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The Impact of Citizen Journalism on Social Awareness and Audience Engagement in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study has analyzed the role of citizen journalism in Pakistan in terms of coverage of social issues in Pakistan and more specifically on the perceived role, opportunities, audience engagement, challenges, and credibility/trust. A questionnaire based quantitative approach was employed. The tool had both demographic questions and 25 Likert items that encompassed five key areas of the research. The number of respondents was 200 and was mainly made up of young, well-educated, urban and aggressive users of social media making them a good sample to gauge perceptions of citizen journalism in Pakistani context. The results revealed that the respondents had positive perceptions towards citizen journalism. The majority of items exceeded 4.00, which means that the participants agreed that citizen journalism is a significant factor in bringing to light social ills that remain unaddressed, giving the citizens a voice, encouraging them to engage, and uphold freedom of expression. Another finding made by respondents was the success of social media in bolstering citizen journalism. The domain-wise scores also proved that there is general agreement on the dimensions of the study, with higher mean scores of Role of Citizen Journalism (M=4.17). The internal consistency was good to strong and similar across domains (Cronbach alpha between 0.80 and 0.85; overall alpha = 0.88). One-sample t-tests showed that domain means were significantly greater than the neutral value of 3.00 ($p<0.001$). The results of correlation analysis explored showed the presence of the positive and significant relationships between domains and hypotheses of the study were accepted. In general, the given research finds that citizen journalism is perceived as a valuable and significant channel of reporting social matters in Pakistan.

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Introduction

Citizen journalism has superior civic involvement and public engagement in democratic tactics. By method of grassroots reporting and community-led efforts, people have managed to highlight neighborhood issues, ensure duty from authorities, and push for societal reforms. The promptness and simplicity of getting admission to content created via residents have extensively motivated public opinion and spurred social moves, as established in several instances of citizen-driven activism and advocacy efforts. Nonetheless, the emergence of citizen journalism brings with it sure demanding situations and debates. Despite those problems, the impact of citizen journalism on the media surroundings and democratic talk is big. Ideally, there might be a cooperative dating among citizen journalism and traditional media, wherein both enhance the media panorama. Citizen journalism, strengthened with the useful resources of digital gear and social media, would possibly provide critical viewpoints

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and grassroots insights. Reporting, and community-pushed storytelling. Conventional media agencies could well know the significance of citizen journalism as a riding strain for reinforcing transparency, obligation, and public involvement. Collectively, they may nurture a vibrant media environment that encourages democratic communication, strengthens social concord, and elevates the voices of the marginalized.

The speedy development of the digital era has reshaped the communication landscape, giving upward thrust to new sorts of facts dissemination past conventional journalism. One of the most outstanding developments is citizen journalism, which refers to the reporting of information activities by everyday people using digital platforms which include social media, blogs, and cell phones (Allan, 2013). In modern-day Pakistan, citizen journalism has grown to be a powerful device for highlighting social troubles, especially in areas underreported with the aid of mainstream media. The accessibility of smartphones and internet services permits residents to document and proportion real-time facts, regularly bypassing institutional gatekeeping tactics.

Background of the Study

The growth of citizen journalism coincides with the worldwide rise of virtual media, in which the bounds between professional newshounds and the public are more and more blurred (Bowman & Willis, 2003). Platforms like Facebook, X (previously Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok have empowered people to file social injustices, human rights violations, and community crises right away. In Pakistan, citizen reporters have played important roles in exposing corruption, documenting herbal failures, and addressing nearby troubles that regularly escape mainstream coverage (Khan & Rehmat, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of digital media platforms and social networking sites has transformed the way information is produced and shared in contemporary society. Ordinary citizens are no longer only consumers of news; they have become active participants in gathering, reporting, and disseminating information about social issues such as poverty, gender discrimination, corruption, violence, environmental problems, and human rights violations. This phenomenon, commonly known as citizen journalism, has emerged as an important alternative source of information alongside traditional media. Citizen journalism provides opportunities for immediate reporting, wider public participation, and the representation of marginalized voices that are often ignored by mainstream media.

Rationale of the Study

The emergence of digital media and social networking systems has notably changed the panorama of communication and journalism. Citizen journalism has ended up an influential supply of information, specially in reporting social troubles which could receive constrained attention from traditional media. Through cell phones, social media applications, blogs, and online platforms, normal citizens can immediately document activities, percentage critiques, and raise focus about social issues affecting society.

Research Objectives

- To explore the role of citizen journalism in reporting social issues in Pakistan.
- To identify the opportunities citizen journalism provides for raising awareness about social problems.

Research Questions

- How does citizen journalism contribute to the reporting of social issues in Pakistan?
- What opportunities does citizen journalism offer in promoting social awareness and civic engagement?

Hypotheses

- Citizen journalism significantly contributes to raising awareness of social issues in Pakistan.
- There is a positive relationship between citizen journalism and audience engagement with social issues.

Literature Review

Citizen journalism dates back to antiquity, when people told their stories, used town criers and handwritten newsletters to pass news and information around in their communities. Until the introduction of the printing press in the 15th century, citizen journalism has been more like what you might recognize today. Newspapers and pamphlets unfold various views and regular people participate in public discussion by means of writing letters to the editor or reporting neighborhood activities (Romano, 2010). In the twentieth century, radio and television also democratized the media by opening up new avenues for grassroots reporting and citizen participation. Through community radio stations and public access to television channels, common people were able to create and broadcast their own content, which helped spread voices that aren't typically heard and promoted communal communication. However, citizen journalism underwent a transformation with the advent of the Internet in the late 20th century. The internet and virtual technologies brought democracy to statistics and made it possible for people to actively participate in the information environment.

