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An agency full of citizens?

How news agencies cope with citizen journalism:

Their concerns and strategies

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1. Introduction

Never in history has it been so easy for ordinary people to broadcast their own opinions. We have seen an explosion of participation driven by consumer-technology. Citizens publish on the microblogging-service Twitter, on their weblogs or on social networks like Facebook. Participation is one of the positive effects, but citizen journalism differs from traditional journalism in one crucial attribute: objectivity. The misuse or even manipulation of this instrument can easily occur, because these sources are not trustworthy. Nevertheless citizen journalism makes a contribution to democracy and offers new opportunities for journalists. These trends have been disruptive to news industries. Newspapers and broadcasters have already tried to harness contributions and their efforts have been much written about. Less well covered is the impact of citizen journalism on news agencies - a hugely important part of the news ecosystem.

News agencies have built their reputation on breaking news, being first with a story wherever it happens. Furthermore they can be seen as "agenda-setters" as they make the first decision on how and if international stories will be covered.[1] But in recent years a number of news stories have been broken first by citizens armed with mobile phones and digital cameras and an internet connection. News about the earthquake in Haiti, for example, the emergency landing of a Quantas A380-plane in Singapore or the Iran elections, were first broken by citizens. Even if a news agency has a foreign correspondent in the country he would never be as fast as an ordinary citizen involved or seeing it happen.

Press agencies gather, write and distribute news from around a nation or the world and deliver it to their clients – newspapers, broadcasters, governments and other users. The association does not only publish news itself but supplies news to its subscribers, who by sharing costs obtain services they could not otherwise afford.[2] Within the range of different media forms, news agencies were sometimes presented as among the "least glamorous or interesting". For Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen they represent an extreme form of a "journalism of information". Early, implicit theorisation saw them as "powerful, but hidden, and, because hidden, perhaps even more powerful than commonly suspected".[3] Palmer sees them as "information vendors" and agenda-setters: "Their advice on customizing the material so that clients access pertinent information helps set the international news agenda for media and

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[1] Chris Paterson, Global Battlefields, In: *The globalization of news*, Sage Publications, 1998, p. 82
[2] Encyclopaedia Britannica
[3] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Terhi Rantanen (ed.), *The globalization of news,* Sage Publications, 1998, p. 7

non-media-subscribers."[4]

Given the changes outlined above, a number of substantive questions have emerged about the future of news agencies. In an age of information confusion, will they still be the agenda-setters or do citizen journalism websites take over this role? If information can be found on the internet for free, how does this affect an agency's business model? How do news agencies cope with citizen journalism and should they develop their own projects to involve people in the news-making process? When every engaged citizen has the possibility to publish his story and photo, does this affect the job of a journalist? Should citizen journalists get paid and how are media ethics affected? Journalists not only compete with competitors for being first but with every citizen potentially carrying a camera with him. This seems to be a challenge that cannot be won.

To answer these questions I spoke to representatives from news agencies and user generated websites and also to experts. I chose in summary six case studies: Thomson Reuters, the AP and the Austrian APA, the websites Wikinews, OhmyNews and Demotix. Finally, I discussed the trends with the author and new media professional Dan Gillmor.

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[4]   Michael Palmer, What makes the news, In: *The globalization of news*, Sage Publications, 1998, p. 177

2. Citizen journalism

Citizen journalists are "the people formerly known as the audience", explains Jay Rosen, New York University Journalism Professor.[5] For him citizen journalists "are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another – and who today are not in a situation like that at all." Today ordinary people can take part in the news-making process thanks to new technology.

Engaged citizens do what journalists are meant to do, they report news. They publish their pictures and videos, their stories and opinions on the internet – accessible for everyone. In contrast to the newspapers, breaking news is the agency's key selling point. In this sense, they would seem to be most strongly affected by citizen journalists who break news on social media platforms, via Twitter or their own weblog. The internet provides low-cost distribution; but it is not only technology that has affected the rise – journalism's "failures" also have led to the loss of trust. "The media's gatekeeper function was increasing obsolete in a world where there suddenly were no fences", the journalist and author John Kelly has written.[6]

In Nic Newman's opinion, citizen journalism will not replace traditional journalism: "They can complement each other. It's not either – it's both. Citizen journalism doesn't replace journalism. They work together".[7] It could create "an extra layer of information". He assumes that the role of mass media is going to change in the way that it's no longer their challenge to "break" the news, but to "confirm" them. "I'm relatively optimistic, because people kind of want both. It's good to be closer to the audience", said Newman.

Engaged citizens publish their content on websites like the one from Turi Munthe, called Demotix, or the South Korean OhmyNews. They directly compete with news agencies because they sell their content - pictures, texts or videos - directly to newspapers. Their potential "journalists" sit all over the world. They are not employed and they do not receive fixed loans or health insurance.

Zvi Reich from Ben Gurion University has compared the sourcing practices of citizen journalists to those of professionals.[8] There was no great difference in the number of sources consulted by mainstream journalists (2.52 per story) versus citizen journalists (2.18). Differences were found in the sort of sources, the sorts of stories and the genesis of stories.

