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<b>Article:</b>	<b>The Impact of Citizen Journalism on Mainstream Media Reporting: A Pakistani Journalists' Perspective</b>
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### **ABSTRACT**

Citizen journalism has been studied in the past and has become a popular trend in the present era. There is a rising concern about the increasing popularity of citizen journalism and its impact on mainstream media reporting. By employing the concept of the "Public Sphere" as a framework for analysis, the research examines how citizen journalism contributes to the democratic process. A convenient sampling method has been used and semi-structured interviews of 10 journalists of the mainstream media were conducted. A thematic analysis procedure has been adopted to draw the findings from the collected data. The research outcomes were evaluated according to the journalists' responses' pertinence to the study's objectives. The study's conclusions addressed its aims and revealed the influence of citizen journalism on mainstream media reporting. The study's practical implications include awareness of the concern for the general audience, citizen journalists and mainstream media.

**Keywords:** citizen journalism, mainstream media reporting, Pakistani journalists

**Introduction:**

The practice of journalism by ordinary people is known as citizen journalism. Individuals who believe that their views are not being heard often seek ways to amplify their message to a wider audience, whether to draw attention or raise awareness. These individuals are commonly referred to as citizen journalists (Noor, 2009). Duffy et al., 2010 define a citizen journalist as an individual who works independently and is not a trained journalist or reporter.

According to Bowman and Willis' (2003) definition, citizen journalism is the process in which non-professional individuals gather news, scrutinize it, and disseminate it to the public. Citizen journalists are the hobbyists of the conventional media. Rosen (2012) noted that citizen journalists form a portion of the audience of mainstream media. In the past, many individuals depended on these citizen journalists, who were the recipients of a one-way media system. However, with the advent of new technology and changing circumstances, we now confront more intricate challenges than in previous times (Noor, 2016).

Citizen journalism also goes by other terms such as participatory journalism and democratic (Baase, 2008). Cohn (2007) listed various forms of journalism, including public journalism, civic journalism, stand-alone journalism, networked journalism, open-source journalism, crowd-sourced journalism, collaborative journalism, grassroots journalism, community journalism, and bridge media.

Citizen journalism provides a platform for discussing topics that may not be covered by mainstream media, and its followers tend to view it as less biased (Noor, 2016). In the past, citizen journalism was predicted to supplant mainstream journalism due to its emergence as a response to the shortcomings of traditional media, which had become politicized and prejudiced, causing people to turn to citizen journalism for news (Bruns & Highfield, 2012; Keen, 2007).

The internet and technology have played a significant role in fostering citizen journalism, which has the potential to diminish print media consumption as websites offer more convenient means of accessing necessary information (Bruns & Highfield, 2012). However, the absence of objectivity has become evident in citizen journalism, and it is recommended that news media should provide multiple perspectives or as many as feasible (Gans, 2005). Unlike professional journalists, amateur journalists lack the ability to call upon sources and speakers to support their statements (Bruns, 2005).

The objective of the study is to comprehend the contrasting circumstances that exist between traditional and citizen journalism. Moreover, the opinion of professional journalists is investigated to find their perception about citizen journalism. For this purpose, the following objectives have been formulated:

- to assess the effect of citizen journalism on the journalistic practices of journalists in Pakistan.
- to investigate the connection between citizen journalism and professional journalism.
- to explore how professional journalists address the challenges arising from citizen journalists.

**Research Questions**

- What is the effect of citizen journalism on the journalistic practices of journalists in

Pakistan?

- What is the connection between citizen journalism and professional journalism?
- How do professional journalists address the challenges arising from citizen journalists?

### **Literature Review**

Since the invention of the printing press, individuals have utilized it to disseminate information through booklets when they felt subjected to unfairness. These individuals consisted of amateur writers (Allan, 2009). Initially, the avenues for sharing information were limited, resulting in restricted citizen journalism. However, today, it is feasible to communicate with millions of people in a matter of seconds through various platforms, thus expanding the reach of citizen journalism (Broowaha, 2010). As financial difficulties arose, leading to the closure of numerous newspapers in the United States, citizen journalism began to fill the information gap left by mainstream journalism (Deuze, 2009).

