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Citizen Journalism: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges

Wally Hughes

Western Kentucky University, wally.hughes174@topper.wku.edu

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CITIZEN JOURNALISM:
HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

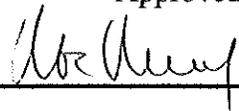
A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By
Wally Hughes

Western Kentucky University
2010

CE/T Committee:
Professor Mac Mckerral, Adviser
Dr. Jeffrey Kash
Dr. Angela Jones

Approved by



Mac Mckerral
School of Journalism



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze what effect, if any, citizen journalism is having on journalism and ethics in today's society. It starts by examining the role citizen journalism played in the early American colonies to show that the concept of citizen journalism is not new but has played a vital role throughout American history. Next, the focus shifts to the events and reasons that led to the re-emergence of citizen journalism during the past few decades, such as media consolidation and new technology. The thesis then highlights a few of the major issues that surround citizen journalism today, notably with regards to the federal shield law debate. From these evaluations, the conclusion will argue what kind of overall effect citizen journalism has on the journalism field and its ethical signature, as well as whether citizen journalism and traditional media can co-exist and complement each another.

Keywords: Citizen, Journalism, Citizen Journalism, Journalism History, Ethics, Shield Law

Dedicated to my family and friends.
Thanks for the support and encouragement.

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VITA

Nov. 14, 1988.....Born - Somerset, Ky.

2007.....Southwestern High School,
Somerset, Ky.

2011.....Western Kentucky University,
Bowling Green, Ky.

Oct. 15-16, 2010.....Presenter, Kentucky Honors
Roundtable, Western Kentucky
University

Feb. 10, 2011.....Presenter, Posters @ the Capitol,
Frankfort, Ky.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: News/Editorial Journalism

Minor Field: Political Science

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On April 16, 2007, amidst a school shooting on the campus of Virginia Tech University, graduate student Jamal Albarghouti decided to take reporting the news into his own hands. As police officers ordered him to get on the ground and take cover, Albarghouti took out his cell phone and took an approximately minute-long video that captured the sounds of the gunshots. He sent the video to CNN, which used it in coverage of the event (“Student shot video”). Albarghouti recorded the video from approximately 200 feet away from the gunshots and offered arguably the best coverage of the events that unfolded that day.

Albarghouti’s actions offer a perfect example of a concept called “citizen journalism,” which occurs when untrained people take on the responsibility of reporting the news. In their book, *Online Newsgathering: Research and Reporting for Journalism*, Stephen Quinn and Stephen Lambie provide a more formal definition. According to Quinn and Lambie, citizen journalism occurs in two forms. “The first is when members of the public, who are not professional journalists, contribute content that is published on traditional media” (43). Albarghouti’s video would be an example of this form of citizen journalism. “The second form of citizen journalism occurs when members of the public

produce blogs or community websites or publications for a specific purpose. In other words, citizens assume the role of journalists” (Quinn and Lamble 44).

WHY STUDY CITIZEN JOURNALISM?

Citizen journalism’s recent popularity has been sparked by new technology media that has led to increased accessibility to information for the general public. Unlike traditional journalism, citizen journalism is not necessarily performed by individuals with educational or professional training in the field; rather it is often done by “citizens” who have no connection to traditional or new media. Because of this disassociation from the institutional media, citizen journalism appeals to many because of a common belief that traditional media are biased, out of touch, ignore important issues or offer irrelevant news. Consumers of citizen journalism often see it as less inherently biased and more in touch with important, timely issues.

But while citizen journalism appears to be a shining example of America’s entrepreneurial spirit and fosters freedom of speech, it does pose some potential problems. Anyone can be a citizen journalist, and the Internet offers unlimited opportunities for anyone to upload content (such as blogs, videos, etc.) for public consumption. Because of the ease in creating and distributing content on the Web, it is impossible to ensure that all of it is true and or genuine. Therefore, ethical standards and credibility of citizen journalism can come into question.

As evidenced by more and more traditional news outlets downsizing or ceasing publication, people now look for alternative sources for news. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter allow the news to find people instead of people finding the news.

Amidst its growing popularity, citizen journalism raises many ethical issues and concerns. What if the news from these sources is not accurate or authentic and driven by the wrong motives? Are the writers objective? Are they fair in their reporting? What negative effects is citizen journalism having on the broader practice of journalism? The bottom line is that consumers should always be skeptical of the news journalism produces, especially citizen journalism, particularly with regard to accuracy, fairness and authenticity.

OVERVIEW

This thesis examines citizen journalism and the effect it is having on contemporary journalism ethics. But before even beginning a discussion about contemporary citizen journalism and its effects, one should first examine it in a historical context.

The idea of citizens reporting the news is not new. Actually, it existed well before “professional” journalists came about. In order to focus this thesis and provide some context as to how citizen journalism affected America’s view of the press, the “Historical Roots” section will examine the birth of the movement in the colonial press. Early American journalists were not professionals; they were untrained news gatherers who shared news with their communities. Their works laid the foundation for the American press and efforts to keep it free of government.

It was not until 1908 until the first sanctioned journalism school opened at the University of Missouri. The impact this institution had on the standards embraced by professional journalists is significant, which is why it is discussed at the end of the first section in the subsection titled “1908: Birth of the Journalism Profession.” In a few

words, once journalism education became institutionalized, a rift began to form between professional journalists and the declining number of citizen journalists. The subsection goes into greater detail as to how and why this occurred.

The second section, “Contemporary Citizen Journalism,” discusses the reasons why citizen journalism has re-emerged. It discusses in great detail media consolidation, the idea that major news corporations concentrated media power by buying up smaller outlets, and how this helped spark citizen renaissance. The section also presents the importance of the Web as a “voice” for the public, and how it is changing the news landscape as traditional media, such as newspapers, begin to decline. Citizen journalism sites, like OhMyNews.com and traditional media-born citizen sites, such as CNN’s iReport, are examples of the effect the Internet has had on citizens reporting news, as are social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

With this influx of citizen reporting also came many issues and concerns. Arguably the biggest issue has been the possibility of a federal shield law and the effect it would have on citizen journalists. Because of its prominence, this issue has its own section, titled “Shield Laws: Who is a Journalist?” A shield law protects journalists from releasing confidential sources when subpoenaed by a court. Several states have shield laws in place, but as of now there is no federal law. The possibility of one raises questions because it would essentially define who a journalist is, and depending on the definition, citizen journalists may not be included. There is much debate as to whether citizen journalists are “true” journalists, and whether they should enjoy the same protections and privileges. The shield law section discusses this debate, as well as where the concept of a shield law came from and how it evolved over time.

However, the shield law debate is only one issue of many that surround citizen journalism. The section following the shield law chapter, “Concerns about Citizen Journalism,” develops other prominent issues such as credibility and legal concerns. These issues involve objectivity (or lack thereof), the accuracy of online stories that are rushed to publication, and the growing problem of online plagiarism. While this is not an exhaustive list of all the issues, it still focuses on some of the most important, and will give the reader an understanding of the relevance of contemporary citizen journalism.

Finally, the conclusion offers general thoughts about the future of citizen journalism by examining the overall effect of citizen journalism on the practice of journalism. It also will examine what role citizens may play in the future in relation to traditional media and predict whether these two will be able to aid one another in delivering the news.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Before focusing on citizen journalism in a contemporary sense, one must first understand its history. The most common misconception about citizen journalism shared by the general public today is that it is a relatively new phenomena that emerged with the technological innovations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This is far from the truth. In reality, citizen journalism has been around longer than even the profession of journalism itself. In 1908, the University of Missouri opened the doors of the world's first journalism school, but newspapers had been around for centuries before that. As a matter of fact, early colonial newspapers in the United States had such an impact on the country that founders included a clause in the First Amendment protecting freedom of the press. But if the country had no professional journalists (since the profession had not been created, yet), then what were the framers of the Constitution protecting? The answer is citizen journalists – those with different backgrounds who practiced journalism on the side, despite having no “formal” journalistic background. The early American press laid the foundation for modern citizen journalists practicing in the United States.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PAPERS

Citizen journalism in the United States dates back to the time of the original 13 colonies. Boston, the largest city in New England in the late 1600s and early 1700s, proved to be the epicenter of the development of colonial newspapers, producing the colonies' first three newspapers. The first newspaper in America, *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*, was published by what today's standards would classify as a citizen journalist. Its creator, Benjamin Harris, was a London bookseller and publisher who fled England upon his release from prison for printing a seditious pamphlet. He came to New England with his family and started over, opening up a bookstore and coffeehouse in Boston (Mott 9). Harris's *Publick Occurrences* was printed September 25, 1690, and was meant to be a monthly publication (Mott 9). The last page was intentionally left blank so that Bostonians could add news items and notes by hand when forwarding the paper to friends (Mott 10). Unfortunately for Harris, his newspaper was shut down four days after its publication for not operating with a license (freedom of press did not yet exist in the colonies) (Mott 9). Although the first colonial newspaper was unsuccessful, it still laid the framework for news reporting done by the public.

