

**The Status of Citizen Journalists Around the World: 2012**

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## Abstract

This report examined the status of citizen journalists and citizen journalism around the world in the year 2012, their methods of acquiring and disseminating the news, the restrictions they encountered in their practice of journalism as well as their security issues, and made recommendations on how to support citizen journalism and protect citizen journalists as they perform their work as citizen journalists. The report gathered information by a survey and by submitted articles written by the journalists obtained through journalist associations and networking. The survey showed that the typical citizen journalist is a 58/42% split between men and women and that they are likely (66.5%) to be between the ages of 18 to 30 years of age. They are in the process of receiving or have attained a college degree (45%) or university degree (26%) and are usually students (34%) or office workers (32%). Most have been citizen journalists for less than a year (85.5%) and spend less than an hour a week on their journalism (81%) and the material they disseminate is almost exclusively through the internet (96%). They are first responders to news events with a majority attending those news events in person (96%) and most get no financial or logistical support from traditional news agencies (98%). The most popular method of news dissemination was by email (31%) and then to blogs (27%) and social media sites. Internet blocks/censorship in acquisition/dissemination of news was not a concern for most citizen journalists (86%-88%). As a group they worry most about being injured or arrested by police at news events (44%) and are not typically restricted to photographing or videotaping events (72%) though a small percentage does face restrictions. Detention/arrest or injury was a very small percentage but was there nevertheless (1.5% for arrest and 4.5% for injury) and most would avoid news events where they feared they could be arrested or harmed (47%). The articles submitted showed citizen journalism to offer advantages in immediacy of media in unpredictable news events as well as trying to fill the gap left by traditional media leaving small communities. The articles also showed problems facing citizen journalists such as a lack of support in terms of money or self-improvement and a lack of legal help if they ran into problems. It is recommended that the concept of the citizen journalist be formalized and institutionalized and that citizen journalists be afforded the same rights of access as those in traditional media. It is also recommended that some measure of protection be afforded to citizen journalists at news events and that there should be some form of collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional news reporting agencies. With almost all citizen journalists relying on the internet, it is recommended that stakeholders continue to lobby for an accessible internet free of censorship.

## **I. Introduction:**

The objectives of the report are to show the current status of citizen journalists and citizen journalism around the world in the year 2012, their methods of acquiring and disseminating the news, the restrictions they encounter in their practice of journalism as well as their security issues, and to make recommendations on how to support citizen journalism and protect citizen journalists as they perform their work as citizen journalists. This report gathered information in several ways. One was by a survey of general questions that asked about the locations and methods of acquiring news and disseminating it, restrictions in news reporting and safety concerns. The other way of gathering information was by articles submitted by citizen journalists where they could talk about any issues important to them as a citizen journalist working in their particular country. The survey question responses were analyzed and differences or similarities among the groups based on nationality were identified. Specific concerns based on the articles submitted were analyzed and differences or similarities among the groups based on nationality were identified.

This report uses the findings to make conclusions on the status of citizen journalists and citizen journalism in the year 2012 and make recommendations that can be used to enhance information access/dissemination as well as protections for citizen journalists.

## **II. Methodology of the Report:**

For the purposes of this report, we will use this definition of “Citizen Journalist”:

“Citizen Journalists refer to those not formally recognized as journalists but get themselves engaged in news reporting and information dissemination through various community media, traditional and new media platforms as a means of reaching their audiences and fulfilling their right to free expression.”<sup>1</sup>

The primary source of information will come from citizen journalists who were contacted through journalist associations and networking. The report gathered information in two ways:

### **A. Survey:**

The survey was anonymous and available to all citizen journalists who were citizens or had residence in a particular country and worked there as a citizen journalist. If more than one survey was received for different countries by the same journalist, the country in which the journalist

was most familiar was kept and the other discarded. The survey asked twenty six questions about general information, methods of acquiring news and disseminating it, and safety issues:

1. General information:

- Status as a citizen journalist
- Experience
- Gender
- Age
- Occupation
- Education
- Support
- Hours per week

2. Acquisition of the news:

- Method of reporting
- Barriers to news events
- Problems with internet blocks or censorship
- Restriction on recording events

3. Dissemination of the news:

- Method of dissemination
- Internet dissemination
- Problems with internet blocks
- Censorship laws

4. Security:

- Fear of police
- Fear of the government
- Fear of organized crime
- Fear of religious retaliation
- Effects of fear on news reporting
- Precautions taken at news events
- Arrest/detention or injury of citizen journalists

B. Articles on citizen journalism:

The other way of gathering information was from articles written by the citizen journalists themselves where they can talk about issues important to them in citizen journalism. A selection of articles are presented in this report that were sometimes filed with the surveys as the optional article submission. The articles were a way of addressing anything that was not addressed in the survey or concepts the citizen journalists wanted to expand on.

### **III. The Results:**

Survey size: 131 responses (one survey per individual).

Our survey has a margin of error of 8.7% and that means that if you ran that survey 100 times - asking a different sample of people each time - the overall percentage of people who responded the same way would remain within 8.7% of your original result in at least 95 of those 100 surveys. Our sample size is only pertinent to the global activities of journalists as the distribution was global in nature and the sample size relatively small. We can make guarded remarks regionally about citizen journalism but really can't say anything with accuracy about individual countries as the survey samples are not large enough to be statistically significant. The survey was conducted in English which meant there was limited participation in countries where English was not their first language.

