The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Democratization of Information Sharing in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze how the phenomenon of citizen journalism has revolutionized the media and information sharing in Pakistan. This article examines how people through access to digital technologies and social networking sites have become active participants in reporting and sharing news. This paper looks into the antecedents of adoption of citizen journalism from the history and the technological enablers such as smart phones, internet connection, and social media platforms; and in Pakistan. In its turn, the article looks at the potential reasons for the emergence of citizen journalism as well as possible goals as the need for more openness, the possibility of making individuals more responsible for their actions, and attempts to bring the usually overshadowed voices of minorities to the media spotlight. Some examples are highlighted to discuss how citizen journalism affects public perception and raises social justice issues. Some of these cases entail scenarios where the concerned lay photographers and videographers have captured images and videos of corruption, violations of the decision's rights among other cases that have not been covered or undercovered by the mainstream media. To summarize, the article evaluates the prospects of and restrictions on citizen journalism in Pakistan. These include; credibility, accuracy together with the possibilities of misunderstandings and manipulative intents in conveying the news. Different policies of media regulation and laws about sharing information in Pakistan are discussed, along with constraints and threats to citizen journalism, including censorship, harassment and legal ramifications. In addition, the article seeks to establish how the prior mentioned forms of media complement each other that is citizen journalism and traditional media. It explores how mainstream media sources depend much on user-generated content and social media for news, and how this media type equally feeds and supports the verification and circulation of beneficiaries' narratives. Since this article forms an information archive on the evolution and implications on the future of the citizen journalism in Pakistan, it will be helpful to all students, media practitioners, policymaker as well as the public at large interested in this emerging field. It underlines the need to create the conditions that will enable the voices of minorities to reach the public mainstream, thereby enhancing democratic vistas of the society.

Introduction

The phenomenon of citizen journalism has observed a rapid rise in Pakistan and has changed the very landscape of news provision and consumption. This process, provoked by the availability of

the Internet and social networks and which is new in recent years, enables average citizens to become communicators and document news and events in real time, bypassing traditional journalists (Qayyum, 2019). These tools such as the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have therefore become the direct sources of the Citizen media with the help of the demographic characteristics and the web. This has given a technological aspect of journalism that enhances the likelihood for those with quite easier access to technology to also contribute to reporting and dissemination of stories from different or multiple perspectives (Jamil, 2020).

Citizen journalism is based upon members of the community playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. Courtney C. Radsch defines citizen journalism "as an alternative and activist form of news gathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, often as a response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism Such studies indicate that there is rising dominance of the conception of the citizen journalist implies a slow erosion of the mass media monopoly and the encouragement of the general public to participate in the media networks (Baloch, 2021). They are established in restricted geographical space that the traditional media may consider uneconomical to cover or become self-censor based on economic interests This makes them have an important role of reporting vices associated with the government in corruption, human rights abuses and social injustices (Khan 2018). This movement nonetheless holds great importance, overcoming difficulties like the authenticity of user-generated content, at times posing legal threats to the equipment's of citizen journalists, in order to foster real-time citizen journalism which contributes to democracy and discursive citizenship in Pakistan (Ali, 2022). Citizen journalism magnifies the possibility of occurring events and its merger with the conventional media only supports this fact, as the latter gradually adopts user-generated content to enhance their coverage (Shah, 2021).

The article is going to focus on the historical change in the media scenario of Pakistan through 'Citizen Journalism' that has played important role in making information sharing accessible and open for the general public of the country. It will explore how with the expanding accessibility to the digital technologies and social media, the citizens are now actively involved in the procuring and sharing of news thereby leading to the breakdown of the media monopoly. I will further expand on the positives of such a transition including: more accountability due to real-time coverage and concern, multiculturalism owing to a broad cross-section of voices, and enlightening since underrepresented matters are conveyed almost immediately. Furthermore, descriptions of experiences and hardships of citizen journalists will be provided such as issues regarding credibility and legal risks and how the involvement of such media actors influences the overall media landscape. It also seeks to offer a wider perspective and overview of the importance and potential repercussions of the practice of citizen journalism in the developing context of media in Pakistan.