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[5] http://www.theopennewsroom.com/documents/Citizen_%20journalism_phenomenon.pdf
[6] John Kelly, *Red Kayaks and Hidden Gold: the rise, challenges and value of citizen journalism,* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2009, p. 7, 8
[7] Nic Newman, Seminar at Green Templeton College, 20th October 2010, Oxford
[8] Zvi Reich, *A Matter of Accessibility,* In: John Kelly, *Red Kayaks and Hidden Gold: the rise, challenges and value of citizen journalism,* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2009, p. 37

While stories in the mainstream media were largely the result of official disbursement of information, citizen journalists' story choice was largely defined by what Reich terms "serendipitous encounters and idiosyncratic choices of lay people as well as their inability to access better positioned sources."

For Judith Lichtenberg, public journalism is characterised by two attributes. First, journalists use their values to play a role in helping communities create a healthy public climate. Second, journalists rely on citizens to identify issues of importance in the public arena and to help set the agenda for what stories and issues should be covered. They aim to connect with citizens in their communities and not merely provide a one-way flow of information to consumers.[9]

Like every new invention, or change, the rise of citizen journalism has led to soul-searching and concern in newsrooms. Traditional media and journalists worry about this development because they are no longer the only ones who distribute news. There are concerns about media ethics and legal issues, but providing information for free in the internet is also threatening traditional business models. On the other hand, these new trends open up new opportunities for journalists too. The professionals can build up a new relationship and conversation with the audience. Newman expects that within the next five to ten years, news rooms will have a "filtering desk" - people who are specialised in bringing the information from citizen journalism into journalism: "This is the trend we're going to see." He is also aware of the concerns about reliability. Current projects try to verify information in any case e.g. email the persons or try to talk to them on the telephone. If information cannot be verified, it is labelled: "For the brand it's important to maintain the trust." For Newman social media alone "is not the answer. It's only one part of it. It's more important to produce relevant content, news people want to discuss."

Discussing citizen journalism also is a discussion about ethics. To keep high quality standards, Prof. Larry Atkins suggests journalism training should be carried out on a regular basis or a podcast or video presentation should be posted on the website giving reporting tips and ethical advice. Peter Shankman suggests a rating system: Readers should rate the stories and the writers themselves. He is convinced this will give them an incentive and motivate them to do their best.[10] Possible solutions, media ethics and the necessity of new business models for news agencies are discussed in the following chapter.

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[9]   Judith Lichtenberg, *Beyond the public journalism controversy*, In: R.K. Fullinwider (ed.) *Civil Society, Democracy and Civic Renewal*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, pp. 342-354
[10]   http://www.ourblook.com/The-Media/The-Rise-of-the-Citizen-Journalism.html

3. News agencies

Citizen journalism allows a completely new kind of participation in the news-making process. In this chapter I am highlighting three news agencies and their ideas and strategies to cope with the phenomenon at the same time as maintaining the reliability of their brands.

3.1.   Reuters

Thomson Reuters (in further text: Reuters) operates in 100 countries and has over 55,000 employees. Its major services include text newswires, video, pictures, digital syndication, graphics and financial information. Reuters furthermore runs projects to encourage different formats of citizen journalism. The company's websites for example ran comments from the Global Voices[11] service for a while, before the sites were repositioned for a more professional audience interested in business and finance.

"It's a phenomenon, it exists and it has a value", says Sean Maguire, Editor Political and General News at Reuters.[12] Nevertheless he is convinced that professional journalists still have an important role in distributing trustworthy information. He furthermore assumes that people will pay for trustworthy information – also in the future. Reuters encourages reporters to write weblogs on the company's website and also a lot of journalists have Twitter-accounts. Furthermore they "keep an eye" on Twitterfeeds, written by politicians or institutions, said Maguire.

"We do use it, but there is the issue of verification. It's a challenge", he says. When social media is used as an unofficial news gathering tool, editors try to talk to local correspondents to verify information. Reuters is "quite cautious" concerning these sources. "It's tricky and really difficult", said Maguire. When stories break, they are "instantly everywhere" - thanks to the internet. "We still do breaking news, it's a big part", an "old-school"-duty for agencies. But now Maguire sees Reuters' duty in adding value: Expertise comes into play, for example journalists have to figure out "what comes up next".

At Reuters they differentiate between consumer media, which is advertising-driven, and the traditional business of a news agency. "We have more than 3,000 journalists globally and

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[11]   An international community of bloggers who report on blogs and citizen media from around the world, http://www.globalvoicesonline.org
[12]   Sean Maguire, Seminar at Nuffield College, Oxford, 22nd October 2010

always made use of stringers and freelancers. So citizen journalism for us is just another source. Maybe for newspapers or magazines the idea is a little more foreign", said Gregory Beitchman, Global Editor at Reuters.[13] Citizen journalism per se is not necessarily new, but the ability of users to publish their content to a wider audience cheaply and easily is very new. "Social media is a platform for them and a good way for us to potentially measure what people are doing. What has changed now is that the sources publish themselves and they can interact with audiences. It also helps us understand how our content is having an influence because it is easy to measure. So for us social media is a really great tool. And by measuring it, it also becomes a potential source." It would not be the only source for a story but it could definitely be one of several sources.

