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Media ethics and citizen journalism

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MEDIA ETHICS AND CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Philip Lee

4.1 Introduction

The emergence of internet-based media has highlighted the need to acknowledge the right of all (and not just members of the professionalised, privileged and largely white, male elite) to communicate in the main or alternative public spheres.¹

The public sphere is usually understood to be the place where citizens exchange ideas, information, attitudes, and opinions in order to influence political action. There has been rich and stimulating discussion of how the public sphere is to be conceptualized ever since Jürgen Habermas published his first book on the theme in 1962. Its publication in English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* was the occasion for considerable debate about the relationship between state and society, prospects for greater democracy, and the role of the media.

One consequence was a shift of emphasis towards participatory politics understood as not merely an activity that takes place in a narrowly defined political context, but as one that can be realized in the social and

¹ Keeble, 2009

cultural spheres as well. This conceptualization of participation – which resonates well with thinking that emerged in Latin America in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s from scholars such as Paulo Freire, Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín-Barbero – views public space democratically “as the creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation, and adoption.”²

American critical theorist Nancy Fraser, a noted feminist thinker concerned with articulating and disentangling the complexities of justice, contested the stratifications and exclusions implicit in Habermas’s analysis, arguing that “participatory parity is essential to a democratic public sphere and that rough socioeconomic parity is a precondition of participatory parity” (Fraser, 1997, p. 136). At the same time she called for critical study of the ways in which social inequality taints deliberation within publics, how inequality affects relations among publics, how publics are differentially empowered or segmented, and how some are involuntarily enslaved and subordinated to others³.

At the same time as this theoretical debate was taking place, far more rapid and in many ways far more exciting developments were happening in the field of communications technology. The evolution of the Internet, commercialized only in 1995, can be pictured in three phases. From 1969 until about 1994, e-mail and remote log-on to large computer systems were the dominant uses of what became the Internet. Almost all the traffic consisted of one-to-one connections. The creation of the World Wide Web launched the second phase of the Internet, which enabled people to broadcast pages to thousands of surfers at the same time. The addition of “one-to-many” applications and graphics on most Web pages led to a rapid increase in Internet traffic.

² Benhabib, 1994, p. 87

³ (Ibid. p. 137).

New social media began the third, game-changing phase characterized by “many-to-many” applications that enabled all sorts of different groups to self-organize and share content, ideas, opinions, and software from sites all around the world. As with most new technologies, social media found their initial – and most popular – application in providing entertainment. But, they are already changing the way government services are delivered, how companies meet customers’ needs, how students learn, how non-governmental organizations do their work, how political campaigns are run, and how religious institutions connect to their members.

The social uses of media apart, one field that has been profoundly shaken by the advent of digital technologies, social media and user-generated content is that of professional journalism. The old paradigm, as expressed by reporter and political commentator Walter Lippmann, was that journalism’s role was to act as a mediator or translator between the public and policy-making elites. The philosopher John Dewey, however, believed that decisions should only be made after discussion and debate in the public sphere and that journalism should do more than simply pass on information: it should weigh the consequences of the policies being enacted.

In an age in which communication is being democratized through the development of interactive digital technologies, where traditional journalism fails, citizen journalism steps in:

Well-organized mass social movements, using their own means of communication, are indispensable as forms of popular education as well as of mobilization. Resistance to the engines of global inequality and destruction is essential; genuinely demo-

*cratic public spheres are arguably both a precondition and an outcome of that process.*⁴

The ground beneath the profession of journalism has radically shifted under pressure from reinterpretations of good citizenship and good governance, the role and identity of different publics, and, of course, exponential developments in communication technologies. Previously, a journalist (one who conveys information about day-to-day events) was a trained and paid professional working for an established organisation in mainstream media (print, radio, television). Now, a journalist is conceived of as anyone who mediates between an event and an audience, whether via a formal outlet or an informal network. Inevitably, this has led to a questioning of roles and standards:

*It appears that there are two contrasting theories of journalism ... One consists of established standards and practices that emanate from print and broadcast journalism and the belief that journalism has a social responsibility to inform citizens and nurture democracy, while the other is informed by suspicion of centrally managed, traditional media conglomerates and a belief, inspired by the open architecture of the Internet and the flexibility of Web publishing, that citizens can participate in democracy by creating their own journalism.*⁵

Rather than taking an “us-and-them” approach to traditional and alternative media, it may be more fruitful to consider how they interact and might complement each other according to circumstance. How do they create informed public opinion that can be harnessed for political and social change? What are their ethical values?

