



PRACTICES OF AND CHALLENGES FOR CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN THE
MAINSTREAM MEDIA OF BANGLADESH

Abdul Kabil Khan¹, Syeda Sadia Mehjabin² and Mamunor Rashid^{3*}

¹Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, Daffodil International University, Dhaka -1216, Bangladesh

²Department of Media Studies and Journalism, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

³Mass Communication and Journalism Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh

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Abstract

In the past few years, it is observed that social media was the first to respond to some issues that become the talk of the town. Broad and easy access to mobile devices and social media has created immense opportunities for the public to share and publish their works on open forums. The audience as the prosumer (producers and active consumers) generates 'user-generated content' that undoubtedly influences the mainstream media's content production procedure and manner through distributing them to many news or social platforms. This process leads to citizen journalism as a parallel mode of journalism where collection, collaboration and dissemination of the information go through a single channel. This study is based on both primary and secondary data sources to understand the impacts, challenges, and opportunities of citizen journalism needed beside the journalism. The qualitative data are collected from seven in-depth interviews with senior journalists, editors, academics and news managers. And two semi-structured interviews were conducted with citizen journalism project coordinators. Their analysis regarding this citizen journalism practices in mainstream media creates access to information by opening a new door to more significant resources. However, the concern remains whether incorporating citizen journalism into mainstream journalism poses any threat or not. It is observed that the absence of practicing journalistic rules and regulations in social media makes their credibility questionable and generates confusion. Online news sites use mobile technologies to create and disseminate their media products, gradually attracting the audience and readers. As a result, people are often used to accessing news from online sites rather than print media. With this current demand, mainstream news media is focusing on more interactivity on their online platforms and encouraging their audiences to join in the news production process.

Keywords: Citizen journalism, user-generated content, social media, mainstream journalism, digital

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries in South Asia, with a population of more than 166.50 million (BBS, 2020). Over the last couple of decades, Bangladesh has seen rapid growth in internet access and mobile phone usability. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), at the end of January 2022, Bangladesh's Internet subscribers reached 121.87 million (BTRC, 2022). The total number of mobile phone subscribers has reached 180.78 million, and over 95 percent of them are using their mobile phones to go online as of March 2022, according to BTRC data. With the development of the ICT industry, a massive shift has happened in the journalism sector as well. The Internet opened an entirely new opportunity for them.

According to Data eportal survey, 52.58 million people have access to the internet, which shows the internet penetration in Bangladesh is 31.5%. Interestingly, there were 49.55 million social media users in Bangladesh in 2022, and between 2021 to 2022, the number of social media users in Bangladesh increased by 4.6 million (+10.1%), which means 29.7% of its population uses social media (DataReportal, 2022). Since social media is a big platform in the age of information and technology, it has created an opportunity for borderless communication.

*Corresponding author: <mrashid@mcj.ku.ac.bd>

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For visual content creation and consumption, people from many countries are choosing mobile devices as their tools. Marching with the trend, in Bangladesh, youth are creating visual content on mobile devices and sharing directly on social media more frequently. YouTube, the video-sharing website, has already created a generation of young stars in Bangladesh to influence teenagers. Since the rollout of 4G services in 2018, YouTube and Facebook viewership has skyrocketed in Bangladesh, opening a new window for content makers to produce Bengali content for Facebook and YouTube. According to bdnews24, during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, Bangladeshis are reportedly using internet data at more than 50 percent of their usual average, watching YouTube and Facebook videos in the local language (Bdnews24.com, 2020). The younger generations in Bangladesh are using mobile devices for communication purposes and as an interactive content creation tool as mobile and web-based technologies that enable them to create highly interactive multimedia content.

The use of mobile technology is not limited to creating content but also how audiences receive the news. It has been said that the telegraph transformed the way that newspapers could report the news more than 100 years ago. Now, smartphones are doing the same for TV news organizations (Lita, 2022). With the rapid growth in internet consumption, people from different statuses of life gather their day-to-day information from social media pages. Here the 'online and mobile technologies play an increasingly prominent role in television newsrooms, particularly on the local level' (Chadwick, 2014, p. 2) when it comes to reporting, gathering information and delivering those to the audiences. Citizen journalists bring that information to them instantly, sometimes without even any censorship. To meet that demand, 'mobile devices have reformed the newsroom environments by introducing new means to connect with the audience and to communicate with other journalists within the same place' (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019, p. 42). As a result, both traditional news agencies and broadcast channels find it important to use mobile technology to gather information and disseminate those from the location. From the early 2000s, we have observed the development of information and communication technologies in many South Asian countries, including Bangladesh. These emerging new technologies and platforms have affected where citizens can get their daily news and how mainstream journalists do their job. As noted by Anthony Adornato, 'social media and mobile devices are the latest technologies shaping the field' (Adornato, 2017, p. 3).