Social media isn't as reliable as a traditional agency. As Reuters is known as a reliable brand they are actually being asked to help manage this content: "We get feedback from our customers. They say 'Help us understand social media'. We don't have a perfect solution today but we are spending a lot of time thinking about it and learning every day. Today we see it as an opportunity." Beitchman is convinced that citizen journalism won't replace traditional journalism: "It would rather supplement it, not replace it. It would change but social media is just another platform. It doesn't change the core values of journalism. But it will be a useful tool - our journalists can interpret social media, make interviews on social media, and interact with their audiences."

Confronted with user generated content-websites, Beitchman is "not at all" afraid: "It's really interesting what Demotix does. For them it's a challenge because they are not a big brand. So it might be difficult to attract media customers consistently, but we are keen to work with emerging brands to help them reach our customers". He adds: "We keep an eye on it for sure, and we are flexible about recognising its advantages. There may even be workflows and methods that we can incorporate into our own business". His worries are bigger when it comes to pictures: "It's really easy and cheap to shoot a decent picture. The prices have fallen to the ground and it's so easy to host an archive. It's a tough business."

Beitchman thinks the relationship between news agencies and their customers is going to change: "We try to provide new services. We are collecting content and managing it and we don't necessarily make everything on our own. In the news agency we are trying to create a content-eco-system." Like Apple's iTunes they want to be a source for lots of different content like international and national news, sport, features and arts.

A trend he sees is that newspapers focus more and more on local reporting, while national and international stories are taken from the news agencies. Based on this assumption he

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13   Gregory Beitchman, Telephone-conversation with the author, 17th November 2010

doesn't think that newspapers will be less dependent on news agencies or even surrender their service because of citizen journalism: "I think they use [the agency] more."

Nevertheless he is aware of the need of an economic change because the prices for content are declining. Only news agencies which can evolve from a company supplying its own content into a platform for all kind of services, including social media, will succeed: "News agencies which provide more value added service and content have a viable future. This is a trend we will see in the next five years."

Although they are using tools like Twitter and other social media, Beitchman doesn't see Reuters necessarily having to succeed in becoming a widespread consumer brand to remain a viable media business: "If we think about going to a consumer brand we would need to study the consumers and focus on their real needs." News agency's content is not always very valuable for end-consumers, he assumes. Media-clients use the news agency often only as a source and sometimes go to make their own story, he explains.

The Reuters Handbook[14] also focuses on "Reporting from the internet". This makes clear that internet reporting "is nothing more than applying the principles of sound journalism to the sometimes unusual situations thrown up in the virtual world." Reuters recommends their reporters to apply the same precautions online that they would use in other forms of news gathering and they should not use anything from the internet that is not sourced in such a way that one can verify where it came from.

Reuters uses platforms as Twitter, blogs, vlogs (video-weblogs), live blogs, Facebook, Posterous, YouTube and Linkedin to round out and supplement traditional newswire copy, which tends to deploy an authoritative voice for online coverage. Julie Mollins is a production editor at Thomson Reuters. She explains her experience: "Citizen journalism allows us to share stories with readers who may react to traditional mainstream, corporate-owned news coverage with a certain jaded post-modern cynicism, questioning its veracity or legitimacy."[15] Social media platforms permit the presentation of the news as a vibrant dialogue focused around a core story presented via strong, traditional reportage.

Reuters recruits guest blog posts for The Great Debate blogs (one for the UK, US and India) and contributors in live blogs: "I started a Flickr page for people to upload pictures and now Reuters has a space where people can upload pictures. They can comment on the sites and respond to some Twitterfeeds." In theory all reporters are involved, which are approximately 3,000 people around the world, in the sense that they can have Twitterfeeds, do live-blogging and record video clips with their flip cameras if they wish. "There are no journalists who are

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[14]   http://handbook.reuters.com , 27th October 2010
[15]   Julie Mollins, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 27th Oct. 2010

dedicated only to doing that kind of coverage. We all have other jobs we must do as well", said Mollins. To verify the information from social media websites Mollins pointed out: "The same rules apply for social media as for regular reportage. We are asked not to break news on Twitter, but to call it in for the wire snaps." When information cannot be verified: "Either you have to attribute it to the source and then try and verify it via primary sources. Basically, if we can't attribute it we would do the same as any reporter and wait to use it until we can verify it."

Mark Jones, Global communities editor at Reuters, sees a changing relationship between journalists, sources and readers because of the new media's possibilities. On the one hand journalists use Twitter and social network-websites as a source and monitor them constantly. On the other hand they use them to request contributions from people via blogs and other social networks. B2B-models and B2C-models are beginning to blur. Formerly Reuters journalists were relatively unknown, today they are developing their own brands. "People have access to journalists because it's easy. That's happening already", said Jones. The "wake up call" for Reuters was the Tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004, when there were only pictures from citizens available from the catastrophe. Jones is convinced that news agencies and user generated websites will complement each other. He does not see them as an alternative: "It's pretty clear that they will have a symbiotic relationship." The question is, if they can provide the same service as agencies do and Jones doesn't think so. They would have to guarantee delivery like Reuters does it in a long established way.