Fourteen years later, Boston gave newspapers another try, this time with John Campbell's *Boston News-Letter*, which experienced more success than its predecessor. Campbell was a bookseller and the postmaster of Boston, starting a trend of colonial postmasters becoming newspaper printers. In *The Early American Press, 1690-1783*, William David Sloan and Julie Hedgepeth Williams explain how Campbell's role of postmaster led to the formation of the *News-Letter*:

As postmaster in an important commercial center and seaport town, he was in a position to obtain news conveniently from incoming letters, newspapers, and ship crews. He circulated his handwritten “public news-letters” to postal officials, merchants, and other affluent colonists. The reports were chiefly about commerce, shipping, and governmental activities. Many subscribers shared them with nonsubscribers, and some letters ended up posted in taverns and other public places for anyone who wished to learn about the news. (18)

As the popularity of the news-letters grew, Campbell decided to begin printing it, and thus America’s second newspaper was founded. It was the colonies’ first continuous newspaper.

The *Boston News-Letter*’s main competitor was another weekly newspaper, *The Boston Gazette*, started by Campbell’s postmaster successor, William Brooker (Mott 15). The *Gazette* went through five postmaster-editors before being turned over solely to its printers (Mott 15). This trend of postmaster-editors in Boston during the eighteenth century depicts how colonists used their professional resources to provide news to the public, while at the same time managing their primary affairs outside of their newspapers. Historian and journalist Frank Luther Mott provides a good description of a typical colonial editor in his book, *American Journalism; A History: 1690-1960*. Mott writes:

Thus, the editor is to be thought of chiefly as an entrepreneur. He had other affairs besides his newspaper on his hands. He was a job-printer and usually a publisher of books and pamphlets. He was often the local

postmaster, sometimes a magistrate, and in many cases public printer.

Frequently he kept a bookstore, where he sold his own publications and books imported from London; and occasionally he branched out into general merchandise lines. (47)

This description strongly resembles a description of a contemporary citizen journalist: an individual with no professional background in journalism who provides the public with an alternate source of news using a variety of resources.

The next major newspaper departed from the postmaster-editor correlation. *The New-England Courant*, founded by James Franklin, the first printer of the *Gazette* in 1721, had no connection to the postal service. Mott describes the *Courant* as a “bold departure from the *News-Letter* and *Gazette* kind of journalism” (16). A major difference was that the *Courant* was not “published by authority” like many previous papers, meaning the governor or his secretary did not approve of the paper’s contents before printing (Mott 16). This defiance conveyed the idea of freedom of press, a concept that would emerge later on and that would take a stronger hold during the American Revolution as colonists grew tired of British authority. The evolution of freedom of the press in the colonies is discussed in greater detail in a later section.

Although the newspapers that came before may have had some flaws such as inaccuracies or sensationalized articles, the *Courant* was perhaps the first to display an obvious breach of journalism ethics in the colonial newspapers. The *Courant* rose to prominence by placing a majority of its attention on a major topic in Boston at the time, a smallpox outbreak in the city. Most people opposed inoculation, and thus the *Courant* was conceived as an anti-inoculation paper, riding the issue into fame (Mott 16).

The problem with the *Courant* was that it used its power to regularly attack Increase and Cotton Mather, leaders of the New England religious hierarchy and strong supporters of inoculation. Mott argues that many writers of the *Courant* were using the newspaper solely as a means to personally attack the two Puritan ministers, writing, “Some of the writers behind the *Courant* were doubtless less interested in the merits and demerits of inoculation than in a popular attack upon the Mathers, but they had in this newspaper crusade a weapon convenient in their hands” (16).

The one-sided nature of the *Courant* brought attention to ethical practices in early American journalism that remain major concerns. It certainly was not “objective” in its reporting, something professional journalists of the modern era strive for, and it seemed to show no guilt about its biases. Yet, it and the rest of the early Boston newspapers illustrate the beginnings of citizen journalism in a developing country, laying the framework for later papers to follow, particularly politicized Revolutionary newspapers.

REVOLUTIONARY ERA NEWSPAPERS

When examining newspapers from the Revolutionary time period, it becomes quite obvious that, like the *Courant*, these papers were not in the least bit objective. They were very political and polarized, either illustrating the colonies’ growing resentment toward English authority or showing loyalty to Britain. Papers like the *Boston Gazette*, known particularly for its attacks on the Stamp Act of 1765, and the *Massachusetts Spy* were “Patriot” publications famous for their propaganda.

In 1765, England passed the Stamp Act, requiring all newspapers in the colonies to be printed on stamped paper which carried an expensive tax paid to England (Mott 71). Many papers evaded the tax by finding loopholes in the act, such as changing their status

from a newspaper to a handbill or “broadside” (a one-sheet newspaper printed only on one side) (Mott 74). Some papers in particular were very bold in their disparagement of the act. The *Boston Gazette* was printed by that time by industrious workers John Gill and Benjamin Edes (who was also a politician), and was one of the opposing publications (Mott 75). Its writers were part of the “Caucus Club,” which was “a small and purposely obscure organization designed to control political action” (Mott 76). The paper used its resources and influence to openly criticize the tax, which would eventually be repealed due to the mass opposition faced in the colonies. Following the repeal of the Stamp Act, the paper remained a strong voice for American independence with a circulation of about 2,000 (Mott 75).

Another paper during the time period was the *Massachusetts Spy*. Mott calls the *Spy* “the most incendiary publication in the colonies” (78). It was started by a 21-year-old named Isaiah Thomas, who had been educated in the publishing field by setting type for textbooks (Mott 77). The *Spy* was originally printed with the objective motto “Open to all parties, but influenced by none,” but the paper soon discovered neutrality was nearly impossible, especially while the independence movement swept through the colonies (Mott 77). The paper moved to the Patriot side and covered a variety of Patriot-related issues, featured anonymous political essays, and was very outspoken in its advocacy for independence. Its circulation topped out at 3,500 (Mott 78).

As the prospect of war arose and threats toward printers and the press became more prevalent, concerns emerged for the safety of these two papers. To protect them, they were both moved out of Boston in 1775, where they remained until the end of the war (Mott 79). Despite being removed from Boston, these two newspapers and others

printed by citizens upset about the English authority led the way in the fight for American independence, albeit in a very biased and one-sided manner.

When the Revolutionary War began, there were 37 published newspapers in the colonies. Out of those 37, only 20 survived the war. Along with the 17 that perished, another 18 were birthed during the Revolution but did not last. However, others were able to survive, so when the war ended there were 35 papers in the new nation, only two less than the starting number (Mott 95). The most important news items during the Revolutionary Era were “the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, the Boston ‘massacre’ in 1770, the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the important battles of 1776-83” (Mott 101).

As war raged between the colonists and the British, colonial journalism also waged war and continued to defy British authority. In reference to the Revolutionary press, Sloan and Williams write,

Over...eight years, America and Britain would fight bitterly on the military battlefield. The press and its readers would fight just as bitterly on the paper battlefield of newspapers and pamphlets. Neutrality and press access were no longer practiced. This was, after all, the battle for people’s hearts and souls and loyalties. Each faction accordingly did its best to exclude any good reports from the other side. (172)

It was a very polarizing time in American Journalism; essentially every journalist took a side. Objectivity was virtually non-existent. “The American Revolutionary press simply did not deal in impartiality. It dealt in persuasion to the utmost degree, even if it meant the loss of livelihood, home, and life itself” (Sloan 191). British officials found it

increasingly hard to contain or censor this open defiance and the growing boldness of Patriot newspapers that supported the fight for independence. Because of the defiant Revolutionary press, journalists enjoyed more press freedom during the war, a freedom that would last after the war ended. Indeed, the Revolutionary Press was so influential that it forced the idea of a free press into the spotlight when the new country drafted a constitution.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Although the notion of a free press was a hot topic during the birth of the new nation, its roots in American society began long before the Bill of Rights. The first major victory for press freedom was the John Peter Zenger trial. Zenger founded the *New York Weekly Journal* in 1733, a “small, four-page sheet, rather poorly printed” (Mott 32). Zenger ran into trouble when he published a satirical advertisement following an election that read, “A Monkey of the larger Sort, about 4 Foot high, has lately broke his chain and ran into the country...Having got a War Saddle, Pistols and Sword, this whimsical Creature fancied himself a general, and taking a Paper in his Paw he muttered over it, what the far greatest Part of the Company understood not” (Mott 32).

The paragraph was a word-cartoon of the sheriff (Mott 32). Zenger was arrested and charged with libel, and on August 4, 1735, Zenger came to trial. Andrew Hamilton, one of the most famous lawyers in the colonies, was his attorney (Mott 34). During the trial, Hamilton delivered a powerful address to the jury, which included these words:

I should think it my duty, if required, to go to the utmost part of the land where my service could be of any use in assisting to quench the flame of prosecutions upon information set on foot by the Government to deprive a

People of the right of remonstrating, and complaining, too, of the arbitrary attempts of men in power...(The question before the court) may, in its consequence, affect every freeman that lives under a British government on the main of America. It is the best cause. It is the cause of liberty...the liberty both of exposing and opposing arbitrary power by speaking and writing Truth. (Mott 37)

Following Hamilton's address, the jury retired and returned shortly with a verdict of "not guilty" (Mott 37). Zenger's triumph symbolized the first major victory of a free press in the colonies.

Another victory came in 1765 and involved Edes and Gill's *Boston Gazette*. During the paper's attack on the Stamp Act, the governor of the Massachusetts colony attempted "to get a libel indictment against Edes and Gill at one time, and some action in the matter by the House of Representatives at another" (Mott 75). The grand jury refused to indict Edes and Gill and the House notably declared "the Liberty of the Press is a great Bulwark of the Liberty of the People: It is therefore the incumbent Duty of those who are constituted the Guardians of the People's Rights to defend and maintain it" (Mott 75).