Distribution: Global – Countries Involved:

Amsterdam (1)  
Armenia (1)  
Australia (1)  
Argentina (1)  
Austria (1)  
Belgium (1)  
Brazil (3)  
Canada (20)  
China (4)  
Congo (1)  
Cuba (3)  
Dominican Republic (3)  
England (4)  
Egypt (1)  
France (4)  
Germany (6)  
Greece (2)  
Greenland (1)  
Guyana (1)  
Hong Kong (3)  
India (2)  
Indonesia (1)  
Iran (1)  
Ireland (2)  
Italy (5)  
Jamaica (2)

Japan (3)  
Kenya (2)  
Kuwait (1)  
Malaysia (1)  
Maldives (1)  
Mexico (2)  
Morocco (1)  
Netherlands (1)  
Nigeria (1)  
Pakistan (3)  
Peru (1)  
Philippines (2)  
Poland (2)  
Portugal (2)  
Russia (2)  
Saudi Arabia (1)  
Scotland (1)  
South Africa (2)  
Spain (2)  
Sri Lanka (2)  
Switzerland (1)  
Tanzania (1)  
Thailand (1)  
Trinidad and Tobago (2)  
Turkey (1)  
Ukraine (1)  
United Arab Emirates (1)  
United States of America (12)  
Venezuela (2)  
Yugoslavia (1)

## Results: The Survey

### **1. General Information:**

Are you a professional journalist (majority of income is derived from journalism)? 98.5% stated they are not professional journalists and therefore citizen journalists. Only 1.5% of respondents indicated that they made their living from money earned as a journalist.

How long have you been a citizen journalist? 85.5% of the respondents reported less than a year. 13% reported experience of one to five years. 1% of respondents had five to ten years experience and 1% had over ten years.

Are you male or female? The actual figures were 58% male responses and 42% female responses.

How old are you? 66.5% of respondents indicated an age between eighteen to thirty years old. The second largest group was thirty to forty five years at 19% of respondents. 13% of respondents were in the forty five to sixty year group and only 1.5% were over sixty years of age. There were no respondents (0%) in the under eighteen year old group.

What is your current occupation? The largest group were students at 34% of respondents but were closely followed by office/administration employees at 32%. Next were laborers at 15% of respondents and business people/self-employed individuals at 8%. The unemployed came in at 6% of respondents with managerial at 2% and professional at 3%.

Level of education attained? College diplomas were the largest group with 45% of respondents followed by university degrees at 26% and high school diplomas also came in at 26%. 2% of respondents had a master's degree and no respondent had a doctorate degree (PhD). 1% of respondents had less than a high school diploma.

Are you associated, in any way, with traditional news organizations (like a "stringer," etc.)? Only 2% of respondents indicated some association with traditional news agencies. So 98% are on their own to report the news.

Even if it is not your primary employment, do you receive compensation for any of your journalistic efforts? 98% of citizen journalists get no remuneration for their work. Only 2% of respondents got any monetary compensation for their journalism.

How many hours per week do you spend on citizen journalist work? Eighty one percent (81%) spend less than one hour per week on journalism. The next largest group of citizen journalists worked one to ten hours a week (17%). Only 2% of respondents worked ten to twenty hours per week and no (0%) respondents worked twenty to forty or over forty hours per week.

## **2. Acquisition of the news:**

Which method do you use most in gathering your news? 96% indicated physical attendance at news events as the most used method of news reporting. Two 2% of respondents used traditional broadcast media and 2% got their news from the internet.

Does your status as a citizen journalist hinder your ability to acquire news information? The status of being a citizen journalist hindering news gathering ability had "somewhat" as the most indicated response at 59.5% of respondents. Next was a tie between "no" hindrances and "often"

each having 19% of the respondents. 2.5% of respondents noted that their status as a citizen journalist was hindered all the time.

Is your ability to gather information restricted by internet blocks by the government? Restrictions because of internet blocks on gathering news had 86% of respondents saying “no” with 5% saying “sometimes.” 6% of respondents said “often” and 3% said “yes, all the time.”

At newsworthy events, is your ability to videotape, photograph, or audio record restricted or prohibited by the authorities? No restrictions were the most common response at 72%. Next was “somewhat” at 16% of respondents with “often” at 10% and only 2% said “yes, all the time.”

### **3. Dissemination of the news:**

How do you predominantly disseminate your articles or commentary? Most popular method of dissemination was the internet at 96% of respondents. Newspapers and newsletters came in at 1.5% of respondents along with community meetings at zero (0%) and other types at 2.5%. Community/college radio or television had zero (0%) responses.

If the internet is used, what is your primary website or internet tool used to disseminate information? Email was most popular at 31% of respondents. This was followed by the personal blog at 27% of respondents. Next was the personal website at 13% of responses. Social media sites came in with Facebook.com at 10%, Twitter.com at 7.5%, and Youtube.com at 6% of respondents. Other social sites had 5.5% of responses.

Is your ability to disseminate information restricted by internet blocks by the government? Problems with internet blocks were mostly not a problem with 88% reporting their ability to disseminate news was not affected by internet blocks. 4% of respondents reported that sometimes they had problems and 5% reported that internet blocks affected them often. 3% of respondents reported that internet blocks restricted the dissemination of their information all the time.

Are there any censorship laws in your area that hinder your freedom in journalism? Of the 131 respondents, 88% said there were no censorship laws that hindered their freedom in journalism. 12% of the respondents reported “yes.”

### **4. Security:**

Do you fear for your safety because of the police presence at events? Most common reply was “somewhat” with 44% of respondents. “No” fear of police at events came in second at 31.5% of responses. “Often” was third at 17.5% of respondents and “all the time, a major concern” had 7% of the responses.



Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of your government? Largest response was “no” fear of their government with 62.5% of responses. Next was “somewhat” with 25% of responses. “Often” had 8.5% of respondents and “all the time, a major concern” had 4%.

Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of corruption or organized crime? The largest response was “no” fear of organized crime with 62.5% of the surveys. Next was “somewhat” with 23% of responses. “Often” had 7.5% of the respondents while “all the time, a major concern” was 7%.

Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of social or religious concerns? 66.5% of the responses were “no” fear of religious retaliation. Next was “somewhat” at 26% of respondents. “Often” was at 7.5% of the respondents and “all the time, a major concern” was 0%.

How do you react to fears or obstacles in your work as a citizen journalist? “Avoid the news events” had the largest response at 47%. Next up was 37.5% of the respondents that said “no effect” and disregarded their fears. 15.5% of the respondents said they would continue but take precautions.

