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Internet and Citizen Journalism:Perspectives and Issues in the Global Broadcast Landscape

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Abstract

The use of participatory journalism to re-invent broadcasting outlets is common trend among media professionals and experts. This paper examines the use of citizen journalism in the production of news contents for broadcast media outlets. Based on principles from Democratic Participant Media theory, the paper argues that participatory journalism can serve as a watchdog to the development process of a nation. Also, this paper examined issues that affect global media outlets that make use of citizen journalism to produce news contents. The authors suggest that citizen journalism should be seen as a tool to re-invent professional media practice. It is an inevitable practice evident on the internet that can be used to promote national development.

Keywords: Internet, Citizen, Broadcast, Global and Journalism

1. Introduction

The advent of the Internet has contributed significantly to knowledge empowerment and information dissemination in modern societies (Salawu, 2007; Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012). In media studies, citizen journalism refers when individual engage in the act of gathering, writing and reporting issues and events that affect national interest. Citizen journalism has been described as the democratization of the multi-media technologies by the people and for the people (Salawu, 2007; Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012). Basically, when any common man in his capacity as a citizen of a nation takes up the initiative to report things or express his views about happenings around him then the occurrence is popularly termed as citizen journalism or participatory journalism.

Citizen journalism is seen as another form of journalism that abuses the standard and control of a professional journalist (Salawu, 2007). This type of journalism can be practiced by an individual or a group of people. It is important to note that activist and non-governmental agencies also create citizen journalism outlets as a medium of expression on perennial issues that affect socio-cultural or political landscape of a nation (Salawu, 2007; Simons, 2008).

The use of citizen journalism in broadcast networks, notably Al Jazeera and CNN, has raised serious questions regarding the ethics and principles of journalism. Should citizen journalists be judged according to the same standards as professional journalists? Is this the end of mass communication or re-invention of mass communication? Who should be the gatekeeper, the trained journalist or citizen journalists? These issues are still being debated today. This locus of this paper examined the perspectives and issues that affect the use of citizen journalism in global broadcast networks

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2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Democratic Participant theory. This theory calls for greater attention to the needs, interests and receivers in a political society (McQuail, 1987; Folarin, 1998). In sum, democratic participant theory may be regarded as a press word equivalent to grassroots democracy, which supports the underlying fundamentals of citizen journalism.

3. Internet, Blogs and Citizen Journalism

Citizen Journalism also refers as participatory journalism, whereby citizens contribute to news gathering and production (Salawu, 2007; Glaser, 2008). Citizen journalism refers to a situation whereby citizens engage in activities that contribute news and information on issues of national interest. Scholars agree that citizen journalism promotes the intense use of the multi-media technologies for news reporting by citizens and for citizens. They also believe that citizen journalism promotes a secular method of information dissemination (Salawu, 2007; Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012).

According to Carter (2004), citizen journalism has a large influence on the mainstream media. The term is not limited, however, to people without journalism training. There are news blogs kept by professional, trained journalists who want to comment on news stories to cover public reactions to them. Because this occurs outside a formal news outlet, this is also considered citizen journalism. There are blogs that touch on subjects that mainstream media outlets are afraid to talk about. This is especially true in countries where the media is strictly regulated by the government. In many cases, the only eyewitness reporters on the scene have been citizens who see news happen and are driven to act. This can result in a new dimension given to a news story that would not have been possible otherwise. The advent of multimedia capabilities has affected the traditional role of journalism. Traditional journalism's basic values consist of a commitment to readers and viewers- to inform, educate, and entertain the audience. Because of the internet, readers and viewers can directly sample events and locate sources of information vital to their lives without journalistic gatekeepers.

Scholars state that there are three elements critical to the rise of citizen journalism and citizen media (Flew, 2008; Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012), which include: open publishing, collaborative editing and distributed content. From this perspective, Wikipedia itself is the largest and most successful citizen journalism project, with news often breaking through Wikipedia editors, and stories being maintained as new facts emerge.