Another factor that thrust the notion of a free press into the spotlight was the intense amount of censorship and licensing done by the British government when America was just a colony. For a long time, colonials were required to obtain licenses and approval from British authority in order to print something or run the risk of suffering consequences such as having the publication shut down (e.g., Benjamin Harris). The most extreme sanction included jail time.

From the birth of the nation, freedom of the press was a notion that carried much weight. When the state constitutions were adopted, nine out of the 13 contained provisions guaranteeing freedom of the press (Mott 144). Furthermore, the idea of freedom of the press was so important that, although omitted from the original Constitution, it made its way into the First Amendment, which states, “Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...” (qtd. in Mott 145). Some states actually refused to ratify the U.S. Constitution unless the freedom of press was included in the bill of rights (Mott 144-145).

This new freedom of the press had an enormous effect on the new nation. Mott writes, “One reason for the extraordinary spread of newspapers... is that the press enjoyed more freedom in post-revolutionary America than it has ever before known anywhere in the world... Greater freedom of comment and a wider range of debatable topics were characteristic of this new and rather wild journalism” (143).

This importance has lived on throughout American history. By including freedom of the press in the Bill of Rights, the U.S. government extended more protection and privileges to journalists, which in turn gave citizen journalists more power. The free nature of the press in America gives citizens the opportunity to create information without having to worry about censorship or being shut down. If it was not for this clause, journalism in the United States would be vastly different.

1908: BIRTH OF THE JOURNALISM PROFESSION

Before 1908, there was no standard way of becoming a journalist. Technically, it can be argued that every journalist before that time was a citizen journalist since no formal education or degree existed, or was required. That all changed with the founding

of the world's first journalism school at the University of Missouri. Prior to the twentieth century, newspapers were primarily provincial, focusing on mainly local occurrences. However, following the turn of the century, international events began to draw more attention among the American public, especially following the Spanish-American War and with the influx of immigrants (Merrill and Hans 216-217). Walter Williams, the founding dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, and the other educators at the school shared this growing passion and greatly incorporated international journalism into the school curriculum. The school had a variety of international newspapers to refer to and analyze (Merrill and Hans 219). According to John C. Merrill and Hans Ibold in *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession*, "The journalism school's emphasis from the beginning was broad and cosmopolitan...Most of the foreign papers accessible to the faculty and students were serious, respectable journals, certainly reflecting the kind of journalism prized by Williams" (219).

The school also emphasized professionalism and social responsibility, as envisioned by Williams, who referred to it as a "professional spirit among journalists" (Merrill and Hans 224). Williams' vision of journalism education was best summarized in an excerpt from a speech named "The Professional Education of Journalists" found in a folder titled "Professional Education for Journalism":

Journalism has yet little or no literature and the schools from which the journalists of tomorrow are to come have just begun to be. From these schools it may be hoped will go out men who will not use journalism as a stepping-stone to something else and who will not permit themselves to be used for low or wrong purpose. Each journalist will regard himself as

holding a brief humanity and will accept no lesser client. With the development of a professional spirit will come higher ideals among all who practice this profession, a more determined insistence upon these ideals, and a more resolute adherence to them. We need to emphasize in journalism that professional spirit which makes for journalistic brotherhood, which upholds the dignity of the noblest profession, which declines to be employed for the base or unworthy purpose to satisfy passion, prejudice or greed (qtd. in Merrill and Ibold 224-225).

Williams' goal for the Missouri School of Journalism was to produce responsible, professional journalists through education that would hold themselves to higher standards than prior journalists. These journalists would make a career out of journalism and focus their time and resources solely to the practice. Graduates of journalism schools represented a shift from previous "journalists" who worked other primary occupations, such as postmaster, and used resources from their main job to cover the news.

In his book, Mott does an excellent job outlining what the "professional spirit" is that Williams emphasized in his vision for journalism education. Mott writes, "The professional spirit in any occupation is indicated by (1) devotion to service... (2) attention to the adequate preparation of its practitioners, including the cultivation of a zeal of the work, and (3) adherence to certain standards, whether codified or not" (863).

The school's emphasis on international journalism and professional responsibility was a break from the way journalism had been up to that point. For the first time, aspiring journalists could earn an academic degree in a "professional program" and focus their attention on journalism instead of relying on another job for their occupation. The

school also ushered in stronger ethical guidelines as well as a more international approach among professionals. The creation of the school proved a pivotal point in journalism history, but it created a greater rift between citizen and professional journalists, a rift that would grow over time. Mott writes, “In the mid-twentieth century, professional attitudes in journalism tended to gain importance. This growth was due largely to a higher level of education among newspapermen and increasing activity among professional organizations” (863). Following 1908, the professional journalist began to take form. The Society of Professional Journalists was founded as a journalistic fraternity at DePauw University in 1909, with campus charters founded at University of Kansas, University of Michigan, and Denver University the following year (“History of the Society”). In 1926, the society adopted its first code of ethics (“History of the Society”). As the century progressed, groups like the Society of Professional Journalists became more common.

TOWARD THE MODERN ERA

A quick examination of American history proves that citizen journalism is not new but rather has existed for centuries. However, following the initiation of journalism education, citizen reporting became largely replaced by professional journalists. Traditional media dominated the news. But in recent years, citizen journalism reemerged thanks to a number of societal factors, such as technology innovation and media consolidation. Thanks to the Web, citizen journalists have a voice to report news. Because of this reemergence, the number of voices in the media is once again growing and beginning to look a lot like the early American press.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEMPORARY CITIZEN JOURNALISM

For decades, newspapers were king in the news world. Even when radio and later television rose in prominence, newspapers remained an established player in the media field, providing “timely” news. But then came the Internet toward the end of the twentieth century, and news media changed forever. The Internet offered a kind of convenience and immediacy that traditional print media did not. It offered a way for the public to read tomorrow’s headlines today, and as time progressed, a way for the public to provide those headlines. Thus, “online journalism” began to grow and spread as more and more people embraced the new technology.

The Internet citizen journalism movement began with blogs in the late 1990s. Quinn and Lamble define a blog as “a type of Web site where entries are written, or posted, the same way you would update a journal or diary” (31). The term was coined by intelligence programmer Jorn Barger in 1997, when he described his Web site, www.robotwisdom.com, as a “weblog,” although blogs did not receive much attention until they started to become a source for news (Quinn and Lamble 30). One of the first major events that put blogs on the map was the 2002 Trent Lott incident. In December

2002, Majority Leader Sen. Trent Lott, R-Tenn., resigned from his position following allegations of racist comments. Much of the criticism Lott encountered originally generated in blogs (Quinn and Lamble 30).

A year later, blogs took a step closer to producing influential journalism. Salam al-Janbabi, a 29-year-old architect living in a Baghdad suburb, started a blog called *Salam Pax*, which covered the Iraq War's effect on the suburb (Quinn and Lamble 30). The blog received worldwide recognition and showed that citizen journalists could reach out to a large audience. *Salam Pax* was only the beginning of a new fad in reporting the news; in the years following, an abundant amount of the same type of news-reporting blogs sprung up.

While most were not sure where the blogging movement was going in the early part of the new millennium, many speculated that it was going to have a huge effect on reporting the news. For example, in a 2001 *Online Journalism Review* article, Senior Editor J.D. Lasica wrote:

While no one is really sure where this is all heading, my hunch is that blogging represents Ground Zero of the personal Webcasting revolution. Weblogging will drive a powerful new form of amateur journalism as millions of Net users – young people especially – take on the role of columnist, reporter, analyst and publisher while fashioning their own personal broadcasting networks. (“Blogging as a Form of Journalism”)

Even in its early days, those who paid attention to the journalism field saw the potential that blogs presented as a vehicle for citizen journalists.

Yet technology did not just stop with the Internet and blogs. It continued to progress. Now, new gadgets, such as smart phones and iPads, provide even more convenience for those looking for news consumption. Today, much of the world can access the news via their fingertips around the clock.

This accessibility has caused a change in the way the news is reported. In *Journalism and Citizenship: New Agendas in Communication*, Dan Gillmor describes news as becoming “democratized” in access. He writes:

With mass media – newspapers, magazines, radio, television – we created media and then distribute it... We were selling products, in a one-to-many system. Today, we create media and make it available, on a many-to-many network of networks. People who may be interested come and get it... People can get what they want, from an enormous variety of sources, and they can get it on their own desktop or phone right now, arranged as they choose. (Gillmor 1)

Social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, are a great example of the many-to-many network of networks that Gillmor wrote about. These networks are not only an asset for traditional media but also for citizens since the Internet provides a platform equally accessible for nontraditional journalists as it is for professionals. In today’s world, the news now finds the people instead of people finding the news, a clear divergence from the role the media traditionally have played. This section takes a deeper look into how and why that change occurred by looking at the contemporary citizen journalism ushered in by the “Internet age.”

MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

One of the major issues that has sparked contemporary citizen journalism is media consolidation, which occurs when multiple media outlets merge together to form a conglomerate. Over the past two decades, consolidation has occurred rapidly in mass media. Today, a group known as “the Big Six,” which consists of Time Warner Cable, The Walt Disney Company, Viacom, News Corporation, CBS Corporation, and General Electric, controls almost all the news (“Ownership Chart”). This rapid growth of super-conglomerates during the past few decades has been sparked by government-led deregulation, beginning with the Reagan administration and leading up to President Bill Clinton signing the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

In 1981, the Reagan administration, along with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Mark Fowler and the U.S. Congress, worked together to extend television licenses from three years to five and to increase the number of television stations a single entity could own from seven to 12 (“Deregulation”).