When it comes to the point where customers need consistency, standards, writing skills, reliability and fact-checking, these projects will be forced to take on the standards of news agencies. He does not think that newspapers will disclaim news agencies' service because of the free information found in the internet. This content does not have the same quality as the information clients receive from the news agency. Reliability and validation, for example, makes Reuters' service valuable, while Twitterfeeds do not offer a finished product, but are more like a starting point. A news agency's clients can be sure the information they receive has been checked out. However, Jones says news organisations need to be open to new opportunities: "A news agency that closes itself, risks cutting itself off from sources and not pulling in new voices" - voices who might know more about an incident.

3.2.   Associated Press

The Associated Press (AP) calls itself the "essential global news network, delivering fast,

unbiased news from every corner of the world to all media platforms and formats."[16] Its headquarters are in New York and the company employees about 3,700 people. Two-thirds of them are news-gatherers and work in more than 300 locations worldwide. The AP is a non-profit news cooperative, owned by its American newspaper and broadcast members. According to the website, "on any given day, more than half the world's population sees news from the AP." The agency has received 49 Pulitzer Prizes, including 30 for photography.

Santiago Lyon is responsible for the photo department at the Associated Press. The department especially uses citizen journalism for events where either there is no traditional journalism presence or citizens have unique views or angles, he explained.[17] One recent example is the emergency landing of a Quantas plane in Singapore. Passengers on the aircraft took pictures of the damaged engine of the plane.

As a first step in cases like these, AP-journalists, photographers and a video-team are sent to the scene of news events. They try to locate citizens who have taken pictures or video-footage, carrying agreements with them. Some citizens provide imagery for free, some want to be paid. However, the value of a picture depends on the content. "When news breaks, we cover social media and look for imagery that appears there. We always try to contact the source and make sure that it is the person who the picture really belongs to. If the person wants money, we discuss the pricing", explains Lyon. The monetary value of the photo depends on how dramatic and important it is and on the news value.

He notices an increasing number of people on the internet who pretend to be the owner of pictures and calls this a "visual echo chamber" - the images are bouncing around and no one knows where they really come from. For example, when the earthquake happened in Haiti pictures from the earthquake in China appeared. "That's confusing. Therefore it is important for us first to make sure the image is real and second that we're dealing with the copyright-holders", said Lyon. These two things are the basic-guidelines for using citizen journalism within the AP. The credibility of the organisation and its reputation is crucial: "We cannot afford to make mistakes. Sometimes it delays us, but it's better to be second but right than to be first but wrong."

The AP runs four regional photo editing desks around the world, which also look for pictures found in social media. Many people throughout the AP are looking for sources of citizen journalism. "We use it as one of many resources. It complements what professional journalists do and sometimes it's the only perspective we can get," said the head of the photo-department. AP furthermore has a profile on Facebook with a selection of stories,

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[16]   http://www.ap.org/pages/about/about.html , 30th November 2010
[17]   Santiago Lyon, Telephone-conversation with the author on 5th November 2010

published every day – after they are distributed to their paying customers. The website is interactive, stories can be commented on and there are also a couple of Twitter feeds.

Compared to the amount of pictures distributed per year by AP-photographers, the number of citizen-pictures is diminutive. The AP distributes approximately 3,000 photos every 24 hours or over one million photos per year. In comparison, Lyon estimates that AP uses less than 100 citizen journalists' pictures in one year. For example, the news agency had six or seven pictures taken by citizen journalists at the Qantas emergency landing. Proportionally it is a very small amount. According to Lyon it is growing because many people carry mobile phones and/or small cameras, but that does not mean that the agency uses more of these pictures: "The potential for news gathering is there but the image-quality is sometimes poor and there's a lack of formal training." It is a problem: the organisation gets a lot of content but the quality is sometimes hugely lacking. "People are sometimes in the right place at the right time but have no formal training on where to point the camera", Lyon summarises. Furthermore media ethics are an issue. Often the situation is clear, but sometimes the editors have to check, how a person got the information or a picture and if it was in an appropriate way.

3.3. Austria Press Agency

The Austria Press Agency (APA) is one of 20 independent news agencies worldwide. Its owners are 15 newspapers and the Austrian public broadcasting company ORF. The APA dealt with the subject of citizen journalism intensely throughout their project "Focus media" in the year 2009. They considered which kind of content the customers need and which part of it could be produced by citizen journalists. The outcome of the process was called "UGI" = user generated information. Its central idea was that "semi-professionals" from emergency-services, communities, associations or a parish produce hyper local content. The APA then would have arranged the content in its database and provided it to their clients – as well as text, picture and video footage. They only planned to prove the source, not the quality of the information. The APA gave up the plans mainly for three reasons. First, it could harm the company's own subsidiary OTS (= Original text service, where clients can publish their press releases). Second, the search for suitable business partners seemed really hard because many of them wanted payment for the content. And third, there was a lack of demand. Clients saw their own USP, namely local coverage, harmed. Nevertheless the APA journalists monitor all kinds of media including blogs and social networks, so they do not miss anything. "Scoops haven't originated out of this yet", said Michael Lang, editor-in-chief.[18]

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[18] Michael Lang, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 16th November 2010

Lang sees news agencies affected by the current discussion, in which news agencies have to justify themselves for not having discovered a credible model yet. For every media organisation citizen journalism-websites like Demotix seem to be attractive on the first sight, he assumes. "These projects promise cost savings and pretend to be an alternative to news agencies. But people have to bear in mind that journalism is more than breaking news which seems to be interesting for citizen journalists. In truth, news agency's duties are more often required pieces, fact boxes, previews or scheduling. All these issues can be summarised under the term 'guarantee of supply'. The clients know exactly when which topic is delivered and the news agency makes sure that the deadlines are met." This is one thing Lang misses in citizen journalism, along with confidence about the source, data or legal issues.