⁴ Hackett, 2010, p. 13

⁵ Berkman and Shumway, 2003, p. 67

4.2 Engaged Dialogue as a Basis for Media Ethics

One starting point is to briefly examine the concept of engaged dialogue – which involves the desire to hear and understand what other people are saying and how they see the world – as a better model than merely reporting or passing on information. Engaged dialogue is what Adam Kahane calls “deep conversation” and here the potential of alternative media to challenge the conventional role of mainstream media is thrown into relief.

Kahane models four ways of talking and listening. The first is “downloading”, consisting of polite, socially acceptable, conventional exchanges in which people do not listen carefully and nothing new is explored. The second is “debating”, when people actively search for new information or perspectives and engage in argument. The third is “reflective dialogue”, characterized by placing oneself in the position or circumstances of another person and seeing oneself through his or her eyes and ears. The fourth and most powerful is “generative dialogue” in which two or more people experience a sense of common purpose and are fully engaged with what is taking place and its potential for change. The premise is simple:

The way we talk and listen expresses our relationship with the world. When we fall into the trap of telling and of not listening, we close ourselves off from being changed by the world and we limit ourselves to being able to change the world only by force. But when we talk and listen with an open mind and an open heart and an open spirit, we bring forth our better selves and a better world.⁶

Engaged dialogue, particularly its “generative” form, is the most democratic, in which everyone is listened to and everyone can take

⁶ Kahane, 2004, p. 4

part on an equal footing. It is reminiscent of the talking circle, a traditional instrument for dealing with conflicts, misconceptions, disagreements, or deeper problems that interfere with the everyday concerns of a person or a community. Talking circles are where people can search for new directions, abandoning the old, making amends, righting wrongs, and creating new pathways toward conflict resolution and possible reconciliation. They represent a model of “integrative conversation” that reinforces the skills of listening attentively, making connections, and working cooperatively to address problems and challenges. Individuals place their community in the foreground of their thinking and themselves in the background in order to participate in a conversation that involves:

A genuine exchange of ideas, feelings, perspectives, opinions, and so forth, where for each person involved there emerges a sense of self as part of the whole. To participate in integrative conversation, one accepts responsibility not only for actively listening to every perspective, but for creating an integrative story along the way. In doing so, the underlying dynamics of power shift from traditionally myopic, self-centred, and rigid to inclusive, interconnected, and fluid.⁷

Independent media, alternative media, and community media offer possibilities for communicative action, deep conversation, and generative dialogue. They also challenge the hegemony of traditional mass media enterprises by increasingly providing organized material that is (to a certain, as yet ill-defined extent) credible and reliable. Since commercial media are unlikely willingly to diminish their profitability any time soon, and since there will always be a demand for independent public service media, we might imagine a future scenario in which there

⁷ Cowan and Adams, 2002, p.3

will be three tiers of media activity that are interwoven and which interact. There will be some kind of public service media at the (inter)national level, offering credible in-depth news, information and opinion mainly focused on political, economic, and cultural issues. There will be both independent and commercial media at the national level, offering credible but probably less structured news, information, and opinion mainly focused on partisan interests. There will be community media at the ultra-local level, offering highly partisan news, information and opinion mainly focused on small groups of followers. People will dip in and out of all three tiers to varying degrees.

This model has implications for the shapers of news, information, and opinion. In future, they are likely to be far more diverse in ethnicity, social and educational background. They will have specialist knowledge relevant to the level at which they are working, probably having been educated or having lived in a particular context. They will work to different formal and informal deadlines using multiple media (text, audio and video) and they will be networked with specialists and non-specialists. If they are paid, they may, as a consequence, work for several different organizations and possibly from home rather than in an office. They will be addressing multiple audiences in different ways and, in common with the best professional journalists, they will need to spend considerable time verifying, interpreting and explaining in order to gain and maintain credibility. They will also need to work as transparently as possible if they are to win and keep the trust of editors and the public.

In carrying out their tasks, these public communicators – the new creators of opinion in society – will interact in a form of symbiotic public journalism that has never been seen before. The problem for their different audiences will be to sift fact from fiction, insight from opinion, truth from falsehood. Not every public communicator will abide by professional codes of journalistic practice (if they ever did) and

most will not have the long-term professional infrastructure of the best media institutions. All of which poses key ethical questions for citizen journalism.