In 1987, in *Meredith Corp v. FCC*, a Washington, D.C. Circuit Court denounced the “Fairness Doctrine.” This doctrine, adopted by the FCC in 1949, viewed the stations it granted licenses to as “public” trustees with the responsibility to make every attempt to cover contrasting views in reporting (“Fairness Doctrine”). The doctrine tried to provide fair and balanced reporting, but concerns arose that it violated the First Amendment’s freedom of speech and of the press. The court ruled that the doctrine was not mandated by Congress and that the FCC did not have to enforce it (“Fairness Doctrine”). The FCC then dissolved the doctrine the same year, despite efforts made by both Houses of

Congress to make the doctrine law. Reagan, who favored deregulation and small government, vetoed the legislation (“Fairness Doctrine”). Thus, since 1987, media outlets have not been required to abide by the fairness doctrine.

Perhaps the most significant act of legislation that enabled media consolidation was the Telecommunications Act of 1996, signed by Clinton into law on February 8, 1996. According to the FCC Web site, the goal of the law is to “let anyone enter any communications business – to let any communications business compete in any market against any other” (“Telecommunications Act of 1996”). However, instead of promoting competition and expansion, the law resulted in the opposite, specifically in the radio industry. The law led to abundant radio consolidation after it lifted the 40 station cap on station ownership. A perfect example of the effect the law had on consolidation in the radio field is Clear Channel Communications. After the act became law, Clear Channel bought 49 radio stations the same year, followed by 70 stations in 1997 and 38 stations in 1998 (“Company History”). Today, Clear Channel operates more than 800 radio stations reaching more than 97 million listeners per week, as well as operating 140 other stations in Australia and New Zealand with international partners (“Clear Channel Communications, Inc. Fact Sheet”).

In 2003, the FCC further deregulated ownership rules, this time in the area of television. The agency voted 3-2 to allow broadcast networks to own television stations that reach a combined 45 percent of the national audience, an increase of 10 percent. It also voted to lift a ban that prevented a company from owning both a newspaper and a television or radio station, with the exception of the smallest markets (“FCC adopts media ownership rules”). The changes came amidst criticism, including from the two

dissenting voters. "Today the Federal Communications Commission empowers America's new media elite with unacceptable levels of influence over the ideas and information upon which our society and our democracy depend," FCC Commissioner Michael Copps said about the changes (qtd. in "FCC adopts media ownership rules").

The FCC followed up the 2003 changes with even more changes in 2007. By another narrow 3-2 vote, the FCC voted to lift a 32-year-old restriction that prohibited a corporation from owning both a newspaper and either a radio or television station in the same city. Again, Copps objected, saying "In the final analysis, the real winners today are businesses that are in many cases quite healthy, and the real losers are going to be all of us who depend on the news media to learn what's happening in our communities and to keep an eye on local government" (qtd. in Labaton). He also said, "Powerful companies are using political muscle to sneak through rule changes that let them profit at the expense of the public interest" (qtd. in Labaton).

As deregulation has occurred throughout the years, smaller media companies vanished and big media corporations grew larger. This has been the source of much concern from critics of media consolidation who see it as a threat to democracy. Furthermore, absence of a Fairness Doctrine means the public is not guaranteed reporting with competing voices representing different viewpoints. Because of this absence, fear of bias has persisted. In a 2003 *BusinessWeek* article titled "The FCC's Loner Is No Longer So Lonely," former CBS anchor and notable press figure Walter Cronkite said, "The gathering of more and more outlets under one owner clearly can be an impediment to a free and independent press" (qtd. in Yang). The fact is many feel out of the loop as media conglomerates continue to buy up all the outlets. This has helped spark the re-

emergence of citizen journalism, which provides the outsiders a way to report the news, share their opinions, and voice their concerns. Furthermore, since the introduction of the Internet, citizens now have a way to communicate with the masses, a power once held only by the mass media. This means consumers have more voices and sources to turn to. This “us against them” mentality has caused citizen journalism to grow, and has helped restore competition in the media.

ONLINE OVERTAKING PRINT

With the rise of online news, traditional media, particularly print newspapers, have begun to struggle. Newspapers are shutting down at a disturbing rate across the country. In a 2009 article for suite101.com, Rupert Taylor presented this finding:

According to the Newspaper Association of America there were 1,878 daily newspapers in the United States in 1940. By 2008, this number had fallen 1,408; that’s down by 72 newspapers since 2000. Today, there are about 49.1 million daily newspaper readers, that’s about the same number as in 1966, when the country’s population was 196 million. But today the population of America is 305 million.

In 2009 alone, the 150-year-old *Rocky Mountain News* published its last newspaper, while the 146-year-old *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and 138-year-old *Tucson Citizen* both ceased print publications and turned to online. What is even more alarming is that few seem to care. A 2009 study by the Pew Research Center revealed 43 percent of respondents said that losing their local paper would hurt civic life in their community “a lot,” while 33 percent said they would personally miss the newspaper (“Many Would Shrug”). But don’t let the respondents’ disinterest fool you; they have heard plenty about

newspapers' struggles. More than half (53 percent) said they heard "a lot" about these struggles, while another 31 percent said they heard "a little" ("Many Would Shrug").

A 2010 study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press revealed that 40 percent of respondents said they regularly read a daily newspaper, whether online or in print ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). However, just 31 percent polled said they read some form of a newspaper the previous day ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). Thirty-one percent was the lowest percentage in two decades of the Pew Research Center polling, down from 43 percent four years ago ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). Interestingly, when the poll later asked online news consumers if they read anything on a newspaper Web site, the number rose to 37 percent ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). The increasing percentage of people reading online newspapers shows a growing number turning to the Internet rather than print publications for their news.

This trend is supported by the poll's findings that reveal a clear gap between print and online newspapers. This year, 26 percent of adults who replied said that they read a print newspaper on any given day, down from 38 percent in 2006 ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). While this is an alarming statistic for print publications, even more alarming is the fact that the decline spans all age groups. For Americans younger than age 50, the share reading a print newspaper fell from 29 percent in 2006 to 15 percent ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). Among Americans ages 50 and older, print newspaper readership fell from 50 percent to 40 percent during the same time period ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). On the other hand, the poll shows that online news really has grown. The study

found that 17 percent of respondents said they read an online newspaper, a number that increased from 9 percent in 2006 (“Americans Spending More Time Following the News”). While as a percentage more Americans still read more print news than online news, the study clearly shows that online journalism’s popularity is growing while print journalism is on the decline.

Another interesting finding in the study revealed that while 17 percent of respondents said they read an online newspaper, 34 percent of respondents said they had read the news online the previous day (“Americans Spending More Time Following the News”). What accounts for this discrepancy? The answer is citizen journalism and online reporting, which is filling the void for those who are seeking an alternative source for news. In a 2009 *American Journalism Review* article titled “Cities Without Newspapers,” Rachel Smolkin writes:

Partly in response to the bleak outlook for metro papers and the relentless cost reductions at those publications, an exciting rebirth is taking place...Tiny but ambitious nonprofit online ventures are springing up as supplements or alternatives to the newspapers in their cities. They focus on public affairs and watchdog journalism – the very functions that metro newspapers have long prided themselves on providing. (“Cities without Newspapers”)

Smolkin cited the *St. Louis Beacon* as an example of an online site replacing traditional newspapers. The site’s editor, Margaret Wolf Freivogel, is a former reporter and editor at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. She says “online journalism is a ‘far superior tool’ for original reporting than print because it removes time and space constraints, allows links

to previous work and offers opportunities for interacting with readers” (“Cities Without Newspapers”). The site has adopted the slogan “News that Matters,” and focuses on significant primarily local issues, such as the city’s public schools, instead of a broad spectrum (“Cities Without Newspapers”). This type of local reporting attracts readers and is a staple of online and citizen journalism.

Another interesting statistic from the Pew Report is that 44 percent of respondents replied they got the news from Internet, cell phones, social networks or podcasts (“Americans Spending More Time Following the News”). This statistic further supports the growth of online journalism and its significant expansion across other platforms. Undoubtedly, many of those news sources reported represented citizen journalists linking video, pictures and text to sites (such as Twitter) where consumers can view it on advanced platforms such as smart phones and iPads. Yes, the age of technology is here, and it offers an array of ways for citizen journalists to report the news.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM WEB SITES

In 2000, *OhMyNews* was founded in Seoul, South Korea, with the slogan “every citizen can be a reporter” (Quinn and Lamble 51). As one of the first news sites ever created solely for citizen journalism, it brought participatory journalism into uncharted waters, serving as a pioneer in the Internet news business. By 2002, the site was so popular that after being elected, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun gave his first interview to *OhMyNews*.

Now a decade old, the bulk of the news on the site comes from the 63,300 citizen reporters from throughout the world that have contributed stories. According to the *OhMyNews* International website, these citizens submitted more than 426,500 articles, an

average of about 150 stories per day (“About”). *OhMyNews* ranks first amongst all independent internet news websites in South Korea, and has more than 2 million unique users visit the site each day, resulting in more than 2.5 million page views (“About”). Amazingly, the site only employs 70 editors and reporters (“About”).