Lang is aware of the problems for news agencies if their only trading good is content. But modern companies for him are much more than simple content providers. They are "solution providers", who are connected with their clients in a variety of business units like IT, database, marketing, platforms and many more. When the company offers solutions for all of these issues, they are connected to their clients even more strongly, he is convinced. He also strongly believes that user generated content-websites like Demotix will not destroy the news agency's business: "Far from it! With every malfunction in the field of citizen journalism the importance and reliability of approved news agencies is going to rise. Quality therefore is most important for news agencies." He does not see a big change for the journalists' job in a news agency: "As soon as a citizen journalist gets paid, he becomes a freelancer. This concept really isn't new."

3.4. MINDS International

Wolfgang Nedomansky, head of APA Finance is also managing director of MINDS (= Mobile Information and News Data Services) International. MINDS was founded as an association in 2007 by eleven news agencies from Europe and the USA.[19] It acts as a central sales unit for mobile, online and other digital services generated by the MINDS agency partners. The main goal is to trigger and support the joint development of innovative services for business customers, especially media companies. MINDS International is a global network and platform of equal news agencies sharing ideas and exchanging knowledge to put business concepts forward in order to raise revenues and save costs in digital markets.

For Nedomansky, citizen journalists can be either seen as an additional source of information or as alternative provider of news: "Therefore they are an opportunity and a threat at the

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[19]   http://www.minds-international.com , 26th November 2010

same time."[20] The advantages of citizen journalism are the large number of possible participants, the availability nearly in all places as well as their low cost. The main problem is the trustworthiness of their stories. Content needs to be checked and these efforts reduce the cost advantage. "From my perspective citizen journalists can only support, but never replace traditional journalism. Personally I see citizen journalism as a completely different thing compared to what we call 'journalism'. I think citizen journalism could be used best for local media concepts", said Nedomansky. He doesn't see a real threat for news agencies through citizen journalism-websites: "It could be an additional source but no real alternative, as they do not cover all relevant stories." Neither does he think that these portals could destroy the agencies' business models: "I don't think so. These platforms might help the agencies in the agenda setting process. But even this can be doubted."

As far as it is not becoming an alternative source, there has been no effect on the news agencies' business model. "Theoretically newspapers could replace parts of our stories by citizen journalists' stories and then may ask for a price reduction. I do not think that this will happen", says MINDS' managing director. Despite services like Twitter, newspapers will still need news agencies: "Twitter is a completely different format for getting or sending information as quick as possible. But it contains no more than a text message. It could be possibly an additional source, but that's it."

According to his experience, news agencies would like to become a customers' brand: "Several agencies are already addressing consumers. The independent ones are not allowed to go B2C as they would compete with their media owners and might steal some of their revenues."

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[20]   Wolfgang Nedomansky, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 26th November 2010

4. User generated websites

These sites have helped bring untold stories and unheard voices to the attention of the world. In the following chapter I'm going to explain three successful online-projects: Wikinews, OhmyNews and Demotix. I spoke to managers of these websites and citizen journalists about their experiences. Compared to news agencies they may have different intentions and business plans, but the goods they trade are the same: news.

4.1.   Wikinews

Wikinews is operated and supported by the Wikimedia Foundation.[21] It has two main types of articles. According to the website the most common is the synthesis article. These draw on media reports from many other sources which are fully cited. "It is rare for other media stories to contain all the available facts, so we provide a more rounded and detailed report." The other type of articles is called "original reporting". These are "first-hand news reports" written by Wikinews contributors on-the-spot of news events.

All the contributors are volunteers. "Verification is by means of independent peer review. There are numerous policies relating to that and the required standards for newsworthiness", explains Brian McNeil, Wikinews project bureaucracy and community-accredited reporter.[22] He doesn't think that news agencies are worried about Wikinews' activities: "Not yet. The project contributor base is too small. The actual idea of a project like Wikinews may appear more threatening for them." In his opinion, a cooperation, possibly collaboration would be "a better way forward." Wikinews' material is freely reproducible under the terms of the projects CC-BY license. "That's not much use where the articles are 100 percent synthesis. However, a lot of the project's original reporting work might be of interest."

McNeil calls Wikinews at present a "copywriting school": "Many late-teen school kids get involved, being forced to learn to write all over again is valuable for them, and possible future employers. On that basis I'd say agencies should look towards Wikinews as a source of future talent. How they then might contemplate getting involved is up to them. Citizen journalists need to eat too. Perhaps some sponsorship for one of our irregular competitions

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[21]   http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Wikinews:Introduction , 26th November 2010
[22]   Brian McNeil, E-Mail-conversation with author, 19th October 2010

would be worthwhile."