4.3 What Is Citizen Journalism and What Are The Ethical Questions It Raises?

Writing in the series *Challenges* published by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, John Kelly observes that citizen journalism's supporters claim six ways it benefits public communication:

- It brings experts into the reporting process so that stories can be more accurate and nuanced.
- It makes possible the coverage of events that the mainstream media might otherwise miss.
- It can save money.
- Through blogs especially, it can influence the news agenda or 'resuscitate' stories that mainstream media might have let die.
- It can demystify the journalistic process.
- It can build a sense of community, increasing the understanding, of, and participation in, civic life.⁸

The concept of citizen journalism is based upon ordinary people who, while not professionally paid journalists, are nevertheless playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, commenting on and disseminating news and information. Jay Rosen, media critic and professor of journalism at New York University, says, "When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism."

⁸ Kelly, 2009, pp. 26-28

Observers argue that citizen journalism should not be confused with community journalism or civic journalism, both of which are practiced by professional journalists. Collaborative journalism is also a separate concept and is the practice of professional and non-professional journalists working together. Citizen journalism is a specific combination of both citizen media and user-generated content. Juxtaposing the term “citizen,” with its notions of good citizenship and civic responsibility, with that of “journalism,” underscores the ideological link between the practice of journalism and its relation to the political and public sphere.

Put simply, citizen journalism is when private individuals do what professional journalists do – report information but with different motivations. That information can take many forms, from a podcast editorial to a report about a city council meeting on a blog. It can include text, pictures, audio and video. But it’s basically about communicating information of some kind. The other main feature of citizen journalism is that today it is almost exclusively found online. The Internet gave ordinary people the ability to transmit information globally. That was a power once reserved for governments, media corporations and news agencies.

Citizen journalism can take many forms. Steve Outing of Poynter.org – “a school that exists to ensure that our communities have access to excellent journalism—the kind of journalism that enables us to participate fully and effectively in our democracy” – and others have identified two major categories of citizen journalism. The first is *Semi-Independent Citizen Journalism* which involves citizens contributing, in one form or another, to existing professional news sites. For example, readers posting comments on stories done by professional reporters; readers adding their information to articles done by professional journalists; readers actively working with professional

reporters to put together a story; and reader blogs that are incorporated into professional news websites.

The second category is *Independent Citizen Journalism* which involves citizen journalists working in ways that are fully independent of traditional, professional news outlets, i.e. blogs in which individuals can report on events in their communities or offer commentary on the issues of the day; video feeds to community television stations; phone-in programmes on community radio.

In 2010 the two US founders of the National Association of Citizen Journalists (NACJ), Ron Ross and Susan Carson Cormier, e-published their *Handbook for Citizen Journalists* “dedicated to the tens of thousands of citizen journalists around the world who are making a difference in their villages, towns, states and nations by picking up the slack left by the changing journalistic climate.”

Focused entirely on the USA, the authors describe citizen journalists as:

Information innovators, digital publishing pioneers, news trailblazers who are cutting a new media swath into the 21st century. They are aggressive trendsetters, media revolutionaries at work transforming the way news is written, produced and delivered. Some work with limited tools. When resources or the latest technology are not available, they innovate ways to get their message out. They do what they can with what they have and without restraint of word or limitation of technique⁹.

A key issue for the authors is the issue of press freedom and the relationship between professional journalism and citizen (or community) journalism. Since the 20th century professional journalists have been seen as the lynchpins of the links between political society and civil

⁹ Ross and Carson Cormier, 2010, p. 21

society. Despite notable attempts by governments to control information and the mass media, independent journalism has been seen as the way to introduce checks-and-balances and to urge public accountability.

Indeed, the public service broadcasting ethic stood or fell by the notion that in order to retain their licenses a small number of recognized and regulated sources should be tasked with a mission to educate, inform and entertain the public in certain ways. Even newspapers were supposed to be editorially and financially independent:

The public-service model was based on the idea that neither the market nor the State could adequately meet the public-service objectives of broadcasting and act in the public interest; indeed, it was felt that the public interest does not coincide either with private interests or the interests of the political powers that be.¹⁰

Today, of course, that picture has changed considerably. The Web facilitates interactive media offerings of a public service nature, which may be commercial or non-commercial, and may be produced by charities, activists, academics, government, other organisations, and new or established companies. Yet the principle remains, and while traditional journalism was and is held to support the public service ethic with editorial principles of honesty, balance, and objectivity:

Citizen journalism is a more horizontal and conversational sharing of news, which is 'always unfinished, and continually under development' ... Thus, the audience is not only connected vertically to people in power, such as editors and politicians, but also horizontally to each other, enabling them to mobilize. The flow of information is no longer controlled from the top.¹¹

¹⁰ Public Broadcasting Why? How?, 2001, p. 10

¹¹ Jurrat, 2011, p. 7

For many commentators, this is where the problem lies. How to ensure that citizen or community journalism is pursued in ways that are ethical when “Credibility is the ultimate value of mass communication whether the medium is a traditional newspaper (in print or online) or a blog.”¹²