When stating the purpose of the site, The *OhMyNews International* website makes its goal of appealing to Internet citizen journalism clear. The website states:

A one-stop shop for all things citizen journalism did not exist. This was a hole in the conversation about media and the Internet, and our position at *OhmyNews* means we are the best people to fill it. We see citizen journalism as a way to promote important subjects like free speech, identity, and privacy. And so, we want to offer a place to gauge the present and decide its future. (“About”)

Websites like *OhMyNews* showed the world and other media outlets how citizens can be a valuable asset in reporting the news. During the past decade, citizen journalist sites such as *OhMyNews* have emerged at a rapid rate. An American example of a citizen journalism website is *Examiner*. According to the website, “Examiner.com is the inside source for everything local. We are powered by Examiners, the largest pool of knowledgeable and passionate contributors in the world. Examiners provide unique and original content to enhance life in your local city wherever that may be” (*Examiner.com*) *Examiner* focuses on local affairs and allows citizens to apply for certain beats within a city. “Examiners come from all walks of life and contribute original content to entertain, inform, and inspire their readers. They are credible, passionate and influential because of their knowledge of a particular topic (*Examiner.com*).

TRADITIONAL MEDIA PARTNER WITH CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

In 2006, CNN launched a citizen journalism initiative called *iReport*, which encourages the contribution of videos and pictures to the network that may then be used in CNN broadcasts. *iReport* has proven to be a success as a valuable source of news; it was not even a year old before it produced its first major report. On April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech student Jamal Albarghouti sent a video captured on his camera phone that recorded the sounds of gunshots fired during a campus shooting (“Student shot video”). The firsthand account of the event was used in CNN’s coverage of the event.

In 2008, CNN took its citizen initiative a step further. The corporation bought the rights to the domain names “ireport.com” and “i-report.com” for \$750,000 (Learmonth). CNN then launched the website version of iReport, iReport.com, later that year, allowing users to instantly submit media directly to the site rather than sending it to CNN. In other words, it removed the middle man and made it easier for citizens to submit content. According to the site, “Everything you see on iReport starts with someone in the CNN audience. The stories here are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. CNN’s producers will check out some of the most compelling, important and urgent iReports and, once they’re cleared for CNN, make them a part of CNN’s news coverage” (“About CNN iReport”).

The initiative has led to a show aired on CNN International called *iReport for CNN*. The show’s website says that the show “is an interactive, international monthly half-hour TV program showcasing the most newsworthy and informative iReport contributions and citizen journalism reports on the internet.” (iReport for CNN). The show airs for 30 minutes on the third Thursday of each month (iReport for CNN).

As iReport's popularity has grown, other media outlets, such as ABC's *i-Caught* and FOX News's *uReport*, launched similar campaigns to compete with CNN. These news organizations have realized the advantages of collaborating with citizen journalists to produce timely, immediate news to the public. As time progresses, it will be interesting to see if traditional media outlets will become more involved with citizen journalists.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Perhaps the most recent development in citizen journalism is the social media revolution. Social media includes sites such as Twitter and social network sites such as Facebook. During the past few years, they have become increasingly popular.

Furthermore, they are becoming an acceptable source of news consumption. A 2010 study by the Pew Center showed that 19 percent of respondents regularly or sometimes get the news from social network sites, while about 3 percent get news from Twitter (keep in mind that Twitter is a relatively young site). ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News"). While this may not sound like a huge portion of the population, the study showed that the majority of those using social media belonged to the younger population, meaning these sites will grow as a source of news in the future. In all, 36 percent of those younger than 30 years old responding said that they at least get news from these sites sometimes ("Americans Spending More Time Following the News").

These sites are a valuable tool for journalists because they allow them to put out a simple headline to an audience and then easily link to the rest of the story on another website. Linking to news websites through social media allows journalists to increase the

number their story reaches. But this is not all. Another intriguing aspect of social media is that readers can follow a particular journalist or news organization and read content as it is uploaded. Twitter is especially influential in this area; about one in four (24 percent) of Twitter users follow a news organization or individual journalist (“Americans Spending More Time Following the News”).

Social media sites are another asset to citizen journalists as well, who can utilize them in the same way as traditional journalists. Since social media profiles are typically public, it allows citizens to write about the news and then post it for the entire Web to see. This was quite obvious in the aftermath of the 2009 Iran presidential election, in which Iranians went to Twitter to protest the alleged corruption and update the world on what was happening in Iran when most other media were repressed. A June 2009 *Time* article by Lev Grossman, titled “Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement,” said, “Twitter didn't start the protests in Iran, nor did it make them possible. But there’s no question that it has emboldened the protesters, reinforced their conviction that they are not alone and engaged populations outside Iran in an emotional, immediate way that was never possible before.” The Iran election protests is probably the greatest example of the power social media can have in reporting the news and shows the possibility of what role the future of these sites might be in society.

Social Media is clearly a growing sector of citizen journalism, and will continue to grow for years to come as the younger population ages. As of September 14, 2010, Twitter had 175 million registered users, with 95 million “tweets” posted per day (“Twitter is the best”). According to the Facebook site, Facebook has more than 500 million active users, 50 percent of which log on to Facebook on any given day. The

average user has 130 “friends” and people spend more than 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook (“Press Room Statistics”).

While contemporary citizen journalists may have more tools to use than their historical colleagues, the idea remains the same. The technology associated with the modern form simply gives citizen journalists a better opportunity to reach a larger audience than in the past. However, with a larger audience comes greater concerns, and contemporary citizen journalism has plenty of issues and potential problems that surround it. A few of those issues will be the topics for the remaining sections.

CHAPTER 4

SHIELD LAWS: WHO IS A JOURNALIST?

As citizen journalism becomes a more viable option for producing news, concerns arise over who to consider a journalist. Are bloggers journalists? Or should only trained “professionals” be considered true journalists? Furthermore, how far should legal protections for journalists extend? These questions and concerns have thrust citizen journalism into the spotlight with regard to a proposed federal “shield law.” A shield law protects journalists from having to hand over information provided in confidence to government bodies using subpoena power. Many states have shield laws or at least offer some protection, but as of now there is no federal shield law, although a federal bill has passed the House but is stalled in Senate committee.

PRIVILEGE LAW

To fully understand the significance of citizen journalism and the federal shield law debate, one must first get a firm grasp on the background of privilege law. Privilege law is a legal aspect that plays a major role in the possible formulation of a shield law. The privilege debate goes all the way back to 1742, when Lord Hardwicke said on the floor of Parliament that “the public has a right to every man’s evidence” (Fargo 66).

Hardwicke's statement, that privileges excusing people from providing evidence in court are not favored because it hinders in the search for truth, is a good description of American law's view of privileges (Fargo 66).

Despite the law's unfavorable view of privileges, it is recognized that at times confidentiality is needed to protect the relationship between two parties. Without this confidentiality, irreparable damage could occur (Fargo 66). Most of the time, confidentiality is requested in order to protect someone or something. If that confidentiality is breached, it could cause harm to a party involved. John Henry Wigmore, a prominent voice on evidence law in the United States during the twentieth century, gave four conditions for which a person should be granted the privilege to not testify in court:

1. The communication must originate in confidence that they will not be disclosed.
2. This element of confidentiality must be essential to the full and satisfactory maintenance of the relation between the parties.
3. The relation must be one which in the opinion of the community ought to be sedulously fostered.
4. The injury that would inure to the relation by the disclosure of the communications must be greater than the benefit thereby gained for the correct disposal of litigation. (qtd. in Fargo 66)

Over time, relationships between "spouses, medical doctors and patients, psychotherapists and patients, and clergy and penitents" became accepted in American law as acceptable cases protected by privileges (Fargo 66-67).

In 1975, Congress imposed an evidence code on federal courts with the adoption of Federal Rule of Evidence 501, which stated:

Except as otherwise required by the Constitution of the United States or provided by Act of Congress or in rules prescribed by the Supreme Court pursuant to statutory authority, the privilege of a witness, person, government, State, or political subdivision thereof shall be governed by the principles of the common law as they may be interpreted by the courts of the United States in the light of reason and experience. However, in civil actions and proceedings, with respect to an element of a claim or defense as to which State law supplies the rule of decision, the privilege of a witness, person, government, State or political subdivision thereof shall be determined in accordance with State law. (qtd. in Fargo 67)

In *What They Meant to Say: The Courts Try to Explain Bransburg v. Hayes*, Anthony Fargo writes “The adoption of FRE 501 can be seen as an attempt to strike a balance between the need for evidence to help ascertain the truth in a legal controversy and the need to protect fragile personal and professional relationships” (67). Journalists argue that due to the nature of their job and the professional relationships with their sources, they should have protected privileges.

BRANZBURG V. HAYES

Until the 1960s, journalism and privilege law did not really intersect. Journalists and the government maintained a fairly good relationship because they depended upon each other; journalists depended on the government for sources, and the government depended on journalists to get information to the public (Fargo 68). Therefore,

journalists were not often subpoenaed. When journalists were, they were usually on the losing end, facing contempt of court if they did not hand over information requested under subpoena.

In the 1960s, the press began to openly question its reliance on government sources, which had been a strong partner in supplying reporters' information up until that point. This strained the press's relationship with the government, particularly during the Nixon administration. During the Vietnam War, many anti-government groups formed. Journalists were the only ones with sources in these groups, and thus the government increased the number of subpoenas in this time period in an attempt to gain knowledge about these groups. This was much to the dismay of journalists, who did not want to disclose confidential sources. The conflict between the government and press further fueled the debate over privilege law and shield law (Fargo 68-69).