Historical Context and Technological Advancements

Citizen journalism in Pakistan falls into historical context analysis and technology category due to its origin and its development. Due to the availability of cheap and wrenching smartphones and increased internet penetration, every layman became an active consumer of media products. Hasan also highlighted that over 50% of the Pakistan population is connected to the mobile, which has itself become a strong instrument to immediately capture and sharing the news and events. In addition, communication applications such as the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and You-tube has also assisted in the provision of the citizen generated content, due to the chance they offer a diverse group of individuals to express themselves (Ahmed 2019). It has provided this technology has provided a better way of doing this to democratized journalism hence breaking the barriers on the different classes in the society where only the privileged could venture in journalism.

The increasing role of citizen journalism can be considered as evidence of a shift in paradigm in relation to information dissemination in Pakistan. Khan (2018) argues that these technologies is the control held by the traditional media, decentralize information, and oppose the status quo. However, citizen journalism brings to light images of impoverished groups and topics that the mainstream media would rarely cover, and thus provides for more diverse and socially inclusive outlook (Malik, 2021). But, at the same time, citizen journalism also has its drawbacks Moreover, such media contain inaccuracies, unreliable information, the discredit of journalists, and violations of the law in the framework of the coverage of certain topics, (Zaidi, 2020). However, one cannot overemphasize the impact of citizen journalism in Pakistan where social media has engendered a new journalism paradigm that offers more opportunities for progress.

Motivations and Impact

In Pakistan, citizen journalism tends to be fueled by the goal to bring change and influence in the media monoculture due to limitations inherent in the Pakistani media sphere. On the one hand, the mainstream media can have various constraints, including political censorship or even commercial priorities, and on the other hand, citizen journalists cover essential issues in democratic societies, ranging from corruption and human rights abuses to social injustices. This commitment to discovering the narrative on stories that would most possibly have been left untold further supports how citizen journalism can prompt social change in voicing views across and galvanize the general publics (Ahmed, 2017).

Another relevant issue that can be discussed with reference to the impact of citizen journalism is the function of revealing important social problems and initiating change in society, in this case the society of Pakistan. Alongside politics by tweeting and blogging about protest actions to expose local officials' corruption and to describe natural disasters, citizen journalists have not only raised awareness among the populace but have also encouraged debate and have helped to shape government policies (Khan, 2019). Secondly, citizen journalism has been most useful in areas where there is less mainstream media coverage thus filling a vacuuming informing hard to reach and forgotten audiences. In empowering the usually marginalized groups citizen journalism acts as a tool for social change and Justice [an instrumental societies] (Malik, 2020).

Challenges and Limitations

In Pakistan, opportunities and constraints are rife with regards to the concept of citizen journalism, which can present a lot of challenges towards setting higher goals and outcomes that may enable it to work efficiently and effectively. The two challenges are task first, it is challenging to verify the accuracy and credibility of information generated by users bearing in mind that user generated contents are not as standardized as those produced by traditional media organizations. This issue rightly brings into focus doubts that arise on how the falsehood and propaganda work to the larger detriment of the public and their incapability of differentiating between the real and fake news (Zaidi, 2018). Furthermore, citizen journalists might also lack formal training, and are not subjected to conventional journalistic etiquette which makes this reporting model even more susceptible for these challenges (Raza, 2020).