Some of the most prominent American citizen journalists were Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, who published several papers in 1787 and 1788 that formed the basis for modern-day writers, now known as bloggers (Knautz, 2007).

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the internet burst into being with the emergence of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991, those who had previously criticized the press for being irresponsible and elitist found a new tool to disseminate content according to their own understanding (Bentley & Meyer, 2007; Littau, 2007).

Now, a multitude of websites are available that offer citizen journalists a platform to share information. Dreier (2012) identified several prominent websites for citizen journalism in his study, including the iReport feature offered by Cable News Network (CNN) since 2006 and Al Jazeera's Sharek Portal, which was launched in 2007.

Citizen journalists tend to avoid working in traditional newsrooms as they prioritize the freedom to share information on issues that are often overlooked by mainstream media or professional journalists (Bentley & Meyer, 2007; Littau, 2007). Experienced American reporter Mary Lou Fulton said, "There is a lack of authenticity in mainstream journalistic practices in the modern era. Reporters cover the education system but not the schools, healthcare not clinics they don't write about you in fact they write just about the abstraction of you" (Fulton, 2004).

There are many examples from the present where citizen journalism has been used. The emergence of citizen journalism gained prominence following the terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, when common people reported the incident on the internet. The term "citizen journalism" gained mainstream attention when people uploaded photos and videos of the 2004 Asian tsunami on their blogs.

Riaz (2011) explains the phenomenon of citizen journalism in Pakistan in his study. Citizen journalism is still in its early stages in Pakistan, however, some of the major newspapers in the country have provided their readers with a platform to express their opinions through a dedicated section called "Letters to the Editor."

The Express Tribune and Dawn, two prominent newspapers in Pakistan, have provided a platform for common people to express their opinions through a dedicated section called "Letters to the Editor." However, state-owned channels do not encourage citizen journalism as

much as private channels. While a few private channels such as Geo TV fact-check reports submitted by citizen journalists, others do not take such responsibility.

According to Anderson (2008), journalistic authority refers to the power held by journalists and journalistic organizations, allowing them to present their interpretations of reality as truthful, accurate, and politically important. Despite citizen journalism's inevitability, tensions still exist between professional and citizen journalism (Lewis et al., 2010).

### **Types of Citizen Journalists**

In order to understand the background of citizen journalists, the different types of citizen journalists are explained.

**Participatory citizen journalists** are individuals who collaborate with professional journalists to create news content (Deuze, et al., 2007). During the London Bombings, much of the information was provided by participatory journalists (Allan, 2007). However, participatory journalists may not have much creative freedom due to gatekeeping by professional organizations (Domingo et al, 2008).

**Watchdog Citizen Journalists.** Watchdog journalists are those who scrutinize and verify the news presented by traditional news sources. They are dissatisfied with the information provided by official news outlets and instead offer their own perspective on a particular issue (Harcup, 2005). By promoting ethical journalism and impartial reporting, watchdog journalists encourage transparency and accountability within the media industry (Fengler, 2003). In addition, these individuals also utilize platforms such as "letters to the editor" to provide their analysis of news stories (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007).

**Para Citizen Journalists.** Citizen journalists who capture live events as they occur also engage in sporadic acts of journalism, contributing valuable news to the mainstream media (Lasica, 2015). This often involves the formation of temporary groups that share information among themselves, fostering a sense of social solidarity within the community (Swart et al., 2017).

**Community Citizen Journalists.** A community journalist is someone who aims to publish information that is intended to help and involve the community. Community citizen journalists cover local events in a small geographical area that are not covered by the mainstream media. These journalists are dedicated to providing accurate and unbiased information (Johnson & St. John, 2017; Paul, 2018).