In 1971, three cases involving reporters who wanted to shield their confidential sources made their way to the Supreme Court. In 1972, the Court consolidated the cases into one, *Branzburg v. Hayes*, and issued a ruling that established precedent in cases involving shield laws (Fargo 70). Before looking at the ruling, it may be helpful to examine the background of the case and the three reporters involved.

Paul Branzburg, the reporter for whom the case was named, was a reporter at the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. He wrote a story about illegal drugs in Louisville from the perspective of two anonymous drug dealers. Branzburg was then called before a Jefferson County grand jury to testify about the story and his sources. He refused, and Branzburg's attorneys began fighting for his right to withhold his sources (Fargo 70).

Earl Caldwell, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, was the second reporter involved in the case. He covered the Black Panthers, a group formed in Oakland, California. He was subpoenaed to appear in court to testify and surrender his notes from an interview with David Hillard, the Black Panther Party's chief of staff (Fargo 71). Like Branzburg, Caldwell refused to release information about confidential sources.

The third reporter, Paul Pappas, was a reporter for WTEV-TV in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Pappas was ordered to testify in court about what he observed at a Black Panthers headquarters prior to a police raid. He was there because the Black Panthers said he could only do a story about a possible police raid. That raid did not happen while he was there, and so Pappas refused to answer any questions about whom or what he saw (Fargo 73). Like the other two instances, the government pressed charges, and the case was appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Court's decision was announced June 29, 1972. It did not rule in favor of the journalists, although it did say journalists had some constitutional protections. Byron White's opinion argued several points.

First, the Court argued that journalists were like other citizens and did not have any special privileges to withhold confidential sources from the government when subpoenaed. The opinion struck down the First Amendment argument because journalists do have some restrictions on their activities (such as at crime scenes or grand jury proceedings), and do not have special access to information that the general public does not (Fargo 73).

Furthermore, the Court also argued the relationship between journalists and confidential sources was not endangered because the ruling would not threaten the bulk

of relationships since only sources involved in criminal activity or who have relevant information concerning a committed crime are likely to be a target of a subpoena.

According to the opinion, these sources were not above the law (Fargo 73).

Second, the Court expressed concerns about the journalists' plea for special privilege. The press was only seeking a conditional privilege, not an absolute one, which posed a problem that is as big of an issue today as it was in 1972: the Court would have to decide who would be protected by privilege law. This is where the case becomes especially relevant to citizen journalists. The Court said that "liberty of the press is the right of the lonely pamphleteer who uses carbon paper or a mimeograph as much as the large metropolitan publisher who utilizes the latest photocomposition methods" (qtd. in Fargo 74). The Court ruled that press freedom was an individual right, not just belonging to traditional press, and went as far as to say that the functions of the traditional press are also "performed by lecturers, political pollsters, novelists, academic researchers, and dramatists" (qtd. in Fargo 74). These statements made by the Court mean that many nontraditional journalists can be legally classified as journalists.

Another issue then arises: after deciding who is protected by the law, the courts would then have to decide whether conditions protecting the reporter were met or if the government presented enough compelling evidence to require the journalist to testify. These concerns are among the reasons the Court decided not to rule in favor of the journalist, although it did say that the federal and state government could enact shield laws to protect the press if they saw fit (Fargo 74-75).

Lewis Powell's concurring opinion argued that the Court had adopted a balancing approach in its majority opinion. He came to this conclusion based on the fact that

although the Court ruled against the journalists and struck them a blow concerning confidentiality, it also said that journalist did have some protections and deserved a remedy if they were called before an investigation being conducted in bad faith (Fargo 74). He also suggested that journalists might be protected in criminal cases where the sought information was irrelevant (Fargo 74). Powell wrote that the journalist's privilege claim should be balanced on a case-by-case basis based on the "freedom of the press and the obligation of all citizens to give relevant testimony with respect to criminal conduct" (qtd. in Fargo 75).

In the dissent, William Douglass argued that reporters should have absolute immunity, except in cases involving implications of a crime they committed. Even then, Douglass argued they should be protected by the self-incrimination clause in the Fifth Amendment, so there would be virtually no reason for a reporter to ever be forced to testify in court (Fargo 76). In another dissent, Potter Stewart argued that the First Amendment should protect the right of journalists to keep their sources anonymous. Stewart noted the ruling would allow the government "to undermine the historic independence of the press by attempting to annex the journalistic profession as an investigative arm of government" (qtd. in Fargo 77).

The Branzburg decision did not greatly affect use of anonymous sources. Two years after Branzburg, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* shed light on the Watergate scandal, which led to the resignation of Nixon. Sometimes, anonymous sources are more important to the story than the potential consequences involved. But this is not to say the Branzburg decision and shield law debate are not significant. While there is not federal shield law, the numbers of states with shield laws

have doubled since the ruling; there are currently 39 states with shield laws not counting the District of Columbia (Fargo 80). All of these state laws, influenced by the *Branzburg* decision, define who a journalist is, although that definition varies from state to state (Fargo 80). A federal law has not passed because of the same concern the Court had in *Branzburg*: Who is a journalist? In light of the popularity of citizen journalism, this issue has taken on an even greater significance.

CURRENT ISSUES WITH A FEDERAL SHIELD LAW

In 2005, interest in a federal shield law was renewed when Judith Miller, a *New York Times* reporter, was charged with contempt of court and served 85 days in jail before agreeing to release the identity of her source, which turned out to be then-Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, Scooter Libby (Van Natta, Liptack, and Levy). The conversations between Miller and Libby concerned the leak of a CIA officer's name. Miller was subpoenaed because she possessed evidence that was relevant to the leak investigation (Van Natta, Liptack, and Levy). Miller's case helped spark a renewed interest in a federal shield law. Legislation has been introduced in both the U.S. House and Senate. According to the American Society of News Editors (ASNE):

The legislation responds to a disturbing trend. Since 2001, five journalists have been sentenced or jailed for refusing to reveal their confidential sources in federal court. Two reporters were sentenced to 18 months in prison and one reporter faced up to \$5,000 a day in fines. A 2006 study estimated that in that year alone, 67 federal subpoenas sought confidential material from reporters, with 41 of those subpoenas seeking the name of a confidential source. ("Background")

The bill, named the “Free Flow of Information Act,” passed by voice vote in the House. On December 10, 2009, the Senate version was reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee but has yet to be brought to the Senate floor for a vote (Alexander and Franklin).

The bill has already endured about six years of debate and has undergone many changes. For example, what started out as an absolute privilege for reporters is now a qualified privilege. According to ASNE, “Both the House and Senate versions require reporters to provide information to prevent acts of terrorism or other significant harm to national security, to furnish eyewitness observations of a crime, and to provide information needed to prevent death, kidnapping, or substantial bodily harm” (“Background”). Another significant issue that remains is who to consider a “covered” person, or, in other words, who can receive qualified protection.

In an interview with *OurBlock*, a self-described “website combining the dynamic online atmosphere of a blog with the researched, in-depth analysis of a book,” (“About Us”) ASNE President Martin Kaiser said the following when asked about the cons of a shield law:

There is always a danger in letting a government entity of any type define who is and who is not a ‘journalist.’ Our main concern is that the final bill may include a ‘status’-based definition of ‘covered person’ that will limit its application to only mainstream media or, worse, those persons who receive financial compensation for their work. ASNE is especially proud of its work with the next generation of journalists, yet the college and high

school journalists we support would be unprotected if the bill applies only to those journalists who receive financial compensation. The same would be true for freelance book authors or investigative journalists. (“Martin Kaiser on Media Shield Bill”)

Even though there is a renewed interest in a federal shield law, it remains to be seen whether or not citizen journalists would be considered covered individuals. If so, it would provide a precedent for the states in regards to their shield laws. The Internet is the primary vehicle for citizen journalists, so whether or not Internet content is protected is a huge issue for citizens who want protection. As of right now, there is no consistency or uniformity from state to state about who is covered in the laws, and few state legislatures have taken up the challenge to define whether citizen journalists, particularly those who use the Internet as a means to report the news, should have the same protections as traditional journalists. In *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and Transitions*, Cecilia Friend and Jane B. Singer write “Not one of the states specifically mentions the Internet. Some are clearly limited to traditional print and broadcast reporters; others are worded broadly enough that they probably would be interpreted to cover online journalists” (105).

Ultimately, a federal shield law would define once and for all who a journalist is. But that is easier said than done, as the definition of a journalist is being clouded by a wave of citizen journalism. Until recently, it has been difficult for bloggers and other Internet news providers to gain the same kind of news media access as traditional media. But accessibility has changed in the past few years to include nontraditional media.

Citizen journalists are beginning to enjoy the same privileges as traditional media. For example, in 2004, three dozen bloggers were credentialed to cover the Democratic convention in Boston with nearly as many covering the GOP convention in New York a month later (Friend and Singer 108). Blurred lines like these raise question about who a journalist is in today's society, and are a major reason a federal shield law is stalled.

CHAPTER 5

CONCERNS ABOUT CITIZEN JOURNALISM

As the field of journalism became more professionalized, journalists developed a higher standard in reporting their news in order to increase credibility, especially as the public began to hold them more accountable for their work. As Friend and Singer say in their book, “Accuracy and credibility – the foundation of any news organization’s unspoken but enduring contract with its audience – demand factual, reliable information and compelling evidence presented in a balanced way” (54). Credibility is the most important aspect of the journalism profession; without it, a journalist has nothing.