Wikinews has reviewers. These contributors have demonstrated an ability to write, copyedit and gain a good working grasp of policy, McNeil explains. The community votes to grant that right and nobody may review any article they are substantially involved in. "Those were prerequisites for listing in Google News on an equal footing with mainstream papers. Wikinews shares software base and servers with Wikipedia and is unlike any other project from the Wikimedia Foundation. Wikipedia is, in stark contrast, a perpetual work-in-progress. Wikinews must serve as a record of "what is known at the time", said McNeil.

On the website in the FAQ-section the user is told that Wikinews is "about news", "Our articles about current events." Wikinews is written from a neutral point of view and factual: "Articles should deal only with facts and their verifiable consequences. Wikinews is relevant, both global and local: "Any story can be published whereever in the world it is from, as long as it is news." Wikinews is collaborative. The story does not have one reporter as its author, the world is invited to join in and write, edit and rewrite each article to improve its content.

4.2.   Ohmynews

When former journalist Oh Yeon-Ho set up Ohmynews (OMN) in South Korea in 2000 he established a new model for editing and publishing articles, digital photos and video feeds from a massive number of citizen journalists. Oh observes that OMN is often compared with Web 2.0 in the way that it harnesses and generates "participation, openness and collective intelligence".[23] The organisation has more than 50,000 registered citizen reporters, called the "news guerrillas", who contribute more than 70 percent of stories. The significance of OMN and similar sites are often measured in terms of their massive scope and influence. OMN is one of the most popular news providers in South Korea. Oh says that stories have influence if they are worthwhile sharing, draw the attention of a critical mass so that public opinion can be built, help to resolve issues rather than simply raise matters to public attention or criticise problems, and bring about "repercussions not only in the cyber world but also in real life".

From the beginning they assumed that their readers weren't just passive vessels for other people's work. "Every citizen's a reporter", Oh wrote on February 22, 2000, as he announced the new website. "Journalists aren't some exotic species, they're everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing, and share them with others."[24] The influence of

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[23]   Oh Yeon-Ho, *10 preconditions for the value of user generated content*, OhmyNews, 26th February 2007, In: Angela Romano, *International Journalism and Democracy. Civic Engagement Models from around the world*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 20

[24]   Dan Gillmor, *We the Media. Grassroots Journalism. By the people, for the people*, O'Reilly Media, Inc. California USA, 2006, p. 110

OhmyNews was substantial and expanding. "We changed the concept of the reporter", said Ho.[25]

For OMN articles, "Including both facts and opinion are acceptable when they are good," said Jean K. Min, communications director of OMN International 2007.[26] Citizen reporters have to register with their real identity to write for OMN and typical citizen reporters write a story or two per week. Before being published they need to be accepted by OMN copy reporters. As much as 30 percent of daily submissions are rejected for e.g. "poor sentence construction, factual errors, or lack of news value". OMN gains intense online conversation and with controversial stories the number of readers' comments can shoot up to hundreds.

OMN calls their editorial policy the "perfect cooperation and harmony between the professional journalism and citizen reporters". Citizen reporters are advised "to be themselves" and tell stories in their own voice. "Your personal interpretation is welcome but no factual fallacy will be tolerated", said Min. In the agreement the citizen reporters sign, it's said that citizen reporters who work in the field of public relations or marketing will disclose this fact to their readers. In the code of ethics the citizen reporters have to sign statements like "The citizen reporter does not damage the reputation of others by composing articles that infringe on personal privacy" or "The citizen reporter uses legitimate methods to gather information, and clearly informs his sources of the intention to cover a story."

Trained internal editors screen, fact check and edit stories before publishing. Min explains: "OMN strives to listen to the voice of no one but our readers' and citizen reporters'." An ombudsman committee composed of citizen reporters and other outside watchers monitor the main page daily and submit a monthly report. This report is also published on the website. Min: "However, millions of watchful eyes of our readers and citizen reporters might be the most effective defence for OMN in preserving its editorial integrity against external force – even from its own founder." Transparency plays an important role: "Without transparency, citizen journalism would exist only in name." Started in February 2000, OMN-reporters submitted more than 426,500 articles, about 150 stories per day, in its first decade. The site is visited by 2 million unique users per day.[27]

Inkyu Kang has been writing for OMN since 2003. "The main reason I write for OMN is, because I'm interested in talking about issues that matter to me, my family, my friends and my community. I know that many important issues are not covered or simply ignored on purpose by the mainstream media for various reasons", he explained.[28] One of the

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[25] Same. p. 126
[26] http://www.kcnn.org/principles/ohmynews
[27] http://www.international.ohmynews.com/about , 1st November 2010
[28] Inkyu Kang, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 3rd November 2010

advantages of being a citizen journalist for him is that you can write anytime you want so. The professor used to write at least once a week.

OMN has developed a "unique incentive system" what they call "tip jar". "As a citizen writer I get paid for my stories by OMN – which is hardly a fortune – and I also get paid by my readers who find my articles interesting and helpful. Since OMN, as an alternative medium, provides information and perspectives rarely found in different news media, its readers are very generous about rewarding writers for stories they like." Kang says that he once received over US$300 for a single story. "Some of the citizen journalists ended up getting thousands of dollars. How much a writer gets depends on how popular the story is: "From nothing to over US$30,000."