Importantly, citizen journalism can also hold anyone, including politicians and public figures, accountable without any hesitation. It presents news as it is and is not constrained by ethical or moral considerations in disseminating information.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study can be built upon the public sphere theory of communication. The theory of the public sphere is useful in comprehending the current state of organizational journalism and the role citizen journalism plays in the democratic process (Antony & Thomas, 2010). This concept was introduced by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1991) who associated the idea of public sphere with the planned democracy prevalent in the governmental, communal, and profitable milieu of the nineteenth century. The notion of public sphere is considered essential to Habermas's work. The media serves as an intermediary to this

public sphere, providing a platform for public issues to be discussed and explored. Public discourse is a key element in creating political recognition and awareness (Dahlberg, 2014).

Recent automation has transformed the public sphere by rejuvenating the process of grassroots information. It has made it easier for multiple voices to be heard, and individuals are empowered to participate more actively in the public sphere (Mutsvairo et al, 2012). The public has been granted numerous means of accessing information and holding politicians and the media accountable (Thompson, 1990).

The digital public sphere enables people to actively participate in the production process, rather than being passive recipients of information. This freedom allows individuals to observe, report, question, and debate, empowering them to engage with others in meaningful ways (Bates, 2007). Papacharissi coined the term “virtual sphere 2.0” to describe this phenomenon, referring to the ability of citizens to share their thoughts and opinions on social media platforms (2015). While some critics argue that the media should strive to create a single, unified public sphere where debates lead to consensus (Habermas, 1991), others advocate for a more diverse public sphere where multiple perspectives are given a voice, without the influence of dominant groups (Fraser, 1990).

### Methodology

The study has used qualitative interview method to collect information from the mainstream media journalists. Interviews are a good way to find inside views, beliefs, and opinions about particular subjects. They allow us to explore constructed beliefs (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

The nature of the interview is semi-structured i.e., a set of pre-determined inquiries were posed to the participants, and their responses were gathered in person through voice recordings that were subsequently transcribed. The sample size consists of N=10 respondents selected on the basis of convenient sampling.

To prevent any misinterpretations, the interviews were carried out in Urdu language and then translated to English language. Each interview had a duration of around 20-25 minutes, and all participants were from the broadcast media and covered different areas of news.

For further explanation of the received responses, the study used thematic analysis. For this purpose, a codebook was generated. The codebook contains codes and themes identified by the authors of the study after going through the responses of the interviewees. Each code describes an idea where the common ideas are grouped together to form a theme. An example of how the codes have been extracted is given in table 1.

**Table 1.**

*An example of extracted codes from the interview*

Interview Extract	Codes
“Citizen Journalism has become a <u>resisting force</u> and a <u>great challenge</u> for regular or mainstream media, the biggest challenge which citizen journalism creates for mainstream media is <u>credibility</u> , <u>any person can disseminate a</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A resisting force</li> <li>• Challenging</li> <li>• Lack of credibility</li> <li>• Dissemination of wrong information</li> <li>• Harming the reputation</li> <li>• Less space given</li> </ul>

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certain information against an entity due to some personal grudge or motive to harm the reputation of an individual or an organization ... that is why mainstream media does not give a significant amount of space to citizen journalism content."

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*Note.* A section of interview taken as an example showing the extraction of codes.

In the next step, the complete transcript was analyzed which generated themes based on the codes which were grouped together (see Appendix A).

### Major Themes

The thematic analysis identified 4 types of themes in the respondent's answers (see Appendix A) which are as follows:

***Changes Brought by Citizen Journalism.*** It denotes the impact of citizen journalism on media, influenced by advancements in technology and other contributing factors.

***Negative Effects of Citizen Journalism.*** This represents the prevalent adverse impacts of citizen journalism on the reporting of mainstream media, as stated by the interviewees.

***Positive Effects of Citizen Journalism.*** This refers to the primary beneficial impacts of citizen journalism on mainstream media reporting as reported by the interviewees.

***Relationship with mainstream journalism.*** It represents the relationship that exists between citizen and mainstream journalism.

### Findings & Discussion

The responses of the interviewees are discussed below to provide clarification for the formulated themes.