Although this contract between journalists and their audience is not a formal agreement, it is mutually expected by both. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) has taken this contract a step further, formulating a code of ethics that is generally accepted by most journalists. The code’s preamble states:

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues.

Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice. (SPJ Code of Ethics)

The code establishes four main points that journalists should consider in reporting: “seek truth and report it,” “minimize harm,” “act independently,” and “be accountable” (SPJ Code of Ethics). This code led to the creation of other journalism codes, such as the National Press Photographers Association Code of Ethics.

There is value in abiding by these codes. When journalists do not, they may be vulnerable to legal troubles, such as libel and privacy laws. Libel is written defamation of a person, which is “damaging to their reputation or causing other personal harm, such as emotional distress” (Friend and Singer 98). In order to win a libel suit, the plaintiff must prove that he or she was identifiable in a false, defamatory statement, and that the statement was disseminated or published as a result of negligence or recklessness (Friend and Singer 98). Libel suits are just one example of many of the troubles journalists can run into when they are not ethical and credible in their work.

A blogger named David Milum serves as a real-life example of a libel suit involving a citizen journalist. In 2004, Milum got in a dispute with Rafe Banks, the attorney who represented Milum in a prior case. Milum demanded Banks to pay back \$3,000 in fees he received, but Banks refused. Milum then attacked Banks on the Forsyth County Political Forum and accused Banks of delivering bribes to judges on behalf of drug dealers (Banks v. Milum). Banks said the allegations were false and sued Milum for

libel. In 2006, the court ruled in favor of Banks and ordered Milum to pay \$50,000 in general damages (Banks v. Milum).

In 2002 in Seattle, Washington, Paul Trummel served 111 days in jail for contempt after failing to comply with court orders (Robinson). Trummel's troubles stemmed from a newsletter he circulated throughout the "Council House," the low-income senior-citizens' residence which he lived in at the time (Robinson). The newsletter outlined the complaints Trummel had about the building, of which the Council House took offense and sought a restraining order against Trummel. The restraining order was granted, and so Trummel ceased his newsletter and took his complaints to his website, www.contracabal.net, adding the personal contact information of the Council House's administrators (Robinson). This time, the court ruled that Trummel must remove the personal information about the administrators. Trummel initially complied with the court's orders, but eventually reposted the same information on another website based in Holland. After refusing to remove the information from the Holland-based site, Trummel was found in contempt and served 111 days in jail for his disobedience (Robinson). Trummel's problems are another example of how citizens can get in trouble if they are not careful when they take reporting into their own hands.

Many of the concerns surrounding citizen journalism involve ethical practices. Since citizen journalists are by definition amateurs, do they abide by the same guidelines as professionals? There are certainly questions concerning the objectiveness, accuracy, fairness and overall credibility of citizen journalism. This section will take a look at those issues in greater detail, and will elaborate on how citizen journalism is affecting journalistic ethics.

OBJECTIVITY OR TRANSPARENCY?

While most journalists admit that true objectiveness is impossible, it is nevertheless something for which a majority strives. But striving for objectivity is not always the case for citizen journalists. Not only are many blogs and other forms of citizen media biased, they openly admit to their biases. While this confession may seem to pose a threat to the credibility of these sources, some argue that their openness actually establishes credibility rather than hurting it. Jeff Jarvis, the blogger behind ByzzMachine, offered this advice to newsrooms in the United Kingdom's *Guardian*:

No, blogging is not the cure for all ills, but it is an apt metaphor for how newsrooms should operate. Reporters should put what they know into a blogging tool when they know it, and editors can publish that anytime. They should link to other resource people who know more than they do or to wire stories that already report the basics. They should ask readers what they want to know before they report a story, and rely on readers to improve and correct stories after they are written. They should share notes and transcripts. They should reveal their process and prejudices to fulfill the open-source era's highest ethic – transparency. And they should shed their haughty, institutional persona and regain a human voice, facing the public they serve eye-to-eye. (qtd. in Friend and Singer 71)

Many citizen journalists have embraced transparency over objectiveness, providing readers with their sources and whatever research they may perform while also making it clear that they are not objective in their writing. For some, transparency makes up for biased material since the writers are honest up front about it (Friend and Singer 70).

Transparency over objectiveness is becoming more acceptable in the journalism field. Some even view the lack of objectiveness as a strength. Friend and Singer refer to transparency in reporting as a new ethic in journalism, and say “It may be the only journalistic ethic that has moved from online to traditional newsrooms instead of the other way around” (Friend and Singer 70). But they follow this up by acknowledging that transparency is more suitable for citizens rather than traditional journalists:

Trying to achieve transparency throughout a newsroom raises other issues, stemming in part from organizational differences between mainstream journalism and blogging. Most bloggers work alone. To the degree that a blog is transparent, it need only reveal the blogger’s biases, motives, methods, and sources. A daily news operation, even a small one, is exponentially more complex. A handful to dozens of people make decisions about what gets covered, how it gets covered, and how it gets played. (Friend and Singer 71)

The simplicity of citizen journalism is one of its advantages compared to professional. Most professional journalists would agree that transparency is a great idea, but simply cannot achieve it due to the size of the newsroom.

Transparency is much easier to achieve in the smaller, less corporative citizen sphere. Because of this, citizen journalists enjoy more freedom to voice opinions in their reporting since they can compensate for biases in other ways. However, whether or not this is good for reporting is up for debate.

Another way citizen journalists are promoting transparency in their reporting is presenting the news as a conversation. According to Friend and Singer, “One factor

driving this new media phenomenon is a dissatisfaction with the traditional model of journalists gathering and presenting an information ‘product’ to an audience – a one-way street” (13). Although traditional media are now trying to incorporate more conversation in their reporting, such as CNN’s *iReport*, the concept has flourished the most on the Web with citizen journalists.

“The Web’s interactive capability has been the most dominant feature of the new media landscape. It has spawned passionate, public conversations among a throng of diverse voices and perspectives and led to the return of a point-of-view style of news writing” (Friend and Singer 13). The conversation promoted by this type of reporting allows for a wide range of differing viewpoints and opinions. Because of conversation, objectivity is not as important since most sides of the topic are still covered, even though the information might come from different sources.

SPEED VS. ACCURACY

Because of the 24-hour news cycle of the Internet, the need for quick, timely reporting is crucial. While quick reporting sounds like a good idea, the emphasis of being first to break a story presents yet another ethical concern because sometimes accuracy and verification is sacrificed in place of speedy reporting.

A 2010 study published in the *Newspaper Research Journal*, conducted by Scott Reinardy, assistant professor in the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas, revealed that U.S. newspaper journalists feel that the need for speed on the Internet is clashing with journalistic values. The study consisted of interviews with 48 anonymous journalists, which were asked three research questions:

1. Have newspaper strategies changed in recent years? If so, how?
2. What has been the result of newsroom change?
3. Have age and years of experience affected how journalists have adapted to the newsroom changes? If so, how? (Reinardy 74)

Reinardy conducted the interviews in February and March 2008. Respondents represented 23 newspapers from 11 states (Reinardy 75). According to Reinardy, “Confidentiality was provided so the respondents could feel free to speak openly about their news organizations” (Reinardy 75).

Overwhelmingly, the replies to the first question were how the Web is becoming more important as a newspaper strategy. One respondent, a local editor, said “We’ve been told we’re changing our emphasis from being a newspaper with a Web site to being a Web site with a newspaper... We count Web hits more than we count circulation” (Reinardy 76). Furthermore, it appeared in the study that Internet stories affect tomorrow’s headlines. Stories that would normally be buried in the paper took greater precedence if the story was popular on the Web (Reinardy 76). A copy editor said that his paper broke news online, then explained it in print. “There have been a couple of crazy days when your front page the next day is five stories that are all local and three have been broken on the Web in the afternoon, which is actually pretty cool,” he said (Reinardy 76). Another respondent said “They’re constantly checking which stories get the most story chat action and the most hits. We’ve had stories go from being an inside local story to being an A1 story all because of the activity online” (Reinardy 76). From the responses, one can gather that prominence of stories online is becoming more important in determining what stories are most important to newspapers.

The second question shifts to the effect that the emphasis put on Web stories is having on the newsroom. The greatest effect seemed to be on journalistic standards, particularly with the rush to publish online that “encouraged shortcuts in reporting and editing and appeared to be counterintuitive to traditional journalistic standards” (Reinardy 76). A copy editor for a newspaper with a circulation of 275,000 said, “Right now we don’t have any copy editors assigned to copy edit anything before it goes to the Web, which can present problems with headlines that are wrong or stories that are wrong or people who are dead in stories and are alive” (Reinardy 77). This presents a major problem: If online stories are directing the focus of traditional media, and those online stories prove to be inaccurate, what does that mean for journalism ethics as a whole?

Releasing material that has not been vetted has long been a staple of citizen journalism, particularly with blogs. Friend and Singer write that:

Bloggers have replaced this ‘filter, then publish’ standard with a ‘publish, then filter’ model that emphasizes individual spontaneity and the ability of the blogging community to challenge inaccurate or covertly biased writing. The ‘publish, then filter’ principle reflects bloggers’ broadly libertarian orientation; it replaces the top-down hierarchy of the conventional newsroom with the photosphere’s network of equals. (Friend and Singer 62)

While this may sound good, Friend and Singer also warn that “it also makes a virtue of necessity. Because nearly all bloggers work alone, the editing function – insofar as there is one – must be assumed by the larger community” (Friend and Singer 62).