4.4 A Code of Ethics for Citizen Journalism

Research carried out in 2012 and 2013 by WACC has revealed that there are very few guidelines or codes of ethics relating to citizen or community journalism. In contrast, there are countless codes of ethics for social media, mostly written from the perspective of large corporations or professional media houses seeking to regulate their employees’ use of social media as sources or personal channels of communication. Although UNESCO has a web site dedicated to Professional Journalistic Standards and Codes of Ethics¹³ and there is also a collection of codes of journalism ethics in Europe at EthicNet¹⁴, neither has so far turned its attention to citizen journalism, perhaps for the simple reason that both sites deal with what is understood to be the well-established and traditionally ring-fenced profession of traditional journalism.

One of the earliest ethical codes for bloggers was published in the *Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Weblog* (2002) by Rebecca Blood. The author takes a hands-on approach from her perspective as an early blogger. However, she does provide key guidelines:

¹² Elliott and Decker, 2011, p. 244

¹³ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/professional-journalistic-standards-and-code-of-ethics/key-concepts/>

¹⁴ http://ethicnet.uta.fi/ethicnet_collection_of_codes_of_journalism_ethics_in_europe

- Publish as fact only that which you believe to be true. If your statement is speculation, say so.
- If material exists online, link to it when you reference it. Linking to referenced material allows readers to judge for themselves the accuracy and insightfulness of your statements.
- Publicly correct any misinformation.
- Write each entry as if it could not be changed; add to, but do not rewrite or delete, any entry.
- Disclose any conflict of interest.
- Note questionable and biased sources.

A *Blogger's Code of Ethics* (2003) was also proposed by Jonathan Dube, editorial director for CBC.ca and an award-winning print journalist who created cyberjournalist.net. The principles were adapted from the code of ethics used by the Society of Professional Journalists. It offers sound advice that still holds good¹⁵:

- Bloggers should be honest and fair in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Bloggers should:
- Never plagiarize.
- Identify and link to sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Make certain that Weblog entries, quotations, headlines, photos and all other content do not misrepresent.
- They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of photos without disclosing what has been changed. Image enhancement is only acceptable for technical clarity. Label montages and photo illustrations.

¹⁵ <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php>

- Never publish information they know is inaccurate – and if publishing questionable information, make it clear it's in doubt.
- Distinguish between advocacy, commentary and factual information. Even advocacy writing and commentary should not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish factual information and commentary from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Ethical bloggers treat sources and subjects as human beings deserving of respect. Bloggers should:
- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by Weblog content. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of information is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects, victims of sex crimes and criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Bloggers should:
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Explain each Weblog's mission and invite dialogue with the public over its content and the bloggers' conduct.

- Disclose conflicts of interest, affiliations, activities and personal agendas.
- Deny favoured treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence content.
- When exceptions are made, disclose them fully to readers.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favours. When accepting such information, disclose the favours.
- Expose unethical practices of other bloggers.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

In an article published in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Martin Kuhn criticised Dube's code for not addressing the human dialogue and interactive nature of blogs. Kuhn writes, "A code of blogging ethics should be both normatively based, drawing upon the interactive nature of blogs, and dialogically derived" (Kuhn, 2007, p. 21). He produced a blend of values derived from ethics scholarship and a survey of blog responses to offer the following:

1. Promote interactivity

- Post to your blog on a regular basis
- Visit and post on other blogs
- Respect blog etiquette
- Attempt to be entertaining, interesting, and/or relevant

2. Promote free expression

- Do not restrict access to your blog by specific individuals or groups
- Do not self-censor by removing posts or comments once they are published
- Allow and encourage comments on your blog

3. Strive for factual truth

- Never intentionally deceive others
- Be accountable for what you post

4. Be as transparent as possible

- Reveal your identity as much as possible (name, photo, background info, etc.)
 - Reveal your personal affiliations and conflicts of interest
 - Cite and link to all sources referenced in each post
5. Promote the human element in blogging
- Minimize harm to others when posting information
 - Promote community by linking to other blogs and keeping a “blogroll”
 - Build relationships by responding to e-mails and comments regularly

The *Handbook for Citizen Journalists* (2010), written by Ron Ross and Susan Carson Cormier, offers something of a combination of the two, focusing on core values. What follows is a summary.

4.4.1 Freedom of the Press

The First Amendment to the Bill of Rights that went into effect on 15 December 1791 states that, “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It includes Article 19, which states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

4.4.2 Power of the Truth

“Truth does not become more true by virtue of the fact that the entire world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it.” Moses Maimonides

Just because someone believes something should be true, does not make it so and determining whether something is true should be a fundamental goal of all journalists. Citizen journalists who are working to inform their communities should focus on this concept, the concept of finding the truth – not reiterating something that is commonly believed by others.

