

Book: Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives
 Author: Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen (Eds.)
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Juxtaposed to dominant mainstream forms of journalism which are today most often referred to as market oriented or market-driven, is an alternative platform for the expression of voices called “Citizen Journalism”. A new and timely book, *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, edited by Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen, takes on the challenge of mapping out this phenomenon in a way that will be of value to communication scholars, media experts and media professionals alike.

The text begins with an introduction by the editors and is followed by 21 articles divided among three sections: Eyewitness Crisis Reporting, Citizen Journalism and Democratic Cultures, and Future Challenges. The book offers a wide range of stories concerning crisis reporting that includes a focus on both the West with such areas as the US, UK, Europe and Australia and a variety of other national contexts including Brazil, China, India, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Palestine, South Korea, Vietnam and Antarctica.

In a Preface, Simon Cottle, General Editor of the series, effectively captures the essence of the book in the following words:

While corporate news organizations seek to expand market shares and colonize communications space *around* the globe, citizen journalism it seems has managed to insinuate itself *inside* corporate news packages while simultaneously *staking out* independent platforms of news delivery and world-wide dissemination. As citizen journalism progressively ingratiates itself into today’s differentiated news ecology so inevitably it unsettles, reconfigures, or simply bypasses traditional hierarchies and relations of communicative power. At least that is the democratic promise and often heard claim of citizen journalism. (Preface: p. xii)

In their introduction, the editors begin their exploration into citizen journalism with the controversy that iReport.com (a news website of CNN) generated by publishing a false report on the health condition of Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple Inc – which led to the crashing of stock prices of Apple Inc to 17 months low. They suggest how such controversies initially engulfed the very idea of citizen journalism by raising concern around the authenticity and credibility of such reporting. The Authors then offer an optimistic image that citizen journalism is developing, by quoting the BBC’s Director, Helen Boaden, who said the following at a conference on e-Democracy on Nov 11, 2008.

Our journalism is now fully embracing the experiences of audiences, sharing their stories, using their knowledge and hosting their opinions . . . we are acting as a conduit between different parts of our audience; and we are being more open and transparent than we have ever been. (p. 4)

Beginning with the harassment stories meted out to Raja Petra of *Malaysia Today* blog, and Alfred Sireleaf’s efforts in civil-war torn Liberia, the Editors explain how citizen journalism is an important form of expression in those countries where the state equates dissent with criminality.

In Chapter 1 – Histories of Citizen Journalism – Stuart Allen traces how citizen journalism became a prominent feature of the journalistic landscape. The South Asian Tsunami in December 2004 marked the beginning of the association of citizen journalism with mainstream journalism, leading British newspapers to comment that “Never before has there been a major international story where television news crews have been so emphatically trounced in their coverage by amateurs wielding their own cameras (p.18). Allan has successfully established, through the citing of examples including the Drudge Report of Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton, that citizen journalism is an invention led by necessity and that the necessity arose out of crisis in the absence of any other alternate medium (p. 22). Allan not only terms it “a new news medium” but also establishes how crisis reporting during war time befitted the term “citizen journalism” (p. 28).

Mellisa Wall explains how war blogs were put to different tests during war in Iraq (Chapter 2, p. 33) while Sophia B Liu et al (Chapter 3) document how citizen photojournalism has opened a new chapter in citizen journalism, arguing that: “sharing eyewitness photography through social media sites has made citizen journalism more visible,

particularly through the cross-referencing and convergence of different media sources” (p.61). Lue presents a number of crisis photographs from Flickr as she details how the Flickr activity developed over a 3 years period involving six notable crises between December 2004 and 2007.

The articles *Wikinews Reporting of Hurricane Katrina* by Farida Vis (Chapter 4) and *Citizen Journalism in India: The Politics of Recognition* by Prasun Sonwalkar (Chapter 5) document how citizen journalism came to the rescue of administrations in providing relief during natural calamities. Both chapters provide well articulated facts that will be of great value to all media professionals in terms of the case studies they scrutinize.

Chapter 6, *Human Rights and Wrongs: Blogging News of Everyday life in Palestine*, by Heba Zayyan and Cynthia Carter, reveals how bloggers are providing alternative viewpoints that are simply not available in the mainstream and thus are helping to reshape the debate in the region. In Chapter 7, *Citizen Journalism in China: the Case of the Wenchuan Earthquake*, Joyce Nip highlights how the Chinese administration realized for the first time how important blogging could be in offering quick relief to the victims of earth quake.

In the second section – Citizen Journalism and Democratic Cultures – Chapter 10, *the Iranian Story* by Gholam Khibany and Annabelle Sreberny and Chapter 11, *Citizen Journalism and Child Rights in Brazil* by Olga Guedes Bailey, offer very interesting examples of how citizen journalism was both fact finding and revealing. Similarly interesting pieces exploring issues in South Korea, Vietnam, and Kenya offer a stunning discourse on the ability of citizen journalism to become a clear alternative to main stream journalism.

In the third section – Future Challenges of Citizen Journalism – the authors of chapter 18, Stephen D Reese and Jia Dai, and Chapter 21, Mark Deuze, offer a strong case for new media and blogging to soon become a serious contender to mainstream journalism.

Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen have made a superb effort in drawing together such diverse topics and engaging authors around a variety of crisis reporting incidents across regions while also offering a well articulated discourse dispelling any lingering doubts about citizen journalism’s role as a full-fledged alternative to the market driven mainstream. This is a must-read and a valuable contribution to the literature in the field. It is clearly going to be of great value to journalism scholars and media professionals as they confront the timely issue of citizen journalism in the new Century.

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