Similarly, Asian countries particularly Pakistan have a plethora of legal and regulatory issues related to citizen Journalism which also signifies the imperative need of Freedom of speech and protection of journalists' rights. A restrictive legal regime has been established in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the laws include Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) as well as the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance discouraging free practice of journalism (Khan, 2020). These laws also enable the authorities to crack down on critical content and quash dissent, which is common and see that press freedom and democratic rights receive scant consideration.In addressing these challenges, civil society organizations and advocacy groups have advocated for the enactment of laws that will safeguard the rights of the 'citizen journalist' as well as freedom of speech. Attempts at reforming the laws and legislations in order to prevent the limiting of freedoms are being made and in progress though the new laws are met with opposition from the political elites of the country (Mahmood, 2020). However, citizen journalists do not give up easily and they are determined in offering their services to tell the society the bitter truth about when, where, and how certain man-made disasters occurred in Pakistan as well as the individuals responsible regardless of the legal and regulatory challenges they are facing.

The Symbiotic Relationship with Traditional Media

The role of citizen journalism and interaction between the conventional and the new media in Pakistan can be termed as shift in news gathering, news reporting and news sharing system. Traditionally, main source of news was dominated by formal media that acted like a filter to the news or information being disseminated (Khan, 2017). However, conventional media sources are no longer the only way to break news events, in the wake of digital technologies and social platforms that are owned by other citizens (Ahmed, 2019). Realizing the importance of these user-driven narratives, mainstream media outlets have started to integrate first-hand reports of happenings contributed by ordinary citizens to supplant their exclusively generated content with that which is sourced from other angles and sources (Malik, 2020).

This merger is mutually useful for different media actors; that is, people who are involved in citizen journalism and those in mainstream media industries. The stories shared by citizens reach many people and many commentators, which expands their impact (Ahmed, 2019). On the

other hand, citizens' media complement the information and credibility of traditional media outlets through participating citizen reporters' firsthand experiences and local perspectives (Malik, 2020). But it also poses issues, especially with the issues arising from the credibility of user-generated content, and the ability to prove ownership of such content. For the existing traditional media outlets, there is the challenge of how to verify some of the stories, which citizens may post, to ensure the credibility of the information is retained (Mahmood, 2021).Despite the most effective advantages participating in each other with traditional media in Pakistan, citizen journalism and traditional media present many benefits such as a wider coverage and multiple-side perspective, but the issue of credibility remains a matter of concern. However, that is a rather rosy presentation of the situation, and while the described challenges may seem insurmountable, this collaboration has the potential to create a healthier media environment in Pakistan because it brings out the best in both citizen reporters and traditional media outlets.

Conclusion

To sum up, the growth of the phenomenon of 'citizen journalism' in Pakistan represents a remarkable breakthrough towards the democratization of discourse in the public sphere. In the way that citizen journalism enables not only passivity but also active involvement in media processes and practices, it enables greater diversity within the public sphere as it is constructed by various subject positions. It not only increases the density and available options of media, but also empowers a broader range of people, including minorities or those who live in different parts of Pakistan, with the discussion and analysis of social problems on different media platforms. However, to realize the advocacy and radical change paradigm of citizen journalism, some improvement should be made regarding the challenges mentioned and the creation of conducive environment. First of all, there is a dire need for more media preparation programme, so that the people are equipped with appropriate thought processes to handle information aegis in the contemporary society. Furthermore, it is high time to address the appearance of the clear ethical instructions that will help to protect the credibility of the published content and defeat the threats connected with the flow of the destructive information and the loss of confidence among the citizens. Additionally, it is critical to ensure the implementation of proper legal measures to prevent any form of intimidation, restrictions, and retaliation against small-scale media workers and other concerned citizens for making their contributions to the society. It is here that citizen journalism has the potential in the future to bring advocacies aimed at a better Pakistan that has efficient, just, and transparent governance system. With the increase in the activities of this movement, people received this movement as a revolution that will greatly impact the future development of media and information dissemination in the nation. Thus, with the support of the political leaders and citizen engagement Pakistan can develop strong and credible form of citizen journalism as an active tool for spreading democratic values, improving social justice and ensuring more effective and inclusive development for whole nation.

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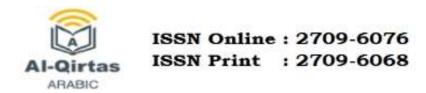
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