4.4.3 Vox Populi – Voice of the People

Many hyperlocal and niche stories go untold because professional journalists do not believe there is enough interest in the subject or because they are not on the scene of the event. Citizen journalists are the eyes and ears of their communities. They are on the scene when many professional journalists are elsewhere.

4.4.4 Accountability to the Public

Citizen journalists' highest obligation is to the public. They are answerable for the truth, fairness and usefulness of whatever they write. The Hearst Newspapers' Statement of Professional Principles says it well, "We place our readers' interests above all others and dedicate ourselves to the principles of truthfulness, fairness and independence."

4.4.5 Accuracy

One of the first rules of journalism is to be accurate. Without accuracy, citizen journalists have no credibility, integrity or respect from their readers or sources. Citizen journalists will excel if they provide content that is accurate, in context and free from bias.

4.4.6 Whole Story

The importance of getting the whole story can never be understated. No story should be complete until it presents all sides in a fair and unbiased manner, and includes all pertinent facts.

4.4.7 Presumption of Innocence

A citizen journalist should not function as an arm of law enforcement or as an advocate for a defendant by speculating about the guilt or innocence of someone referred to as a “prime suspect,” “person of interest” or defendant.

4.4.8 Importance of Context

Because the same information might be interpreted differently, depending on the circumstances, journalists must be vigilant in their efforts to paint the full picture. They must tell their audiences who said what, and when, where, why and how they said it.

4.4.9 Respect of All People

Citizen journalists must be sensitive, respectful and recognize individuals’ rights to privacy. Citizen journalists should be extra sensitive and use common standards of decency when dealing with children or people who are not used to being in the news or who are unexpectedly in the news.

4.4.10 Limitation of Harm

Many news stories are about people – human beings who deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. Citizen journalists pursuing im-

portant stories are not automatically given the right to take any photo, ask any question or quote any witness. Even the process of gathering information can cause distress and even permanent harm to innocent people. An ethical reporter will treat the people they deal with in the same way they would like to be treated, whether they are sources for stories or subjects of them.

4.4.11 Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest

Good citizen journalists keep themselves free from obligations of any kind towards news sources and newsmakers. Even the appearance of conflict of interest is avoided. The rule is to maintain professional objectivity and preserve a clear difference between legitimate business relationships and personal friendships.

4.4.12 Immediate Correction of Mistakes

In the haste of covering the news, legitimate mistakes do happen. When they do, journalists have the responsibility to admit their errors and correct them promptly and completely. It's that simple.

4.4.13 Courage

Citizen journalists ask their questions with boldness and with respect. But citizen journalism is also being practiced in places where a substantial measure of extra courage is required just to snap a photo or upload a video. In many totalitarian countries, citizen journalists spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to stay out of jail, how to avoid beatings and how to keep from "disappearing." Without the courage to ask questions, research relevant facts, seek verification and face bullies with audacity, few truly important stories will ever be told.

4.4.14 Shame of Plagiarism

To plagiarize the work of another is considered one of the most serious breaches of journalist ethics. In most cases, professional journalists caught plagiarizing are fired or are severely disciplined. Citizen journalists may not lose their jobs or even suffer any repercussions for plagiarism. However, they should experience personal shame, for it is a reprehensible act.

Select, copy, paste may be the simplest definition of plagiarism because to plagiarize, is to intentionally present someone else's words and/or ideas as your own. But more than breaking the law, plagiarism is a breach of trust with the audience. Here's the principle: Legitimate citizen journalists never plagiarize.

4.4.15 Integrity

The Preamble of the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics says, "Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility." Citizen journalists must join the many serious professional journalists who still adhere to the ethics and standards that made journalism a valuable and honourable profession. Integrity is the virtue of basing all of an individual's words and deeds on an unswerving framework of personally-held, well- developed principles. This means one must know what is right and wrong, good and evil, helpful and hurtful, and then act accordingly, even at personal cost (Ross and Carson Cormier, 2010).