4.3.   *Demotix*

Demotix calls itself the "home of global user-generated news". Its intention is to promote free speech, change the news agenda, give everyone a voice and pay for photos and videos. People can upload their news stories, pictures and videos. According to the company's website, Demotix spreads this to 200 news companies around the world and the fees are split 50:50. The community currently consists of about 17,000 people from 190 countries. "Demotix was founded on the cross-roads of activism and journalism, with two principles in mind; freedom of speech and freedom of information", the user is told on their website. With the participation of everyone news from every corner of the world should be covered. In this context Demotix points to the fact that even AP and Reuters "fail to cover 40 per cent of the world" with a single staffer. The company is convinced that with everyone's dedication the way news is gathered can be changed: "And we can change what's on the front pages of every newspaper or broadcast worldwide."[29]

The information from Demotix is brought to news organisations via FTP feed or daily email-feed. Basic, non-exclusive rights for photos are sold between US$3,000 and US$50. Some photos and videos can go for US$100,000, Demotix says.

Everyone registered on Demotix can write a story, anonymously if desired, since in some countries citizen journalists aren't safe. Demotix sees itself as a "work in progress", so referring to users' wishes more features should be added.

According to its founder the company earns money. "Demotix is a business. We have sold images thousands of times, all over the world", says CEO Turi Munthe.[30] The reliability of the

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[29]   http://www.demotix.com/page/about-us , 25th November 2010
[30]   Turi Munthe, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 12th October 2010

articles is proved: "We have a publisher and picture editor who process every single image that comes our way." Spreading news is no longer a USP for traditional media like newspapers or news agencies. The apprehension of losing power is obvious. "All the news agencies are concerned. Many of them have gone out of business – UPI, McClatchey, etc. – where are they now? And the rest have already been making cuts and changing their programmes." He adds: "The Associated Press, many people believe, is a dying beast."

5. Forecasting Trends

To outline a possible future scenario for news organisations I spoke with the author Dan Gillmor. He has been active in this field for years and founded the Center for Citizen Media. Gillmor is convinced that there are many opportunities also for traditional media in the market place. He suggests news companies to "watch very carefully", become partners or start their own projects.[31] "The most important thing is - that news agencies recognise that people who create media not as a professional are doing some extraordinary important work." The "standard-model" from traditional media, saying "please send us your work – but we won't pay for it" is a "terrible way" in his opinion. First of all they should participate actively in the larger marketplace where people get more than a simple "thank you". People should get paid for valuable work. While Demotix sees a potential market here, traditional media pretends not to do so. "For whatever reason, they don't take this market seriously. I suggest they should, because great value is being created by people producing media in non-traditional ways. These people deserve to be compensated for the work they do", says Gillmor.

"I'm not seeing too much recognition from traditional news agencies. But they should." If they don't recognise the value of social media they will miss something, Gillmor is convinced. He sees many opportunities in the market. News agencies, for example, could work together with citizen journalism-projects or start their own: "I don't have a recipe for them but this is the arena for entrepreneurs and this calls for experimentation." Another option Gillmor thinks about is "real time auctions" for images. As a consequence, citizens will participate in the value-creating-process: "I'm hoping for more value for everyone in the ecosystem. Today value accrues entirely to people who control networks of distribution."

Gillmor admits that information gathered from social media is not always trustworthy: "That's one of the issues." But he points out that also in print or television the truth never is an absolute one. He therefore is an advocate for "critical thinking": "There is not enough of that. I think about media literacy in a broader sense. This would also include participation, not only the consumer function. Participation is a vital component of democracy."

He is convinced that news agencies will regret it, if they don't argue with the topic: "I want to see traditional news business become open to different things." There are many opportunities for them to experiment in this arena: "They can do more to help us move ahead

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[31]   Dan Gillmor, Conversation via Skype with the author, 27th October 2010, Oxford - California

– if they want to. I would love to see them doing it." Gillmor assumes, it would turn out as a mistake if they ignore the phenomenon of citizen journalism.

Also in his latest book, Gillmor questions the ethics of news organisations that assume that the work of citizen journalists is something the company should get for free. He is highly sceptical of business models that say: "You do all the work and we'll take all the money we make by exploiting it." In his opinion this is not only unethical but also unsustainable in the long run. "Not every person who captures a newsworthy image or video necessarily wants to be paid. But many do, and right now, for the most part, their compensation is a pat on the back. Eventually, someone will come up with a robust business model that puts a welcome dent into this modern version of sharecropping." Beyond licensing he also suggests new market systems to reward citizen photographers.[32]

Gillmor is a bit pessimistic about traditional news organisations' willingness or ability to change. Traditional media are experimenting but mostly on the journalistic side. He misses real business innovations. Nevertheless he says: "Journalism's future is bright." He is aware that the kind of media environment we need won't come easily: "The new era will require changes to the legal, social and economic environment.[33]

Until now the media companies rely on advertising, but this doesn't provide enough money. Nic Newman thinks that micropayments like iTunes will be successful, because they are convenient. There is no best practice model, but media has to make a strong commitment on this issue and "make good content".[34] In his paper "The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism" he says that social networks are coming under intense pressure to find new revenue streams: "They have success with their audiences but almost all networks are running at a huge loss."[35] The current business models are unsustainable and the outlook remains unpredictable. According to Newman, analysts believe that social networks will try to use collected data for targeting users better.