Do you take any measures to protect yourself as you perform your work as a citizen journalist? Largest response was “no” at 88.5% of the responses and “yes” at 11.5%.

Have you ever received threats or were intimidated or pressured in any way due to your work as a citizen journalist? Largest response was “no” at 91% and “yes” with 9% of respondents.

Have you ever been arrested or detained covering a newsworthy event as a citizen journalist? 98.5% of the respondents said “no” to having been arrested or detained. Only 1.5% of the respondents answered “yes.”

Have you ever been beaten or injured by authorities while covering newsworthy events as a citizen journalist in your country? 95.5% of the respondents answered “no” to the question of whether they had ever been beaten or injured by the authorities while covering newsworthy events. 4.5% of the respondents reported that they had been beaten or injured by the authorities while covering newsworthy events.

## Results: The Articles

There were many articles and comments submitted with the surveys but unlike the strict rules governing the surveys we can use the articles and comments that we received whether the surveys were discarded or not. We have included a selection of the articles from as broad a selection around the world to give a diverse and more personal look into the world of citizen journalism.

## Citizen Journalism in Canada

By Rick Miller

Canadian journalism is at a crossroads. While technology has progressed to the point where it is possible for the citizen journalist to inexpensively broadcast globally in an instant, there are still many barriers that inhibit the free flow of information that are simply unacceptable in a modern democracy.

As an independent journalist covering the student protests in Quebec, some of the largest popular demonstrations in Canadian history, I experienced some of the abuses suffered by traditional and independent journalists alike.

Working journalists, obviously identifiable with credentials visible and carrying broadcast equipment were beaten, hit with batons, pepper sprayed and unlawfully detained. News crews were directly targeted by police forces. I was personally taken into custody while in transit, transported to a police station and was physically forced into painful stress positions, being forced face down to the ground and having my arms extended backwards to unnatural degrees. Police confiscated my press pass and notebooks, and harassed and intimidated my contacts.

While researching other stories of importance regarding public health and safety issues such as environmental health and climate change, booking interviews with the relevant public official of Government of Canada officials or scientists was extremely difficult at best. In one instance taking over three months to get an interview with Health Canada, well after the incident had occurred. Eric Pellerin, chief of Health Canada's radiation surveillance division himself later remarked: "The communication aspect could be improved."

Regardless, media relations teams require a list of all questions in advance, effectively turning interviews into verbal press releases that strictly adhere to a script; giving an impression of information and perception control rather than transparent accountability from public institutions.

Another challenge is the funding model. Absent a larger umbrella organization to assist with sponsorship and reluctance for advertisers to fully leverage new media, many citizen journalists are forced to rely on donations or "out of pocket" payment of expenses, dramatically decreasing their potential to properly research and present a story.

It is my hope that we can overcome these challenges and successfully transition to an even playing field. With forward thinking policy implementation supporting the protections of journalists and accessible funding sources, member nations can all greatly benefit from the shift towards citizen and independent media.

## Citizen Journalism in Slovakia

By Akintayo Olugbenga Adewale

The rise of new media technology such as the Facebook, Twitter, CNN iReport, Youtube and the prevalence of cell phones, digital cameras and so on have brought citizen journalism closer to the people of Slovakia. One interesting thing about being a citizen journalist is that one does not have to be a trained journalist to be involved in citizen journalism as it is enough to have a penchant for information gathering and dissemination. To borrow from Mark Glaser, “the idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact check media on their own or in collaboration with others”.

Here in the Slovak Republic though, the concept of participatory journalism is not a new one even though it is not yet well organized. Citizens without any formal training in journalism write for online forums, discuss national issues, politics, religion and economy among other subjects. Unlike in Nigeria (my home country where I come from), the explosion of all sorts of photographic cameras, video recording devices, mobile phones and appliances of all sorts has brought just a little change to the way citizens get involved in the newsgathering and dissemination process. Slovaks are a little bit relaxed when it comes to participatory journalism. In my opinion, this could be due to (among many other reasons) the fact that the nation was closed for many years under communism. The people were led by communist regimes under the old Czecho-Slovak pact and were ‘forced’ to always be in silence. The scar of communism, I believe, still remains fresh in their memory such that harnessing the power of the social media in bringing about desired change even in situations where violence has not been effective is not as common as it ought to be. This I believe partly explains why when a black man like me goes into the streets to cover events and ask for interviews, most people get shocked and look like - ARE YOU A JOURNALIST? Seeing a person of colour at polling booths during an election with a camera or mobile phone recording and asking questions looks so strange to the majority of the people here. The Slovaks themselves do not expect to see non-journalists (whether white or not) taking up the roles of journalism.

Be that as it may, Slovaks and other foreign nationals living in this country are being bitten by the bug of “we journalism”. There is a gradual increase in citizens’ participation in journalism especially with the introduction of CNN iReport. Information is gathered, processed and reported on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc. The people here are beginning to see the mainstream media as part of the old communistic system. There is a slow but steady increase in the number of people taking the profession of journalism into their own hands without necessarily going to a journalism school to learn the “5W’s and H” of news writing and reporting.

## Citizen Journalism in India

By Krishna Mohan

Citizen Journalism in India is an outcome of modern technology playing a vital role in empowering people especially the poor and impoverished lot in raising their problems and issues which hitherto suffered government neglect and indifference. It is at its nascent stage and is gradually developing as an alternative to the media conglomerates in print and electronic media which work under pressure to cut costs and as well to show higher incomes and ratings to satisfy the investors. In such a situation the interests of the common man has no place in this dispensation. Be that as it may, issues at the grass roots do not get the requisite attention from the main stream media. At this juncture independent free lance journalists, RTI activists come to play an important role to bridge the yawning gap.

