

# The impact of the rise of citizen journalists for mainstream media assignment



Due to the development of science and technology, the world is experiencing an information revolution. With the arrival of information age, the traditional information producing strata changes and new media rise gradually. Citizen journalists can be regarded as a representative of new media. As the concept is relatively new, it is not yet completely defined. Generally speaking, citizen journalists refer to members of the public who are not trained or employed as professional journalists for a living to produce and circulate photos, videos, news and views (Stabe, 2006).

In recent years, the rise of citizen journalists has an impact on mainstream media. Mainstream media, which sometimes are called elite media or agenda-setting media, can be defined as the media that are popular and available to the masses (Chomsky, 1997). They set the framework of information producing, involve TV, radio and newspapers. The impact mainly has three aspects: offering a large amount of information sources, breaking the monopoly of language rights and promoting the innovation of operation mode. This essay will explain the details of the impact of the rise of citizen journalists for mainstream media.

First of all, it is generally agreed that citizen journalists offer a great deal of information sources for mainstream media. Traditionally, mainstream media rely on professional journalists to get news or information through their observation, inquiry, analysis or investigation (I, Reporter, 2007). A lot of large media have employees all over the world to provide information sources. However, since many great events usually take place suddenly, it seems difficult for professional journalists to predict and gather information.

In contrast, the most outstanding characteristic of citizen journalists is that they are ubiquitous, which means they can appear in the most unlikely places (Glocer, 2006). Moreover, as new information science and technology such as digital products, mobile phones and network become more and more common in people's daily life, which provide technical support to release news, it makes the dissemination of news that citizen journalists can obtain themselves at the accident scene go out at any time easy.

As a result, the rise of citizen journalists remedies the regret of professional reporters to be present on the plot while all events are happening and impels mainstream media's report and spread of news to be faster as well as in a more comprehensive way. Take the example of London bombings on July 7th, 2005. On that day, terrorists attacked three subway trains and a crowded red double-decker bus, at least 37 people were killed and more than 700 wounded in these bombings (China Daily, 2005). This event was the deadliest attack on the city since the blitz during the Second World War.

Many citizens witnessed the event, took photos with their mobile phones and sent them to news organizations. It is said that mainstream media received 50 photos within an hour after the first bomb went off and 300 photos in all. In addition, mainstream media received several videos, 20 000 emails and text messages after the bombings happened (Hobson, 2005). Citizen journalists and professional journalists who joined subsequently together, successfully finished the strong report to this accidental event. It is the public that helped confirm this was a bomb rather than a power surge.

To some extent, this event can be regarded as an important milestone in the recent history of citizen journalism in Britain because it was the first time that such material provided by citizens had been deemed more newsworthy than the professionals' material (Glaser, 2006). Another impact of the rise of citizen journalists for mainstream media is breaking the monopoly of language rights. The reason why mainstream media are mainstream is that they have big resources and set the framework of information producing (Chomsky, 1997). All second-class and third-class media filter news in this framework every day.

They not only have a great influence on society, but also have very strong economic strength. Meanwhile, they are regarded as the mouthpiece of parties, governments and the masses. For a long time, mainstream media occupy social leading right and guide the major public opinions of the society, have very high authority and credibility. Nevertheless, since most of mainstream media are connected to or owned by the wealthy, as well as related to parties or governments, the information that they offer can be affected by powerful people who only want certain things to reach the public (Rayner, Wall and Kruger, 2004).

Therefore, in the past, people who have different ideas or thoughts would be cut out. Because of the arrival of information age, people suffer from information overload. The role of audience in information producing is changing. They are no longer directed by the will of mainstream media and they pay more attention to their own interests. Many of them act as citizen journalists, voluntarily look for news sources, purposefully comment on news events or provide accounts that differ from mainstream news accounts.

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The Internet has become the main platform and blog is one of the major forms for citizen news to release among audience. Since the Internet is anonymous, open to all and it gives access to all voices on all sides, citizens can participate in the creation and spread of information freely without any limitation (Dearnley and Feather, 2001). As a consequence, it challenges the authority of mainstream media and breaks their monopoly of language rights. An instance of this is Jane Stillwater, a 64-year-old Berkeley woman (Hider, 2007). As an anti-war person, she often condemned the Iraqi war at home via her blog on ordinary days.

However, as time passed, she felt that her articles lacked convincingness because she appraised the war in the United States that is far away from Iraq. After much deliberation, she decided to go to Baghdad where the story was. Nowadays, this old woman acts as a war correspondent in Baghdad, publishes what she has seen and heard on her blog, unfolds the true appearance of Iraq to people all around the world. As she is a citizen journalist, she does not like professional journalists who are affected by the social construction, her reports are different from those of mainstream media and more acceptable to the public.

Finally, the rise of citizen journalists promotes the innovation of operation mode of mainstream media. In information age, media industry has entered an era that relatively surplus rather than wanting in the past (Hewitt, 2005). With the increase of audience's choice to information, their reliance and concern to mainstream media is reducing gradually. In order to change such situation, mainstream media have to take measures to adapt themselves to the rise of citizen journalists. One measure is adding 'interactive' function.

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It means that the masses are able to comment on news events published by mainstream media on the websites just as they do on the blogs. Thus strengthens the connection between mainstream media and audience. For instance, many large news organisations such as CNN, CBC and ABC have this function on their websites. Another measure that is adapted by mainstream media is cooperating with blogs. On the one hand, they incorporate content from blogs. On the other hand, they link to blogs dealing with their own content. Furthermore, mainstream media begin to widen resource orientations.

In other words, they adopt various means to gather news sources, including encouraging citizens to offer the news and buying the news from citizens. What is more, professional journalists of mainstream media begin to regard citizen journalists' blogs as a source of story ideas or information. Virginia Tech massacre on April 16th, 2007, which was a school shooting and led to at least 30 people killed, can be an example (CNN, 2007). After this event happened, mainstream media were quite active to look for witnesses to share their experiences and information with audience.

A student even received interview request from six mainstream media such as BBC, CBC and MTV. To sum up, the rise of citizen journalists has a serious impact on mainstream media. Firstly, it offers a large amount of information sources for mainstream media. Citizens have the advantage that they exist everywhere. Once the sudden incident appears, the citizen in the scene only needs a mobile phone that can take photos and connect to the Internet, can report news at any time. In this way, it avoids the omission of the great media event.

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There is no doubt that the majority of sudden event news that mainstream media release will come from citizen journalists rather than professional journalists in the future. Secondly, this trend breaks mainstream media's monopoly of language rights. Since citizen news mainly spreads through the Internet, and the characteristics of the Internet determine that this kind of spread is unrestricted. Thus this makes the slogan that everybody is a journalist come true and challenges mainstream media's leading right of releasing news (Glocer, 2006). Finally, the rise of citizen journalists promotes the innovation of operation mode.

Mainstream media have realized that the public is in the leading position of mass media in the information society. Therefore, they have taken measures to adapt to the rise of citizen journalists including adding 'interactive' function, cooperating with blogs and widening resource orientations. In a word, the rise of citizen journalists is a challenge as well as an opportunity for mainstream media. Mainstream media should combine own advantages with those of citizen journalists, thus they can hold the development trend of mass media in the future.