It is interesting that the authors also refer to the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. Many people might assume that citizen journalists conform to such norms, although here we need to make a careful distinction between those whose aims are genuinely democratic and inclusive and those whose aims are anti-democratic and exclusive:

In an environment in which external controls are almost wholly absent, self-imposed constraints on freedom become crucial. This is certainly true for users, but it also applies to journalists whose professional norms and occupational roles are stretched in new directions by the online medium's immediacy, by emerging new formats for expressing their own voice, and by radically different relationships with people outside the newsroom.¹⁶

Most recently, ARTICLE 19 – an international human rights organisation, founded in 1986, which defends and promotes freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide – has articulated a policy paper titled “The Right to Blog” (2013). It puts forward a set of recommendations addressed to state actors and policy-makers about what they should do to promote and protect the rights of bloggers domestically and internationally. It also gives practical advice to bloggers about their rights and explains how – and in what situations – they can invoke some of the privileges and defences that traditional journalists have found vital to the integrity of their work.

ARTICLE 19 argues that it is no longer appropriate to define journalism and journalists by reference to some recognised body of training, or affiliation with a news entity or professional body. On the contrary, ARTICLE 19 believes that the definition of journalism should be functional, i.e. journalism is an activity that can be exercised by anyone. Accordingly, it argues that international human rights law must protect bloggers just as it protects journalists. The policy paper, therefore, addresses the key areas that bloggers are likely to face, that is: licensing, real-name registration (vs. anonymity), accreditation, the protection of sources, protection from violence, legal liability and ethical responsibility and suggests ways for them to be addressed.

¹⁶ Singer, 2011, p. 859

The key recommendations quoted verbatim from the policy paper are as follows:

- Relevant legal standards should reflect the fact that “journalism” consists of disseminating information and ideas to the public by any means of communication. As such, it is an activity which can be exercised by anyone.
- Any definition of the term “journalist” should be broad, to include any natural or legal person who is regularly or professionally engaged in the collection and dissemination of information to the public via any means of mass communication.
- Bloggers should never be required to obtain a licence to blog.
- Bloggers should never be required to register with the government or other official bodies.
- Accreditation schemes must meet international freedom of expression standards and should ensure that:
 - all applicants, including bloggers, who meet the minimum requirements defined in the law should be automatically issued with a “press” facilitation card;
 - press cards should only be required to get access to events or premises where there is a clear need to limit attendance based on limited space or the potential for disruption;
 - the conditions for obtaining a press card should be based on the overall public interest and not on considerations such as affiliation with a professional association or degree in journalism.
- Legal commentators, including bloggers, should be allowed to use social media from court rooms if the hearings are open to the public.

- To the extent that they are engaged in journalistic activity, bloggers should be able to rely on the right to protect their sources.
- Any request to disclose sources should be strictly limited to the most serious cases. It should be approved only by an independent judge in a fair and public hearing with a possibility of an appeal.
- State authorities must guarantee the safety of bloggers using a variety of measures, including the prohibition of crimes against freedom of expression in their domestic laws.
- States must take reasonable steps to protect bloggers and other individuals actively engaged in online communities when they know or ought to know of the existence of a real and immediate risk to the life of an identified blogger as a result of the criminal acts of a third party.
- State authorities must carry out independent, speedy and effective investigations into threats or violent attacks against bloggers or other individuals engaged in journalistic activity online.
- The laws governing the liability of bloggers, including defamation law, incitement and other speech-related offences, must comply with international freedom of expression standards.
- As a general rule, bloggers should not be held liable for comments made by third parties on their blogs in circumstances where they have not intervened or modified those comments.
- For certain types of content, for example content that is defamatory or infringes copyright, consideration should be given to adopting ‘notice-and-notice’ approaches whereby bloggers would be required to pass the complaint to the orig-

inal maker of the statement at issue, without removing the material upon notice.

- The term “duties and responsibilities” in Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 10 of the European Convention must be interpreted flexibly to take into account the particular situation of the blogger in question.
- Bloggers should not be forced to abide by the ethical codes or codes of conduct developed by traditional media and should not be coerced or given an incentive to join self-regulatory bodies for traditional media.
- Bloggers may decide to follow the ethical standards of traditional media of their own accord. They can also develop their own code of practice either for their own blogs or for associations they voluntarily join. Alternative dispute resolution systems should also be encouraged.
- When bloggers produce a piece for a traditional newspaper, they should be subject to the newspaper’s editorial control, and abide by the ethical standards of journalists¹⁷.

4.5 Gender – The Missing Link

There is a significant omission in all the discussions around a code of ethics for citizen journalism: gender ethical guidelines. Since 1995 the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) – a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting communication rights – has coordinated the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). It is a longitudinal research and advocacy initiative on gender in the world news media, carried out in 5-year cycles to moni-

¹⁷ The Right to Blog, 2013

tor change in selected indicators of gender in news media content. In 2010 data was collected in 108 countries for the fourth in the series, which revealed that women make up only 24% of the people heard, read about or seen in the news¹⁸.