Citizen Journalism right now finds a small and insignificant slot in television channels where in citizens are given an opportunity to focus on local issuer's problems and grievances confronting the local populace but is not an alternative to traditional journalism whose advocates ridicule citizen journalism as lacking in quality and professional reporting. Whatever may be the cause it has given an opportunity to the common man and poor sections of society in the far flung isolated tribal and low literate regions to utilize the smart phones and computers to gain access and connectivity to powers that be which would not have got the attention of the main stream media. Local issues like shut down of schools, depriving the children of education and nutrition have been highlighted through citizen journalism besides focus on lack of socioeconomic development and neglect by government and economic exploitation has garnered attention through this medium of journalism.

The anti-corruption movement of Anna Hazare and black money issue raised by Baba Ramdev are all telling reminders of the power of citizen journalism. The casual attitude of taking things easy has been given a go by and youth today needs a revolutionary change. Social problems, issues, severe poverty, malnutrition, women subject to domestic violence and rape, and other manifold issues has been powerfully projected and raised through citizen journalism which is being recognized as a powerful force in the nation today.

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## Mobile Revolution in Kenya

By Carol Omadie

Citizen Journalism in Kenya is "ripe" with the "Mobile Money system, which has changed how people send, receive and save money, a concept that's currently being replicated by many other countries." says Mr. Dicken Olewe of The Star Newspaper in Kenya (3 September 2012). "Concurrently, the mobile phone is leading another revolution: how people consume, share and interact with news." he said. The various mobile money systems in Kenya are M-Pesa, (Pesa is Kiswahili word for money), Pesa Mkononi, Pesa Pap and Yu cash.

In Kenya smartphones are becoming cheaper and accessing the internet is becoming more affordable, allowing people to engage more in social media platforms. Kenyans are able to make video calls through Skype or voice calls with Viber at the same subscription rate without extra charge. Other social media applications such as BBM for Blackberry, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and other messengers like Yahoo, Gmail and Hotmail, are also used to broadcast news as they happen and share with the local media or post in the blogs.

Figures from Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK) in July 2012 indicate that mobile ownership continues to rise. About 98.8% of internet access in the country is through mobile phones and 74% of the population owns a mobile phone. The arrival of the iPad is here and citizens use this to disseminate information of interest to the public before it appears in the print media.

The Android application allows citizen journalists to easily upload their news reports to a dedicated website where readers can view the entire stream of content, or filter stories according to various categories and regions. This application enabled me to cover an accident of one of the 10 fleet of vehicles we were traveling with from Bukoba, Tanzania on July 2nd 2012 along Mai Mahiu – Narok Road at dawn around 6.00 am. Mr Eluid Mikia, the car owner and the other 3 passengers were unhurt and the insurance has compensated him.

Kenya has developed a platform to promote citizen journalism with the help of World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA's) Mobile News for Africa Grant and Training Scheme by The Star journalist and web administrator, Mr Dicken Olewe.

In the incident of witchcraft from my village, Ogada in Kisumu – Western Kenya we were able to take photos and upload to relatives in Diaspora the same minute as the fire was still burning. Mr Bonga was stoned to death and his house burnt down in 2011 because villagers claimed he was involved in witchcraft and kills young kids. A girl was found near his maize plantation after missing for couple of days and he has been a suspect for years. He lives just 1 km away from our home so I captured the scene and got a story out of it.

There are very many opportunities for citizen journalists as the Mobile News for Africa is part of a strategic partnership between WAN-IFRA and (SDID) to advance media development and press freedom worldwide. In Nairobi alone, citizens are updated with traffic situations on the road through the product of citizen journalism.

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## Citizen Journalists in Brazil

By Marta Ferreira

Citizen Journalism is also known as Collaborative Journalism, Journalism or Journalism Democratic Street. Its concept is based on ordinary citizens, without journalistic training, participating actively in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.

One of the main concepts behind citizen journalism is that reporters and producers do not have complete knowledge about a subject. Collectively, the audience knows more and has more information on the subject. The great traditional media are trying to take advantage of the knowledge of your audience through comments or through the creation of databases of citizen journalism or news sources. Ordinary people began to determine what is discussed in society. We have cases here in Brazil, businesses hiring bloggers to disclose photoblogs in the company's products. The matters discussed in blogs, are issues related to day-to-day living, such as rainfall, relations with the government, unemployment, etc. There is no clear intention to remedy the agenda; the purpose of the citizen journalist is getting information from community to community. In turn, the term popular communication has a wide range of understandings: the information from the leftist revolutionary movements, even newspapers "sensacionalistas". There, they necessarily concern themselves with the distinction between citizen-journalist/citizen journalist, but it demonstrates the idea of forming an agent authorized to speaking communities, expressing or selecting what is most authentic in the field.

But it is important, in any case, here to emphasize the sense of agency and the aspect of accountability, which points to citizen journalism, encouraging activism and participation. Finally, citizen journalism provides a closer relationship between the journalist and the consumers of information content in a scaled-down, almost "intimate form". Not only by the proximity between the real experiences of the sender and receiver, but by the content posted.

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## Citizen Journalism in Pakistan

By Muhammad Ather Khurram

There is no doubt that citizen journalism is rising, it is necessary for a country like Pakistan and social media and blogs have played a major role in journalism. Especially for the dissident discourse of the youth, the internet has proved to be the safe haven where questions over orthodox and traditionally established notions could be asked without fear of a violent backlash so citizen journalists are more vocal where as professional journalists are more resourceful. Citizen journalists are neither regular journalists and nor do they achieve the basic education of journalism and proper experience in that field. Also they are not on the payroll of newspapers and channels nor attached to them in a proper way. Even they themselves don't always have an idea if what they are doing is journalism or not. Usually such people are political or social workers or people having literary sense. They themselves inform newspapers about the incidents of their areas; make telephone calls, send fax on their own expense, reach the newspaper office using their own ride and inform them about the important situations and incidents causing tension for themselves and their habitation. But at the same time such information is also the news for newspapers and newspapers are incomplete without this news. Such people inform police and emergency services immediately in case of any accident and then also inform newspapers about it. Social media has transformed the debate around democracy and access to

information in Pakistan by giving citizens and activists the power to write about topics that are impossible to cover in the traditional media.