Lack of filtering might be a desirable trait for some, but it is important that readers check the accuracy, especially of blogs, of content they read online instead of assuming it is all true, whether it be citizen or traditional journalism. Remember, rumors run rampant on the Web, which increases the flow of false information.

The idea of uploading content on the Web, even at the expense of traditional journalistic standards, has become so popular that even many mainstream citizen journalism sites do not filter most sources. For example, CNN's iReport.com has a pop-up box with a disclaimer that states "So you know: iReport is the way people like you report the news. The stories in this section are not edited, fact-checked, or screened before they post. Only ones marked 'CNN iReport' have been vetted by CNN" ("About CNN iReport"). Although CNN does vet the reports that it uses in its main news coverage, iReport still poses potential concerns about accuracy for those who view the content on the site. Ultimately, one should always do some research and not assume everything on the Internet is true, no matter how credible it may seem. With proper scrutiny, online journalism, particularly from citizens, can prove to be a valuable source for news. Without scrutiny, it may lead to inaccuracies being believed as truths.

PLAGIARISM

With the speed that content moves on the Web, it is very tempting to plagiarize someone else's work and post it on another site without attribution. Unfortunately, this happens far too much in today's online world. As Stephen Quinn and Stephen Lamble write in their book about online journalism, "Conduct a simple search of the Web relating to just about any contentious topic or big news story and you will find multiple copies of the same reports and comments. Often there are so many copies that it is difficult to find

or identify the original document” (99). Simply put, one of the major problems on the Web today is plagiarism.

There are two dangers for journalists regarding online plagiarism. The first danger is giving into temptation themselves, and the second is attributing information to the wrong source, who plagiarized from somewhere else (Quinn and Lamble 99).

As a general rule, it is never acceptable for a journalist to plagiarize because of ethical reasons. But that is not to say it never happens. Perhaps the most common online form of plagiarism is copyright infringement. According to Quinn and Lamble, “Copyright is a form of intellectual property protection... Intellectual property relates to the ownership and expression of ideas. In broad terms, copyright does not protect ideas, but it does protect the expression of those ideas in a tangible form” (143). Expression can take the form in various entities, including news reports, Web sites and other online content.

Most nations have copyright laws protecting intellectual property. Typically, it is free and automatic; the creator is the first owner of the copyright unless some other agreement has occurred (for example, one may attach a notice to the property relinquishing copyright and making it public domain). The protection starts the moment an expression of an idea is created, not when it is published (Quinn and Lamble 143). In the United States, copyright protection continues for 70 years after the creator’s death. After that, the idea is free for the public to use (Quinn and Lamble 143-144).

Violating copyright laws can lead to a world of troubles for journalists. Typically, offenders are open to “both criminal prosecution by the state and liable for a civil action for compensation by the copyright owner” (Quinn and Lamble 145). The

heavy punishments make copyright infringement a big deal, but still lazy, unethical journalists fall prey to its convenience. “There are numerous examples globally of journalists and other writers who have lost their jobs and or been fined substantial amounts as a result of plagiarism and breach of copyright. As well as suffering the ignominy of exposure as cheats and thieves, they have faced substantial fines and even jail” (Quinn and Lamble 145).

The Internet offers many opportunities for plagiarism. Quinn and Lamble do a great job of explaining the threats presented, and give good advice on how to not fall victim to the practice while working on the Web:

Online researchers must be careful not to plagiarize and not to breach another’s copyright. In practical terms, that means you can only use a very limited amount of something someone else has created without his or her permission. Otherwise you must seek permission from the copyright owner, and that owner has every right to demand a fee and a perfectly sound legal right to refuse permission for the work to be reproduced. (144)

If journalists, particularly citizen journalists looking for research and other sources online, follow this advice, they should be able to avoid plagiarizing someone else’s work.

The second problem with plagiarism is a little different. As previously mentioned, it is often difficult to find an original source on the Internet because the content has been reproduced so many times. In an effort to avoid plagiarizing, this could lead to attributing content to the wrong source which has reproduced the content of someone else, thus still plagiarizing despite one’s good intentions. To avoid plagiarizing, it is important to always trace information all the way to the original source, no matter

how difficult it may be. “The best way to do that is to try to find primary documents and/or the authors of those primary documents...Finding those primary documents, reports, and sources online takes common sense. It involves...finding original news reports, looking carefully at URLs, and picking up a telephone and talking to experts” (Quinn and Lamble 100). Careful, meticulous work will help citizen journalists and others avoid attributing information to a wrong source.

Professional journalists might be familiar with copyright laws, but citizens may not. That is why plagiarism is an important ethical issue concerning citizen journalists. Bloggers and other citizen journalists, lacking the extensive resources of professionals, rely heavily on facts and figures they find on the Web and may not know how to assess the credibility of information they find. Since part of the challenges facing citizen journalists is credibility, it is important that they use reliable sources to back up their reporting. Plagiarizing someone else’s work, whether it be intentional or not, would severely damage a citizen journalist’s reputation and ruin his or her credibility. Furthermore, if a citizen is not careful, plagiarizing could also land him or her in jail and or a large fine. According to Quinn and Lamble, “penalties for ‘willful infringement’ by an individual can be as high as \$US150,000 per infringement and can also attract jail sentences. In most jurisdictions, those whose copyright has been infringed are also entitled to sue for damages” (145).

The issues discussed in this section are not an exhaustive list of problems and concerns surrounding the citizen journalism movement. However, the section does highlight a few of today’s most prominent issues, all of which affect a journalist’s credibility in some way. Since the credibility of citizen journalists is what makes them

successful, it is important that they overcome these obstacles and not fall victim to any of these unethical practices. For them to succeed, it is important for citizen journalists to display the same ethical behavior as traditional journalist in their respective work. Good citizen journalists will produce accurate and fair work in a timely fashion. If they can do this, they will gain credibility and earn the respect of their audience.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

What effect has citizen journalism had on the practice of journalism and journalism ethics overall? Despite a few ethical concerns, such as the ones discussed in previous sections, in the end the good outweighs the bad. Citizens have played an important role in journalism throughout history (see the role citizen journalism played in the American concept of freedom of press), and their importance does not appear to be changing any time soon. With today's technology, the power that citizens have in producing news is growing like never before. Furthermore, citizen journalism appears to be returning to its historical roots with its hyperlocal reporting and audience participation. For example, blog comments are very similar to the blank page at the end of *Publick Occurrences* in purpose. Once again, there are many voices and reporting news is not limited to Big Media. Citizen journalism may have declined with the growth of professional journalism in the 1900s, but it is emerging stronger than ever before in the 2000s.

The biggest strength that citizen journalism has is its perception among the public as a viable alternative for traditional media. Because of this perception, it draws an

audience from those discontented with the traditional news or who were never contented in the first place, because traditional news may not cover as many local affairs and is often viewed as biased. But this is not to say that citizen and traditional journalism cannot coexist peacefully. Some studies actually show that the two can benefit each other. One of these studies will be discussed briefly here to show how citizen and traditional journalism can work together to deliver the news.

A study published in the spring 2010 *Newspaper Research Journal* found that citizen journalism Web sites might be able to complement daily newspapers. The study, which examined 86 citizen blog sites, 53 citizen news sites, and 63 daily newspaper sites, indicated “citizen journalism Web sites (news and blog sites) are generally not acceptable substitutes for daily newspaper Web sites” (Lacy et al. 42). The major reason for this finding was that citizen sites were not as timely as daily newspaper sites. The study found that only slightly more than a quarter of the citizen sites updated the same day they were examined (Lacy et al. 42). Furthermore, “even if a citizen news or blog site has daily postings, it is unlikely that such sites have as many items as daily newspapers have because citizen journalism sites depend mostly on volunteers rather than paid journalists” (Lacy et al. 42). According to the finding, daily newspapers also have more resources than do citizen sites because dailies require more investment into their stories. This resources gap will also make it difficult for citizen sites to become a replacement for daily newspapers (Lacy et al. 44).

But this is not be viewed as a contradiction to the timeliness of citizen journalism. The study found that the citizen sites were more likely to concentrate on local events than the newspaper sites (Lacy et al. 44). This would suggest that citizen

journalism would still be timelier with community news, which has been a major attraction to consumers wanting more local coverage.

Although not being an acceptable substitute for daily newspapers, the study did suggest that citizen journalism could be a potential replacement for weekly newspapers in a complementary role to dailies:

They can provide opinion and hyperlocal news that large dailies do not.

Dailies have more resources, but they tend to concentrate those resources on issues that affect larger geographical areas in their markets. The dailies are less likely to cover details of a neighborhood than are citizen news and blog sites, unless they actually imitate these citizen sites. Perhaps serving as a complement better suits these citizen sites. (Lacy et al. 44)

The study shows that while citizen journalism might not yet act as a pure alternative to the traditional media, it certainly serves its purpose.

It will be intriguing to see how this relationship between traditional and citizen journalists plays out. As evident with the above-mentioned study, early signs show that the relationship can definitely work. Collaboration between the two already has proven to be successful and is becoming more common as more traditional news media reach out to citizens for help in reporting. It appears that the future of journalism offers a world where citizen journalists and the traditional media can work together to deliver the news, each doing their part to carry the load. Citizen journalism seems to have a bright future.

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