#### Changes in Mainstream Journalistic Practice

Regarding the impact of citizen journalism, the journalists were asked about their experience and their responses are as follows:

*"Citizen Journalism has become a resisting force and a great challenge for regular or mainstream media, the biggest challenge which citizen journalism creates for mainstream media is credibility, any person can disseminate a certain information against an entity due to some personal grudge or motive to harm the reputation of an individual or an organization ... that is why mainstream media does not give a significant amount of space to citizen journalism content." (Respondent-1)*

This suggests that mainstream media outlets will only feature content that highlights the harsh realities of society and has the potential to alter the news narrative, such as when it concerns a government agency. Citizen journalism frequently relies on rumors and misinformation, and such unverified content holds little weight in traditional news reporting. Respondent-2 stated that:

*"Citizen Journalism is definitely a paradigm shift. After 9/11 attacks, citizen journalism grew as people uploaded videos of the attack on internet. Most of the news about it was being uploaded by citizens not the media people. Whatever we see trending on twitter is broadcasted on TV channels as a topic of current affairs programs."*

In his perspective, citizen journalism holds a significant influence, and therefore, conventional media is primarily shaped by citizen journalism and social media.

Respondent-3 in the similar notion said:

*“Yes, it has brought changes just like print media has faced loss due to social media, citizen journalism has similarly affected the other mediums of news as the sense of curiosity which used to be created by print and electronic media has been diminished because citizen journalists provide news on social platforms minute to minute.”*

### **Citizen Journalism’s Impact on Mainstream Media Reporting**

Journalists were asked about the impact of citizen journalism on their work and the obstacles they face due to it.

*“It is a bit of both, for some media organizations it is a kind of resistance where as for some channels it is a great source of facilitation of news stories. Citizen Journalists post their content on YouTube and Facebook pages, these platforms disseminate the information at an increasingly high rate, the reason citizen journalism use these platforms is because there is no other mode of communication with the masses for them. . Citizen Journalism is in practice in the U.S for the past decade whereas in Pakistan it is a new concept which is evolving gradually, so it is a bit of both worlds.” (Respondent-4)*

Respondent-2 provided a positive response regarding the influence of citizen journalism on mainstream media reporting, stating that despite not being professionally trained journalists, the issues and leads provided by citizen journalists are crucial for mainstream journalists to cover in their reporting.

*“Being a member of mainstream media, I don’t consider it as a challenge rather I think they have made things easy for us, in a way that back in the early days the content that we used to struggle for , in order to get access to that, can now be easily found on social media through tweets and other social updates. It makes it easy for us to follow or spy on the story.” (Respondent-7)*

### **Coping with the Pressure**

Respondent-9 provided their opinion on the pressure journalists have to deal with as a result of citizen journalism when they were asked about it.

*“Journalism should be done on the principles of objectivity neutrality and facts, so here cross checking and verifying the facts with the coordination of citizen journalists in certain cases increases work pressure.” He explained further,*

Additionally, the respondent elaborated that it is not possible for trained journalists or camerapersons to be present at every incident or calamity at all times, thus citizen journalism can play a significant role in providing them with images and video footage. These can be shared on social media platforms, from where mainstream media can also utilize them. So far, the breaking news syndrome is considered , the respondent-1 said that:

*“Timing is always important in our profession and mainstream journalists do face a “race against time” with citizen journalists, as the social media information dissemination is speedier. On the other hand, it acts as facilitation for professional journalists in terms of content acquirement.” (Mateen Haider, Senior Reporter, G TV)*

The respondent-4 stated,

*“They do not act as a barrier and we do not have to contact them. They are adding information and information can come from anywhere. We have to do our own work.” He explains that the work of citizen journalists does not determine their responsibilities.*

*“I have to verify a report through official sources and cover the other side of the story as well. There is no as such conflict between the journalists. Citizen journalists have their*



platforms such as YouTube and their own websites. At times I may need footage of a place where I cannot go then I will contact a citizen who can provide the footage.”