In Pakistan PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) has been established under PEMRA Ordinance 2002 to facilitate and regulate the private electronic media. It has a mandate to improve the standards of information, education and entertainment and to enlarge the choice available to the people of Pakistan including news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art and culture as well as science and technology. Recently a newly launched TV channel “Hero TV” announced that famous model Veena Malik will host a religious program, on this issue Pakistani citizens by social media condemned the channel and reported to PEMRA and you can see by this link (<http://www.pemra.gov.pk/complaints/>) that in July 2012 there is 3641 complaints against that TV channel. You can also see the complaints against all TV channels and this is the first step, so there is no doubt that citizen journalism is rising in Pakistan.

Citizen journalists providing news and sometimes exclusive stories of great importance to newspapers and channels without any journalistic concern and financial benefits are practically meant as a backbone for media. Some Pakistani news channels like “Dawn News”, “SAMMA News”, etc. start citizen journalism on their website and invite people to send reports. This is a very good sign in Pakistani media and I think all Pakistani news channels and newspapers should give privileges to citizen journalists for their bright future.

## **IV. Discussion of Survey and Articles:**

Discussion based on the survey:

1. Demographics of a typical citizen journalist: Most citizen journalists identify themselves as citizen journalists (98.5%) and they know their status in the world of journalism. Citizen journalists describe themselves as amateurs in the truest sense doing it for mostly altruistic reasons and not for monetary payment. The gender responses were 58% male responses and 42% female responses with what looks like a slight tendency to males in Asia and Africa with an equal split in first world countries. In terms of age, the largest group was between eighteen and thirty (66.5%) followed by thirty to forty five (19%). This makes sense as people in that age group usually have a ready knowledge of computers and word processors and are competent at using the internet and its resources to perform their citizen journalism. The over sixty year old group with only 1.5% of responses was a shame as the retired are in the best position in terms of time and financial stability that they can concentrate on citizen journalism while the younger people have to work full-time to make a living as the money does not come from their journalism. Perhaps being unfamiliar with computers and the internet is the reason for the low participation rate in the elderly. Most citizen journalists will only spend one hour or less per week on journalism and most have been doing it for less than one year (88.5%). This does not mean that all these young well educated people just decided to become citizen journalists in the past year, but more accurately that citizen journalists have a high turnover rate. Citizen

journalists seem to get involved because of an issue or event they wish to report on and after it is done the interest dies or lessens in regularity. It could also be a bad experience reporting at an event as several respondents have mentioned in their surveys and comments or articles. A typical citizen journalist is usually a student (34%) or office worker (32%) with professional and managerial people very much in the minority. Why so low a number in managerial (2%) and professional (3%) occupations? Most likely because they simply do not have the time followed by negative influences on their careers covering controversial issues.

2. Outside support for a citizen journalist: A typical citizen journalist will have no support (98%) outside their personal abilities, equipment and finances. Very few are “stringers” (2%) working for a traditional broadcaster or newspaper. This means that citizen journalists have to finance everything from equipment to websites, travel expenses, and other necessary expenses. These expenses are covered by working jobs that are unrelated to journalism and to make matters worse some have to cut back on pay in order to cover an event. With a typical demographic in the eighteen to thirty age group and with no support from traditional media, time is very limited to report on events of newsworthy interest. Most do not have any formal training as a journalist and no real prior experience in acquiring news material from news events. Most programs in journalism are formal courses in colleges and universities aimed at full-time jobs in the broadcast or newspaper industry. Very few journalist associations give any support to citizen journalists.

3. How news information is acquired: Almost exclusively, newsworthy information is collected first hand, by actually being there (96%). With the ability to photograph and record in audio/audio-video and upload so quickly and easily onto social sites, citizen journalists can many times beat traditional journalism with breaking news stories. This makes citizen journalists “first responders” of actual photos and video at unexpected events, a valuable resource that could be used by traditional media. Citizen journalists are everywhere and their ability to get the news first is now unprecedented. The only caveat is that press releases and press events are still small and only reserved for traditional broadcast media. One of the most notable results from our survey is the lack of so called “bloggers” doing the survey and describing themselves as citizen journalists. The blogger usually gets many news items from other newspapers and the internet and so on, and this makes it possible for them to blog daily about events of interest to themselves. Citizen journalists seem to be more irregular in their news reporting; only posting material and content occasionally but with first-hand reporting. With a few exceptions citizen journalists are free to use the internet to gather and research for their journalism.

4. How newsworthy information is disseminated: The internet was the most popular choice (96%) because of the ease and low cost to use. It is very hard to be a citizen journalist without the internet as access to other media is cost prohibitive. As for the method of dissemination, email was the most popular (31%) and offered some identity protection for the original user if desired. What happens when the email is bounced around and where the media goes after that is another matter and may end up on social media sites under another identity. The bloggers were there but not as dominant as many would believe at 27%. Personal websites were third and will probably increase as the cost goes down. Social media websites were there but not as frequent as one might have thought with the top three being Facebook.com, Twitter.com and Youtube.com. Blogger.com was mentioned in the Philippines and Sina Weibo (weibo.com) in China. With regard to censorship laws, most are not hindered by them but some censorship laws do exist.



Many made no precise indication to particular laws, but some did. Jamaica, for example has a law (“qualified privilege defense”) that usually requires journalists to submit articles about, for example, a politician to that politician first for reading or possibly face legal action. With a few exceptions citizen journalists are free to use the internet to disseminate their journalism.