Two years earlier the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) had launched its Ethical Journalism Initiative (<http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en>) to confront ongoing discrimination in the news and to reconnect journalists to their mission by enforcing core ethical standards. Challenging sensationalism and stereotypes, checking facts, abiding by codes of conduct, supporting independent self-regulatory bodies are some of the actions identified to uphold media quality and rebuild the public's trust in the news. The IFJ recognized that fair gender portrayal is one of the issues to be given priority if media hope to fully reflect the role women play in society. The widespread use of digital media platforms, social media, and the development of online news are clearly part of this new paradigm.

As a result of GMMP 2010, WACC and IFJ cooperated to produce a *Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism and Media House Policy* in an effort to redress gender disparities in news media content. Arguing that the primary reason for gaps in coverage is that gender has not yet been integrated into the news agenda, and that there is still an assumption within the profession that gender is at best a “niche” issue, and that events and issues traditionally categorised as hard news can actually benefit from a gender perspective, the Handbook's authors said:

It is time for the news media – and media professionals – to realise the importance of gender as a key lens through which all

¹⁸ This report is available at http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2010/global/gmmp_global_report_en.pdf

*events and issues must be examined in order to tell the whole story. For coverage to become more inclusive and balanced, not only reporters/correspondents but the range of professionals who together shape media content – including visuals – have to be conscious of the need to factor gender into the process of deciding what to cover and how to cover it.*¹⁹

Why is gender important? In nearly every society, traditional gender roles privilege men at the expense of women. Through the imposition and continuous reinforcement of rigid gender norms, society deprives women of rights, power, and resources. Traditional gender roles drive women's lower economic status, low literacy and education, poorer health outcomes, and greater exposure to gender-based violence. Millennium Development Goal 3 is "To promote gender equality and empower women." Gender equity implies fairness and justice in the distribution of opportunities, responsibilities, and benefits available to men and women, and the strategies and processes used to achieve gender equality.

Gender equality is equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within communities, and society at large. However, women are not the only ones harmed by traditional gender norms and inequality; men and transgender individuals also suffer negative consequences. Transforming traditional gender roles is critical to reducing the damage that those roles inflict on everyone. Increased gender equality – the equal treatment of all individuals, regardless of gender – benefits all members of society and achieving equality means working with people of all genders:

In the final analysis, unless gender is acknowledged as one of several factors that affect people's experience of almost everything,

¹⁹ Learning Resource Kit, 2012, p. 9

*and accepted as one of the angles to be explored while covering anything, the media will continue to tell only part of the story – whatever that story may be.*²⁰

In their review of existing codes of ethics, the authors of the *Learning Resource Kit* identified elements of codes that are comprehensive from a gender perspective and which should figure in any generic code of ethics for citizen journalism:

1. Recognition of different forms of diversity in the implementation context. The codes spell out various forms of diversity relevant to the locality, such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex, ability, sexuality, age and class.
2. Clear delineation of unacceptable practice, including:
 - Making discriminatory and/or denigrating reference to a person/group
 - Presenting a person/group in a prejudicial and/or pejorative context
 - Publishing material intended or is likely to engender hostility/hatred towards a person or group based on their characteristics
 - Publishing material that contributes to dehumanizing a person/group
 - Publishing material that encourages discrimination on grounds of characteristics of group
 - Portraying a person/group in a negative light by placing gratuitous emphasis on their characteristics
 - Demeaning the person/group
 - Condemning people on the basis of their identity

²⁰ Learning Resource Kit, 2012, Book 1, p. 12

- Promoting hatred, intolerance, discrimination and violence towards a person/group on the basis of their characteristics
 - Using insulting expressions which may cause moral or physical injury
 - Creating or processing information that jeopardizes human rights and freedoms
3. Recognition and respect of diversity of opinion
 4. Placing responsibility on media professionals to develop awareness of gender equality as integral human rights
 5. Articulating non-discrimination as a responsibility of journalists
 6. Articulating the need to contribute to democratizing media as a duty of journalists for the purpose of increasing popular participation, strengthening identity and building a culture of peace
 7. Clear identification of:
 - The entities responsible for code's application
 - The entities to whom enquiries should be directed
 - The entities responsible for dealing with enquiries
 - Procedures for complaints
 8. Gender-specific provisions address the following concerns:
 - Equitable portrayal of all genders
 - Respect for human rights
 - Negative portrayal
 - Gender stereotyping
 - Stigmatization of persons on account of gender
 - Victimization
 - Exploitation
 - Degradation
 - Language and terminology choice

- Equal treatment
- Inappropriate or irrelevant emphasis on gender, physical characteristics, family status or marital status
- Gender balance of commentators and experts²¹

4.6 Next Steps

There is considerable evidence that a code of ethics can be derived from existing thinking and practice and to which citizen journalists might voluntarily subscribe. While imposing a licensing system would infringe freedom of expression and might even be counterproductive, citizen journalists with integrity will welcome a framework in which what they do can be recognized as responsible and accountable and as meeting accepted standards. At the same time, we should not ignore the wider questions raised by Stuart Allan at the First WSIS+10 review meeting, “Towards Knowledge Societies for Peace and Sustainable Development” held at UNESCO, Paris²².