### **Relationship between Citizen Journalists and Mainstream Journalists**

When questioned about the presence of a gap in mainstream media that prompts citizen journalism, Respondent-4 stated:

*“Mainstream Journalists will never give space to citizen journalists in mainstream media hence their relationship is at cross roads with citizen journalists. A journalist will never leave his post in mainstream media to create a place for citizen journalists, who have no real media education or any experience regarding the field and try to make entry as a parachute journalist just because they have a few influential videos and a powerful social media platform.”*

As per his opinion, although mainstream media is willing to incorporate citizen journalists as a component to add to news and information, it is not willing to grant them the same status as professional journalists. Professional journalists put in a lot of effort over many years to establish themselves with a credible reputation and authority. Therefore, citizen journalists will never be considered equivalent to professional journalists.

*“The policy of mainstream media is not affected by citizen journalism thus there is no as such relation between the two. However, if an issue is reported by the citizen journalists that affects the society, then it is taken up by the mainstream media. Professional journalists will never rely completely on citizen journalism.” (Respondent-6)*

### **Challenge Faced by Professional Journalists**

The respondents were asked to share their opinion on whether professional journalists face challenges due to the emergence of citizen journalists.

*“First of all, the race against time is always there and the shortage of content does occur especially in the mainstream media’s last three days of the week i.e. Friday Saturday and Sunday. Journalists often take content from citizen journalists but mostly they create their own file of news in early days of the week. There is often no political activity or a significant event to cover, even government offices are closed, so the journalists use this file saving technique to counter the shortage of news and not be entirely dependent on citizen journalists.” (Respondent-10)*

Talking about the unverified stories of citizen journalism is concerned, the respondent-9 asserted that:

*“It is about the new technology, trends and how they are used. If a citizen journalist’s stories are bouncing, then there are many other people who are reporting on the same story. You can run a unverified story once on your platform but not every time as there are certain cyber laws which can cause problems for you and your acceptance in public will depend on it.”*

The respondent-7 pointed out another challenge to be cautioned about in the following way:

*“Citizen Journalism can act as a challenge when a news story is publicized by the citizen journalists, which should be publicized as it may harm a person or national security. Mainstream media avoid such stories that may prove to be problematic for their organization or the country.”*

The respondents expressed their belief that the popularity of citizen journalism is growing because it bypasses traditional gatekeeping processes. They mentioned that citizen journalists are not bound by the same restrictions as professional journalists and have more freedom to report on issues that may not be covered by mainstream media. However, they also acknowledged that this lack of gatekeeping can lead to issues with accuracy and reliability in citizen journalism.

*“It is true, that citizen journalism is free of any kind of policy laws or channel boundaries like the mainstream media. Professional journalists are tied by the virtual ropes of regulations of PEMRA, channel narrative and policy. The gate keeping concept does not exist in citizen journalism, this is the reason there is a lot of sensationalism in it and facts are often distorted in a manner to acquire popularity for the video or the content.”*  
(Respondent-1)

Therefore, based on the respondent's opinion, citizen journalism can cause misinformation and disharmony in society, which goes against religious principles and media regulations. The respondent believes that citizen journalism's non-compliance and lack of fact-checking make it incompatible with mainstream media.

*“No matter what people post on the social media, its authenticity is only established when it is taken up by the mainstream media. The liberty social media has today is being questioned due to unauthenticated content. People may be attracted towards citizen journalism, but they still consider mainstream media to be the authentic source.”*(Respondent-2)

## **Conclusion**

The study explained citizen journalism in detail with a focus on its influence on mainstream media. For this purpose, interviews from mainstream reporters were taken to understand their view of citizen journalism. The study used thematic analysis and found four themes in the answers given by the reporters which showed that there are some positive and negative effects of citizen journalism on mainstream media reporting. The study demonstrated the impact of citizen journalism on the media landscape and the dynamic between citizen journalism and traditional journalism.

From the interviews, it can be observed that the respondents highlighted the impact of evolving technology in both positive and negative ways, emphasizing the importance of objectivity and news verification as essential parts of their duty. They noted that citizen journalism is not bound by these concerns and can fill gaps in news coverage when necessary. However, they also stressed that it is the responsibility of mainstream media reporters to cross-check facts and present accurate information to the public. In terms of the relationship between professional journalists and citizen journalists, the respondents indicated that there is no significant conflict between the two groups as they complement each other, but citizen journalism cannot replace mainstream journalism.

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