5. How safe are citizen journalists when practicing citizen journalism: Most citizen journalists are as safe as anyone at news events that do not have broadcast credentials. This means that the police do not know why they are there and they will be treated as a common citizen or even a protestor if it is a protest. The largest percentage of respondents feared the police “somewhat” (44%). If the event is not likely to become violent they will have no real fears. However if they feel there may be violence, they may question their involvement in that event as journalists. This is why the largest segment (47%) responded that they would rather avoid newsworthy events where they could be arrested or physically harmed. Of the respondents who do take precautions we received comments such as “due diligence” while others went in groups and watched each other. Most who do go to events do not receive threats but some do and not only at the event:

Some citizen journalists commented on their experience:

“In Nigeria I was beaten by a group of political thugs because they thought I was taking pictures of the irregularities going on in the polling booths. My cloth was torn, my camera was seized and the police kept on looking without preventing the guys from beating me up. What happened was that I was taking a long shot of the gubernatorial elections taking place. I visited different polling stations and the one I was attacked was made up of gangs of political thugs stuffing the pooling box with votes for a particular candidate.”

Also from the same citizen journalist:

“Once I was asked to write a rejoinder to an article stating that I was erroneous in my thinking and my investigations whereas, other conventional media which featured the same story were not pinched. I think the fact that I am not a registered journalist exposes me to series of threats and discrimination.”

From a Canadian citizen journalist working in Canada:

“Working journalists, obviously identifiable with credentials visible and carrying broadcast equipment were beaten, hit with batons, pepper sprayed and unlawfully detained. News crews were directly targeted by police forces. I was personally taken into custody while in transit, transported to a police station and was physically forced into painful stress positions, being forced face down to the ground and having my arms extended backwards to unnatural degrees. Police confiscated my press pass and notebooks, and harassed and intimidated my contacts.”

Arrest and detention seems to be a rare event (1.5%) around the world for citizen journalists, yet they do happen and when it does happen they lack the legal resources to defend themselves as opposed to the legal help available to traditional broadcast/newspaper journalists. The percentage of citizen journalists beaten or injured was three times higher than arrest at 4.5% and points to the risks citizen journalists take as they report on events.

6. What do all the questions of the survey tell us, taken as a whole, about citizen journalists as a group: One of the more interesting results of the survey is how open citizen journalism is to public participation. Citizen journalists are almost evenly distributed between men and women. There is just a slight percentage increase for the men (58%), but in citizen journalism, women are not finding the same institutional barriers to entry that they may have found elsewhere. In citizen journalism, with a free and open internet, all who desire can participate. This does not only extent to gender but to occupation, age, education, income and so on. Everyone has a voice in citizen journalism.

## Discussion based on the articles:

Advantages of citizen journalism from the articles submitted:

1. Eyes and ears everywhere: The internet and cell phones have given most people the ability to report on events they run into in their everyday lives. We no longer need to wait for a news crew or professional journalists to drive to the scene of a newsworthy event. The public is always there ahead of them with the physical evidence already recorded.
2. Citizen journalists can report on areas abandoned by traditional news media: For more than a decade the shift of advertising dollars to the internet has been predicted and significant,<sup>2</sup> and as a result large newspapers and television and radio broadcasters are abandoning small communities and their news. As a result, the only way to keep the public informed on town council developments and so forth is by citizen journalists who will fill the void left by traditional journalism. This is more important than ever as local governments without accountability through news reports, give them the ability to make decisions that would be unpopular if not reported to the community. Citizen journalism is a very effective replacement in this case.
3. Citizen journalists offer more opinions: With traditional newspapers and broadcast journalism you only have a handful of portals to news events and their analysis. However, with citizen journalism you have access to as many differing opinions on a news item as you wish. No particular group or segment of society can be shut out of having a voice as many did in the past. Citizen journalism has made this a democratic reality.
4. More coverage on borderline newsworthy stories: Traditional newspapers and broadcast journalism have limited space for content and advertisers. Therefore, the selection of articles that make it into the news is usually targeted in what the public will be most interested in listening/viewing or reading. This means that many newsworthy events can go unreported if they don't make the cut, and this can be a major disservice to the community. Citizen journalism corrects this by having citizen journalists report on events that have little interest in the general public, but still enough interest to some to merit

reporting. The financial need for sponsors or advertisers that may have had an influence on news dissemination in traditional broadcast media/newspapers do not apply to the citizen journalist. Citizen journalists usually make their money from another occupation and therefore cannot be influenced by outside commercial forces for their opinion on news issues. So there is a place and desire for citizen journalism. Citizen journalism gives more newsworthy events access to the public.

Disadvantages of citizen journalism from the articles submitted:

1. The citizen journalist is by definition a part-time journalist: As such many of them pick and choose the venues they attend. As a result, biased reporting is always a concern as many only report on those issues they are passionate about. With a traditional newspaper or broadcaster you have a full-time journalist going to news stories as a job and may not have an opinion on the matter one way or another. This is not to say big broadcasters and newspapers do not have biases as they usually have in political matters, but citizen journalists can be more biased in the reporting. Having said that, actual recording of events and unaltered photos of the news events are generally bias free and are of value no matter what anyone thinks of the text of the article.
2. Lack of training and experience: Very few citizen journalists have formal education in journalism or experience in tradition journalism. This creates problems in getting all the necessary information to write a proper news report, ask pertinent questions and so on. Some training can be done on-line but inexperience will be a constant problem, especially since many do not continue with citizen journalism for more than a few months.
3. Lack of resources and support: Many submitted articles mentioned that the lack of resources does affect their journalism. You cannot go into time-consuming investigative journalism without the time to do so free of another regular job. And you need the money to finance the report along with legal and logistical services journalists have in major newspapers and broadcast radio and television. There is no advertising, or very little advertising revenue to fund citizen journalism and so citizen journalism seems to remain the domain of first hand reporting of news events and very little investigative reporting.
4. Lack of recognition: Because citizen journalists are not affiliated with large newspapers or broadcasters in radio and television, their ability to get interviews and attend closed news events is a constant problem. Lack of credentials tying them to some newspaper or radio station or TV station usually means no interview. Lack of credential verification or association membership make getting interviews very hard for those in high offices or any event in which space is limited to journalists. This will be a continuing problem unless some accommodation is made for dedicated citizen journalists at those news events.