"Media-organisations are exploring and figuring out how to use social media. It's a period of innovation. Everyone is considering the opportunities, and business models are being analysed", said Lyon.[36] Social media is open for everyone and free of charge. There are some websites where information is distributed partly for free and partly for payment. Media companies have to think if there is a way to turn it into money. "People are experimenting. The exact business models have yet to be determined", said Lyon.

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[32]   Dan Gillmor, *Mediactive*, 2010, p. 59
[33]   Same, p. 112 and 122
[34]   Nic Newman, seminar at Green Templeton College, 20th October 2010, Oxford
[35]   Nic Newman, *The Rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism,* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford, 2009, p. 49
[36]   Santiago Lyon, Telephone-conversation with the author, 5th November 2010, New York

Citizen journalism can save money, explains John Kelly: "By enlisting the help of unpaid volunteers, news organisations can supplement their offerings with user-generated content. This could allow them to redirect their resources at a time of declining circulation, advertising and profits."[37] But for him the cost savings of citizen journalism can also be "illusory".[38] Reduced costs of acquiring material may be offset by the increased costs of editing the material. Moderating comments and wading through submissions looking for worthwhile material is elaborate, too." Wolfgang Nedomansky also thinks that the effort of selecting and checking citizen journalism stories is rather big, so it does not make sense or it is not affordable for each newspaper: "If citizen journalism becomes a success, news agencies most likely will become gate-keepers of news in this field as well. It is about doing this work centrally for all media in a country. I am not sure if there is a necessity to pay citizen journalists. Most of them just want to be involved, being 'important', and love to see their story in the media."[39]

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[37] John Kelly, *Red Kayaks and Hidden Gold: the rise, challenges and value of citizen journalism,* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2009, p. 26
[38] Same, p. 32
[39] Wolfgang Nedomansky, E-Mail-conversation with the author, 26th November 2010

6. Conclusion

The internet makes it easy to participate in the news making process. It has no borders, no regulations and no limitations – in a positive and a negative way. News agencies have realised that they have to react to the activities of citizen journalists. Some started their own projects to involve readers; some thought about it, but didn't carry out any projects.

I spoke to representatives from three news agencies and also three user generated websites. In my experience the news agencies see citizen journalism as an issue to care and think about but they are not too concerned for their business models. Projects like Demotix or OhmyNews they don't take very seriously. In their opinion citizen journalism can be used like any other source – a source in which reliability must be doubted and checked. The reputation of their brands is crucial and above all other issues it's their aim to maintain reliability. Internet sources must be checked properly, even if this means a delay and sometimes being second.

Although some already fear for their future, the news agencies still trust in their own strengths and power. Trustworthiness is an essential good and news agencies therefore allude to their experience. News agencies assume that user generated websites don't have the potential to compete with them. Consistency, standards, reliability and the guarantee of delivery can only be provided by them, the news agencies think. They are convinced that their brands, established over many years, are strong enough to resist individual activities. News agencies still believe that they are the key source for confirming important information. They do not see a necessity to change their business model at all.

However, they are all convinced that news agencies need to be open to new opportunities so they will not miss new developments. As weblogs and Twitter become more and more popular, news agencies also encourage their journalists to use them as a communications tool, always making them aware that there are company guidelines which have to be observed. Journalists have to differentiate properly between their private opinion and their work.

The citizen journalism websites for their part refer to their potential of every single citizen being a journalist. As they see many topics underrepresented in mainstream media they have established their own projects. Although the participants are requested to submit only true information, editors – paid or voluntary – recheck the facts before publishing. These platforms earn money: People and also news companies are willing to pay for good content,

say the representatives. Some of them still see the projects as a laboratory course; others see nothing less than their being the successors to traditional news organisations.

Competition is often healthy and may force news agencies to improve their service. How the company reacts is up to them and also depends on the country and market they are operating in. As the research also has shown, the importance of citizen journalism differentiates in different countries. It definitely has more impact and power in authoritarian systems than in democracies with independent media. In general I would recommend that news agencies should see citizen journalism projects as potential partners and possibly cooperate with them. At least they are a source not only for breaking stories but also for possibly deeper research and improvement.

Whether it is private blogging or a professional platform, news organisations should recognise the activities of citizens in the web. If they do not, they could miss a huge amount of information - sometimes more important and sometimes less. Facing this information-tsunami, their impact as agenda setters and gatekeepers will become more important than ever before.

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Dan Gillmor, Author

Mark Jones, Global Communities Editor, Reuters

Inkyu Kang, Citizen-journalist, OhmyNews

Michael Lang, Editor-in-chief, Austria Press Agency

Santiago Lyon, Head of Photo-department, Associated Press

Brian McNeil, Project bureaucracy and community-accredited reporter, Wikinews

Julie Mollins, Production Editor, Reuters

Turi Munthe, Chief Executive Officer, Demotix

Wolfgang Nedomansky, Managing Director, MINDS

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