epistemology (Maher, 2005).

Another research by Tom Grubisich (2005) reviewed ten new citizen journalism sites and found many of them lacking in quality and content. Grubisich followed up a year later with, "Potemkin Village Redux." He found that the best sites had improved editorially and were even nearing profitability, but only by not expending editorial costs. Also according to the article, the sites with the weakest editorial content were able to aggressively expand because they had stronger financial resources.

Yet another article published on Pressthink examined Backfence, a citizen journalism site with initial three locations in the DC area, which reveals that the site has only attracted limited citizen contributions. The author concludes that, "in fact, clicking through Backfence's pages feels like frontier land - remote, often lonely, zoned for people but not home to any (George, 2005).

In addition, David Simon, a former Baltimore Sun reporter and writer/producer of the popular TV series, "The Wire," criticized the concept of citizen journalism. He claimed that unpaid bloggers who write as a hobby cannot replace trained, professional, seasoned journalists.

An editorial published by *The Digital Journalist* web magazine expressed a similar position, advocating the jettisoning of the term "citizen journalist", and replacing it with "citizen news gatherer". In comparison, professional journalists cover fires, floods, crime, the legislature and the White House every day, whereas a citizen journalist, an amateur, will always be on the outside of those lines (Editorial, 2009).

Edward Greenberg, a photographer and New York City litigator, notes higher vulnerability of unprofessional journalists in court compared to the professional ones. This does not mean that professional journalists are fully protected by shield laws. Although, several cases have been mentioned where courts have invalidated the use of the U.S. First Amendment as a defence for reporters, who were summoned to testify before a grand jury. In 2005, the reporter's privilege of Judith Miller and Matthew Cooper was rejected by the appellate court. Others criticize the formulation of the term "citizen journalism" to describe the concept, as the word "citizen" has a conterminous relation to the nation-state. The fact that many millions of people are considered stateless and often without citizenship (such as, refugees or immigrants without papers) limits the concept to those recognised only by governments. Additionally, the global nature of many participatory media initiatives, such as, the Independent Media Center, makes talking of journalism in relation to a particular

nation-state largely redundant as its production and dissemination do not recognise national boundaries. Some additional names given to the concept based on this analysis are grassroots media, people's media, or participatory media.

Max Kalehoff, an executive at Nielsen BuzzMetrics, summed up that journalism should just be called "journalism", that is, media practitioners shouldn't just use a word like the citizens, but word like amateurs, networks, distributors that professionals can understand. Journalism can be practiced in all sorts of ways, and by virtually anyone in society. One does not need to have to be a citizen or a professional; you could be a foreigner, or even an alien from wherever to be a journalist. Therefore, he refutes the overall beat; because journalism is not some exclusive club; it's something that takes many forms (Hobson, 2006).

Alexander (2010) concluded that with the growth of citizen journalism, problems of credibility of news sources and content are endemic. Likewise, readers of citizen journalism are always sceptical about what they read no matter how well meaning citizen journalists are.

## **Conclusion**

It is crucial to mention that the distinguishing feature of citizen journalism or community journalism is its focus on national and local issues and activities, generally from the state to town level down to neighbourhoods, schools and clubs. If community journalists cover state, national or international news, they focus on how these events affect the local community. Traditionally, community journalism is produced by a hometown newspaper, or the suburban bureaus of a large metro daily. It is because of their local focus and their important role in the community's identity, that hometown papers tend to be healthier than their big-city cousins. However, in areas served by the metro dailies, cutbacks are underway in outlying areas, suburbs and neighbourhoods.

Increasingly though, regular citizens, empowered by online publishing tools and multimedia devices once affordable only to professionals are becoming involved in community journalism. Some of these citizen journalists are covering a specific governmental body, while others are focusing on a specific issue.

As the decline of some newspapers and major news media continues, many experts are looking toward community journalism or citizen journalism to keep vital information flowing at the local level. Many newspapers and professional media organisations are providing tools, editors and training to enable citizen journalists carry on.

The appeal of society-wide discussion is great, but the history of citizen journalism shows that social discussion has the greatest potential in a community small enough for an individual to comfortably identify with. Nevertheless, “citizen journalism” is now a broadly recognized term that one hears often in newsrooms across the world. A Google search of the term produces hundreds of thousands of references. Media organisations small and large have begun to integrate citizen journalism concepts into their affairs.

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