## Regional discussion:

Though the sample size precluded definitive statements on a regional level, between the survey and articles some broad statements can be made with the caveats (on those statements) taken into consideration due to small sample sizes.

North American and European citizen journalists enjoy the most open and free environments with only concerns about altercations with the police at news worthy events and a lack of access to newsmakers at relatively closed news events.

South American and Caribbean citizen journalists enjoy relatively open and free environments but some of this depends on the particular country.

African citizen journalists are most concerned with statements about politicians and their government and their safety when making negative political comments.

Asian citizen journalists face more internet censorship and more concerns relating to their government and organized crime and religious issues. There are exceptions such as Japan which is very open and free rivaling North American and European countries.

## V. Conclusions:

Our survey showed that the typical citizen journalist is roughly a fifty-eight to forty-two percent split between men and women and that most fall between the ages of eighteen to thirty years of age. Citizen journalists usually are in the process of receiving or have attained a college diploma or university degree and are mostly students or office workers. Most have been a citizen journalist for less than one year, spend less than an hour a week on their journalism with almost no outside support, and the material they disseminate is almost exclusively through the internet. They are very much first responders to news events that are open to the public which include all forms of news making from protests to natural disasters, thus making citizen journalists valuable to the world as a source of immediate media as almost all carry cell phones capable of photos and audio/video capability. The most popular method of dissemination is by email and then to blogs and social media sites. Internet blocks or censorship is not a problem to most but still exists in some countries. Citizen journalists worry most about being injured or arrested by police at news events and are not typically restricted when photographing or videotaping events though a small percentage do face restrictions. Detention/arrest or physical harm by authorities is rare, but the incidents are there and quantifiable nevertheless.

The advantages of citizen journalism are many. Anyone can be a citizen journalist, and since citizen journalists are everywhere they can report on many news stories with supplied media content almost immediately. They are not affected by economic restrictions facing profit based

news media and can report on areas abandoned by traditional news media. Citizen journalists offer more opinions and coverage on borderline newsworthy stories. However, there are some problems with citizen journalism. The citizen journalist is by definition a part-time journalist and limited in time and resources to report newsworthy events. They usually lack formal training and the practical experience that full-time traditional journalists have. Their designation as a citizen journalist also comes with a lack of recognition as a true member of the press which can hinder them in getting interviews and entry into some media news events and increase their likelihood of arrest/detention or injury at other events.

If there is one statistic that is most obvious and important, it is that citizen journalism cannot survive without the internet. Ninety six percent of citizen journalists use the internet to disseminate information. The past realities of news dissemination needing money for printing presses or radio/TV stations and the regulatory processes that come into play are not there for citizen journalists. The financial need for sponsors or advertisers that may have had an influence on news dissemination in traditional broadcast media/newspapers do not apply to citizen journalists. Citizen journalists cannot be readily influenced by outside commercial forces for their opinion. So there is a place and desire for citizen journalism. But all this can only continue if we have a free internet without filters or blocks to prevent dissemination of information or acquisition of information. The internet needs to remain free so that all opinions are able to have a hearing in the minds of citizens with regard to any news event or issue. All voices need to be heard for individuals to have the information to make informed decisions or choices, and thus ultimately self-determination. Citizen journalism and an open internet will help ensure this.

## **VI. Recommendations:**

1. That the concept of the citizen journalist be formalized and institutionalized in those large global organizations that deal with communication and rights like freedom of expression in the same way as traditional broadcast media and newspapers. Freedom of the press should extend to the concept of the citizen journalist in the same way as it does to traditional news media journalists. Citizen journalists face the same perils as professional journalists and deserve the same considerations and protections.
2. That citizen journalists be afforded the same rights of access as those in traditional media. Access at closed news events should make some allowance for dedicated citizen journalists to archive and comment on events of interest to themselves and their communities.
3. Some measure of protection should be afforded to citizen journalists at news events. Citizen journalists regularly have cameras and cell phones confiscated at events. The concept that a camera could be used as a weapon and thus confiscated and the journalist detained or arrested usually does not make sense. The cameras and video equipment are more likely to be confiscated if activities of authorities are questionable and liable to be caught on video by citizen journalists. Some formal level of protection of media needs to be addressed. A traditional broadcaster having their video forcibly taken and the reporters detained or arrested is a rare event

in many countries, but the same is not the case for citizen journalists. Therefore, if citizen journalists get into trouble with the law or authorities, they have very little resources to go to court and make those parties accountable for their actions. Though detainment/arrest and personal injury are rare they are a noticeable percentage and when a citizen journalist is imprisoned, injured or killed, there is more than a good chance no consequences will come of it. There are organizations and associations that help citizen journalists but they are very few in number. The ability to validate their reason for being at events as part of the press is harder than those of traditional press media and thus any protections given to traditional journalists may not be available to the citizen journalist if they run into problems at a news event. This lack of support for citizen journalists either monetarily or systemic in society shows a need to update how media is handled in the age of the internet.

4. Some form of collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional news reporting media should be encouraged. Citizen journalists are everywhere and first responders to many news events. Some form of procedure for citizen journalists to submit photos and audio-visual material to traditional newspapers and radio/television broadcasters could be a mutually beneficial collaboration. Citizen journalists could offer newspapers and broadcasters immediacy of newsworthy media and in return those newspapers or broadcasters could offer support in education, legal, and other forms of support to regular contributors. The changing face of news reporting can still continue at all levels if the idea of citizen journalism is embraced and utilized by traditional newspapers and television and radio broadcasters.

5. The importance of the internet cannot be dismissed. Ninety six percent of the citizen journalists surveyed used it as the sole means of disseminating information. The other traditional methods of dissemination are too costly for citizen journalists who have no support other than their own meager means. The internet should remain censor free as the distribution of newsworthy material, for everyone, is the right of all for freedom of opinion and ultimately self-determination.

## References

1. (adapted from) UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Paris, France: UN/UNESCO, 2012.
2. Pippa, Norris. A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies. NY: Cambridge University Press, (2000, chapter 4, page 2).