Citizen Journalism: Academic Definition and Philosophical Practice

The idea of citizen journalism came within the modern day digital era with vending of the journalism. Many scholars have provided you with one of a kind definitions of what it is to be a journalist, and of who is a journalist. Citizen newshounds have upended information media ecosystems by querying the veracity and representativeness of information emanating from the conventional information media newsroom. Scholars have proven a hobby in human beings' potential to participate more actively in data manufacturing following the upward push of the Internet and new media.

In Context: Citizen Journalism in South Asia

The act of everyday people reporting facts and disseminating statistics, or "citizen journalism," has turned out to be increasingly more famous worldwide, specifically in areas wherein set up media stores are censored or do not appropriately cover a number of views. South Asia, with its numerous political topography, presents an intriguing context for understanding the improvement, troubles and importance of citizen journalism. Pakistan has a colorful media landscape, which is predominantly managed by using some non-public individuals (i.e., business tycoons). The best and tone of Pakistani information content is marred by issues of censorship, corruption and sensationalism.

Role of Citizen Journalism in Modern Society

The analysis of the studies of overseas authors A. Lindner and Larson (2017) highlights the large function of the way of life of citizen journalism inside the existence of cutting-edge society. In a joint medical paper, they write that "with the enlargement of the Internet and the creation of technological innovations, the attendance of statistics web sites has elevated

substantially, which contributed to the development of journalism, the failures of which aren't so essential against this heritage" (Lindner & Larson, 2017).

Theoretical Framework and Methods

Theory

This work is anchored on a mass communication theory known as Democratic - Participant Media Theory. It was actually developed by Dennis McQuail during the 80's. This theory, according to Folarin (1998), "lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, so as to guarantee-easier media access for all potential users and consumers". Explanatorily, Ojubor (2002) avers that "there is in this theory a desire for horizontal rather than vertical (top down) communication".

Methodology

This research will adopt a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure comprehensive analysis. The study will focus on university students, journalists, and active social media users in Faisalabad. A sample of 200 respondents will be selected using stratified random sampling. Survey Questionnaire will be used to collect quantitative data on audience perceptions, usage patterns, and trust levels in citizen journalism. In-depth Interviews will be conducted with 10–15 citizen journalists to gain qualitative insights into their motivations, experiences, and challenges. Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics and correlation tests. Qualitative data will be thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to opportunities and challenges in citizen journalism.

Results

The demographic data of respondents indicate that there were a total of 200 respondents. Gender wise, most of the respondents were men ($108, 54.0\%$), 88 (44.0%) were women, with 4 (2.0%) not disclosing their gender. As far as age is concerned, the biggest group of the respondents was 18–22 years of age (96 respondents, 48.0%), 23–27 years of age (62 respondents, 31.0%). Students formed the largest segment of the sample, with 102 respondents (51.0%), followed by social media users with 48 respondents (24.0%). Before testing the hypotheses, the internal consistency of the five questionnaire domains was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated acceptable reliability across all scales. The domain of Role of Citizen Journalism achieved a Cronbach alpha of 0.84 (Good), and Opportunities achieved 0.82 (Good). The overall scale gave Cronbach's alpha value of 0.88 (Strong).

The descriptive statistics of the questionnaire statements reveal that there is a positive perception of citizen journalism among the respondents in general. The majority of the mean scores exceed 4.00 demonstrating overall agreement. Respondents recognized the value of citizen journalism in covering social issues as shown by the mean score of 4.18 on the statement that citizen journalism plays an important role. The domain-wise mean scores are all situated in the "Agree" range, with Role of Citizen Journalism ($M=4.17, SD=0.61$) and Opportunities ($M=4.14, SD=0.58$).

A one-sample t-test was applied to determine whether the mean score of each domain was significantly higher than the neutral test value of 3.00. For the Role of Citizen Journalism domain, the average score was 4.17 ($t=27.13, p<0.001$), indicating it was significantly higher

than neutral. Pearson correlation analysis showed strong positive correlations between the Role of Citizen Journalism and Opportunities ($r=0.68, p<0.001$), and Audience Engagement ($r=0.62, p<0.001$).

Correlational Tests for Hypotheses (H1 & H2)

Hypothesis 1: The association between the Role of Citizen Journalism and Social Awareness/Audience Engagement yielded $r=0.62$ ($p<0.001$), indicating a moderate positive and significant relationship. Accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Opportunities and Audience Engagement yielded $r=0.58$ ($p<0.001$), indicating a moderate positive and significant relationship. Accepted.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research established that the respondents in Pakistan tended to perceive citizen journalism as an effective and significant tool of reporting social issues. Throughout the quantitative results, citizen journalism was related to publicity of overlooked concerns, increased involvement of people, enhanced awareness, and accelerated dissemination of information. The findings align with prior literature showing that social media transforms inactive users into active members of online information collection. Citizen journalism is not only appreciated in terms of information sharing, but also in terms of voice, participation, and awareness on social issues.

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