In a Session on “Citizen Journalism”, Allan listed the following key questions which – in his opinion and that of many others – remain to be addressed:

- To what extent is there a difference between citizen journalism, citizen-generated content and social media? How do they each reshape the public sphere?

²¹ Learning Resource Kit, 2012, Book 1, p. 29

²² The Multistakeholder WSIS+10 Review Event, 25-27 February 2013, hosted by UNESCO and co-organized with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), is part of a process examining the achievements of the Action Lines that emerged from the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) meetings in 2003 and 2005. Outcomes will feed directly into subsequent review meetings and reported to UNESCO’s Executive Board and to the 37th session of the General Conference of UNESCO (November 2013). The intention is also to integrate findings into the UN MDGs review process and into a possible post-2015 sustainable development framework.

- How have mainstream media outlets incorporated citizen journalism, and what effect has this had on content and coverage? How does it vary across regions? Do the same dynamics hold across platforms (e.g. broadcast and satellite television, newspapers, online news sites)?
- How is citizen journalism reshaping institutional configurations in the mainstream media? How does it impact the news agenda, and global and regional news flows?
- If a crucial task of self-regulatory mechanisms is to foster public trust in the media, what does this mean for citizen journalism and self-regulation of these media?
- How have professional media outlets adapted to a more competitive media environment?
- Do citizen journalists constitute a 5th Estate? How do they act as watchdogs of the mainstream press, and what impact do they have the nature of journalism? What new issues arise concerning accuracy and verifiability? Are there mechanisms or self-correcting systems that could be put in place to prevent the spread of false information?
- What specific threats do citizen journalists face, and what can be done to address them?

Within the above framework, it would be possible to conceive of a research project to be carried out in a country of the South where communication rights are generally guaranteed (such as India) which would explore the key questions raised by Stuart Allan at the same time as evolving a generic code of ethics for citizen journalism that is both practical and acceptable to professional and non-professional journalists alike.

One important issue is the protection and safety of journalists, including citizen journalists. On 12 April 2012 the UN Chief Executives

Board endorsed the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*²³. The Plan of Action aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, with a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide. Its measures include, among other undertakings, the establishment of a coordinated inter-agency mechanism to handle issues related to the safety of journalists as well as assisting countries to develop legislation and mechanisms favourable to freedom of expression and information, and supporting their efforts to implement existing international rules and principles.

Section 1.5 of the Plan notes:

Without freedom of expression, and particularly freedom of the press, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible. In a climate where journalists are safe, citizens find it easier to access quality information and many objectives become possible as a result: democratic governance and poverty reduction; conservation of the environment; gender equality and the empowerment of women; justice and a culture of human rights, to name a few. Hence, while the problem of impunity is not restricted to the failure to investigate the murders of journalists and media workers, the curtailment of their expression deprives society as a whole of their journalistic contribution and results in a wider impact on press freedom where a climate of intimidation and violence leads to self-censorship. In such a climate societies suffer because they lack the information needed to fully realize their potential. Efforts to end impunity with respect to crimes

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against journalists must be associated with the defence and protection of human rights defenders, more generally.

Of specific interest is the following paragraph: “In addition, the protection of journalists should not be limited to those formally recognised as journalists, but should cover others, including community media workers and *citizen journalists and others who may be using new media as a means of reaching their audiences.*” [Emphasis added.]

Section 1.17 underlines the need for special attention to be given to gender-specific issues: “Female journalists also face increasing dangers, highlighting the need for a gender-sensitive approach. In carrying out their professional duties, they often risk sexual assault, whether in the form of a targeted sexual violation, often in reprisal for their work; mob-related sexual violence aimed against journalists covering public events; or the sexual abuse of journalists in detention or captivity. Furthermore, many of these crimes are not reported as a result of powerful cultural and professional stigmas.”

In local contexts, four areas may require further definition and elaboration:

- Strengthening public awareness of citizen journalism
- Training needs of citizen journalists
- Best practices in citizen journalism
- Cyberactivism and citizen engagement.

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