4. Citizen Journalism and Global Broadcast Networks

According to Carter (2004), the influence of citizen journalism is increasing tremendously on the mainstream media. It is important to stress that it is note that it is not only individuals without journalism training that engage in citizen journalism but also professional journalists who want comments and healthy discussions on their news blogs. This is also called citizen journalism because it takes place outside a formal news outlet and usually in countries where media outlets are under severe control by the government.

Similarly, according to Volotta (2013), the increasing influence of citizen journalism outlets has led to several global broadcast outlets to re-invent their news production. A number of these broadcast outlets design progrmmes and approaches to seek out the services of citizen journalists to produce and submit stories for broadcast. This paper examines how CNN, BBC and Al Jazerra make use of citizen journalism and the issues that affect the global broadcast landscape

Kperogi (2011) notes "The iReport.com, launched on August 2, 2006 (CNN.com, 2007), is a CNN citizen journalism experiment that gives ordinary people from everywhere in the world the opportunity to contribute unedited, unfiltered, and uncensored user-generated video and text-based news reports" (p.319). For the past eight years, iReport has been successful in gathering and reporting news in troubled regions in Asia, Africa and Europe.

One of the uses of citizen journalism to promote civic engagement and political participation is the development of the BBC's Action Network. According to(Nieman Reports, 2012), the BBC's Action Network (formerly called icon) was established to mobilize individuals to be involved in community issues and provide solutions to address these issues.

Also, global network Al Jazeera, established a citizen journalism-based program 'The Stream', which expands the use of social media to report its news programs. Corthesy (2012) has reasoned "'The Stream' is an example of how social networking technology and citizen journalism altered the way Al Jazeera reported on the Arab Spring

In media studies, issues are things that individuals in the society are thinking about and talking about that affect national interest or development. Among communication scholars, issue saliency is the most preferred variable for research and discourse. There are several perennial issues affecting the use of citizen journalism in the broadcast media landscape across the globe. This paper identifies and discusses such issues as they affect the international community.

One major issue negatively affecting the broadcast news networks because of the use of citizen journalism is job security. It was reported that CNN sacked over 50 staff in November 2011, many of them were photojournalists. CNN sacked these staff because it would lean more heavily on its citizen journalism outfit 'iReport' for more, better content. CNN's strategy of shifting various tasks from its paid journalists to the five-year-old network of iReporters has raised the possibility that CNN will soon replace news anchors with holograms any time soon, but the network is trending towards giving its citizen journalists more assignments, surfacing more of their content on TV and generally making iReport content more of an editorial fixture(Estes, 2013). Also, BBC is undergoing a restructuring that will result in the loss of some 3,000 jobs. This job reduction will allow the savings to be invested in transforming the entire news organization, including the news division, into one that is ready for the fully digital, on-demand age. The broadcast world is changing rapidly, and the traditional model of channels and schedules might not survive the decade (Nieman Reports, 2012).

Another issue affecting the use of citizen journalism in broadcasting is no gratification or payment to citizen journalists. IReport and other news networks often offer no pay to contributors including photo and video contributions. While users are granted copyright to their contributions, they often are forced to relinquish control of who uses their work and where their images and video are shown worldwide. CNN is presently exploiting free labor from all over the world; through the user-generated citizen media, it has generated over 200,000 news videos (Kperogi, 2011). .

Another major issue affecting the use of citizen journalism in global broadcast network is the high number of citizen journalists arrested and killed due to their association with broadcast networks. For example, Salim Qabbani and Abdelmawla al-Hariri were citizen journalists based in Syria reporting for Al Jazeera. Salim Qabbani was arrested, while Abdelmawla al-Hariri was killed for reporting for Al Jazeera

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the availability of the digital technologies, people now have unprecedented access to the tools of production and dissemination of news, knowledge and information. Citizen journalism encompasses content ranging from user-submitted reviews on a website about movies to wiki-based news. Some sites only run stories written by users, while many traditional news outlets now accept comments and even news stories from readers. Citizen journalism should be seen as a tool to re-invent professional media practice in any modern society. It is an inevitable practice evident on the Internet that can be used to promote national development.

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