# Appendix

Appendix A: Copy of the citizen journalist survey used in the report.

## **The Status Of Citizen Journalists Around The World: 2012**

### **Citizen Journalist Survey**

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Instructions**

Read each question carefully and then print the letter of the correct answer next to the question.

#### **Part I: General Information**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ **Are you a professional journalist (majority of income is derived from journalism)?**
  - A. No.
  - B. Yes.
  
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ **How long have you been a citizen journalist?**
  - A. Less than a year.
  - B. One to five years.
  - C. Five to ten years.
  - D. Over ten years.
  
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ **Are you male or female?**
  - A. Male.
  - B. Female.

- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ **How old are you?**
- A. Under eighteen years.
  - B. Eighteen to thirty years.
  - C. Thirty to forty five years.
  - D. Forty five to sixty years.
  - E. Over sixty years of age.
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ **What is your current occupation?**
- A. Unemployed.
  - B. Student.
  - C. Laborer.
  - D. Administration.
  - E. Businessperson/self-employed.
  - F. Managerial.
  - G. Professional.
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_ **Level of education attained?**
- A. Under high school diploma.
  - B. High school diploma.
  - C. College diploma.
  - D. University degree.
  - E. Master's degree.
  - F. Doctorate (PhD).
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ **Are you associated, in any way, with traditional news organizations (like a "stringer," etc.)?**
- A. Yes.
  - B. No.
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ **Even if it is not your primary employment, do you receive compensation for any of your journalistic efforts?**
- A. Yes.
  - B. No.



- 9) \_\_\_\_\_ **How many hours per week do you spend on citizen journalist work?**
- A. Less than one hour.
  - B. One to ten hours.
  - C. Ten to twenty hours.
  - D. Twenty to forty hours.
  - E. Over forty hours.

## **Part II: Acquisition of News**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ **Which method do you use most in gathering your news?**
- A. Physical attendance at news events.
  - B. Traditional broadcast media.
  - C. The Internet.
  - D. Newspapers.
  - E. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ **Does your status as a citizen journalist hinder your ability to acquire news information?**
- A. No.
  - B. Somewhat.
  - C. Often.
  - D. Yes, all the time. Please state how your ability to acquire information is hindered:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ **Is your ability to gather information restricted by internet blocks by the government?**
- A. No.
  - B. Sometimes.
  - C. Often.
  - D. Yes, all the time.
- If "D", can you and how do you get around those blocks?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ **At newsworthy events, is your ability to videotape, photograph, or audio record restricted or prohibited by the authorities?**
- A. No.
  - B. Somewhat.
  - C. Often.
  - D. Yes, all the time.

### **Part III: Dissemination of News**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ **How do you predominantly disseminate your articles or commentary?**
- A. Internet (all forms).
  - B. Newspaper or newsletter (real paper physical distribution).
  - C. Community/college radio or television.
  - D. Community meetings (e.g. town hall meetings, etc.).
  - E. Other (type in answer):

\_\_\_\_\_

- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ **If the Internet is used, what is your primary website or internet tool used to disseminate information?**
- A. Youtube.com.
  - B. Twitter.com.
  - C. Facebook.com.
  - D. Personal blog.
  - E. Website (that you own and manage).
  - F. Email.
  - G. Other (type in answer):

\_\_\_\_\_

- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ **Is your ability to disseminate information restricted by internet blocks by the government?**
- A. No.
  - B. Sometimes.
  - C. Often.
  - D. Yes, all the time.

If "D", can you and how do you get around those blocks?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_ **Are there any censorship laws in your area that hinder your freedom in journalism?**

A. No.

B. Yes, (type in particular law):

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Part IV: Security**

1) \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you fear for your safety because of the police presence at events?**

A. No.

B. Somewhat.

C. Often.

D. All the time, a major concern.

2) \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of your government?**

A. No.

B. Somewhat.

C. Often.

D. All the time, a major concern.

3) \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of corruption or organized crime?**

A. No.

B. Somewhat.

C. Often.

D. All the time, a major concern.

4) \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you fear for your safety in newsgathering because of social or religious concerns?**

A. No.

B. Somewhat.

C. Often.

D. All the time, a major concern.

- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ **How do you react to fears or obstacles in your work as a citizen journalist?**
- A. No effect, disregard the fears or obstacles.
- B. Continue with news reporting but take precautions. Please be specific on those precautions and for what threat or obstacle:
- \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Avoid the news events/issues that you fear or have obstacles to citizen journalists. Please be specific on what were the topics/issues that made you avoid them and why:
- \_\_\_\_\_

- 6) \_\_\_\_\_ **Do you take any measures to protect yourself as you perform your work as a citizen journalist?**
- A. Yes. If "yes" please elaborate:
- \_\_\_\_\_
- B. No.

- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ **Have you ever received threats or were intimidated or pressured in any way due to your work as a citizen journalist?**
- A. Yes. If "yes" please elaborate:
- \_\_\_\_\_
- B. No.

- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ **Have you ever been arrested or detained covering a newsworthy event as a citizen journalist?**
- A. Yes. If "yes" please elaborate :
- \_\_\_\_\_
- B. No.

- 9) \_\_\_\_\_ **Have you ever been beaten or injured by authorities while covering newsworthy events as a citizen journalist in your country?**
- A. Yes. If "yes" please elaborate:
- \_\_\_\_\_
- B. No.

**\*\*\*\*\*Optional Article: In addition to this survey each participant can include an original article about citizen journalism in their country. The article need only be a few paragraphs in length but must be the participant's own material.**

Please note that all information from this survey is confidential. The optional article about citizen journalism in your country is by default confidential but may be published by the International Association of Independent Journalists Inc. by expressed written permission by the author. This survey and the report to be based upon it is an independent report by the International Association of Independent Journalists Inc. and produced for the International Association of Independent Journalist Inc. (a not-for-profit association registered in Canada and able to operate internationally). [www.iaij.org](http://www.iaij.org)

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