Technology can affect news values in both positive and negative ways. Like mainstream journalists, with the help of limited resources and cheap equipment, citizens can broadcast live anytime from anywhere. Nevertheless, it is often said that just because something is of interest to the public and gets lots of clicks does not make it public interest journalism (Ergas et al., 2019, p.1). Similarly, the rise of user-generated content has gone hand-in-hand with poor-quality click bait and fake news (Hill & Bradshaw, 2018, p. 52). Traditional journalism has now slowly moved to digital format. The visibility of 'declining public trust in news, loss of advertising revenue, and an increasingly participatory, self-expressive and digital media culture', leading news organizations are trying to find new ways to reach their audiences (Deuze et al., 2007, p. 322). Many print newspapers today have online versions; television channels are streaming user-generated content on their websites. The content of news media is actively integrated with social networks. Today Bangladeshi news organizations are very much open in terms of using the content that citizen journalists produce; even in some cases, the news outlets offer audiences to share their stories as photos, texts, or videos.

Ordinary citizens can craft and distribute user-generated contents due to the wide access to social media and mobile devices. Bangladeshi ordinary citizens now use their smartphones and social media channels to instantly deliver newsworthy multimedia content from the field, which directly impacts the news production process in the mainstream media in Bangladesh. In the article (Uncertain) Future of Journalism in Bangladesh, Kaberi Gayen talks about the changes in the media ecosystem. Media organizations that used to control content and channels now only produce content; companies like Google and Facebook are the gatekeepers to audiences. Online versions of almost all newspapers use social media accounts to gather, distribute and publish content (Gayen, 2020).

In 2011, we observed mass protests and civil unrest in different Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa, which later turned into national revolutions (Kinfu & Khan, 2013). Also affecting the Asian region there were also a series of demonstrations in Bangladesh where Facebook was used to generate buzz about those events (Khan, 2020). Citizen Journalists captured photos, recorded videos, and instantly shared original stories with millions of people worldwide. Thus, these untrained non-professional journalists play an active role in their community and cover untold stories to satisfy public curiosity. Social media is a tool to share content, feelings, thoughts, ideas, emotions, and etcetera. Through social media, citizens can gather, process and distribute information and communicate to fulfil their livelihood demand.

Most of the discourse related to citizen journalism in Bangladesh usually focuses on the tension between traditional journalism and citizen journalism (Sharma & Rahaman, 2018). Even how it is the reason for the 'spreading of misinformation as it is done by amateurs. From those narratives, it is easily noticeable that 'citizen journalism has considered an independent entity working on their (citizen journalists) own' (Moniruzzaman, 2021, pp. 232-233). There is a study gap while addressing citizen journalism from a mainstream media angle. This article aims to mitigate those gaps and discuss how mainstream media practices citizen journalism and what kind of challenges professional journalists face regarding citizen journalism. To fill up the knowledge gap from the previous research, we have set our research objective to identify the practices of citizen journalism from a mainstream media lens. The following research objectives are carried out to conduct this study;

1. To investigate the practices of citizen journalism in mainstream news media.
2. To understand the present state and challenges facing by both professional journalists and news outlets while practicing citizen journalism.
3. To understand the practices of mobile technologies and social media tools reshaping the mainstream media while using citizen journalism.

To conduct this study there are three research questions to answer;

1. How does mainstream news media practice citizen journalism?
2. What type of challenges do professional journalists and news outlets face while practicing citizen journalism?
3. How does mainstream media use mobile technology and social media tools to practice citizen journalism?

This article sheds light on how these changes influence Bangladeshi mainstream media and what insights experts are adding to this issue. Before continuing, it is vital to talk about how the audience has changed with the advent of social media. We also need to focus on the use of smartphone's content creation and the nature of citizen journalism' content in Bangladesh.

Democratic participatory theoretical framework has been applied in this study to understand citizen journalism's engagement and impact on mainstream media. In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, social theorists, like Denis McQuail, cautiously observed the 'great transformation in traditional and communal ways replaced by the fast-paced secular, urban living and to a great expansion in the scale of social activities' (McQuail, 2010, p. 53). Looking into the practicality, the media professionals and experts in broadcasting media emphasize the necessity of participatory journalism. Democratic participatory theory directly constructs citizen's active participation, where they have access to report or express their knowledge on the occurrences around them. A citizen's active role in mass media through proper communication channels is more prominent in a democratic set-up where the infrastructure works favorably. Therefore, citizen journalism has been described as the 'democratization of multimedia technologies by the people and for the people' (Okorie et al., 2012, p. 158). This concept signifies the underlying fundamental of citizen journalism, 'where mainstream journalism is not challenged rather: a press word equivalent to grassroots democracy' (Okorie et al., 2014, p. 16).

It is important to shed light on mass communication to understand the democratic participatory theory, and how they help construct society, and through which channels? The nature of the relation between media and society depends on the circumstances of time and space. As an audience, people tend to experience mass media based on the societal structure. There are two divergent segments with strong perspectives: Left (progressive or liberal) and Right (conservative). According to Denis, the Leftist theorists are critical of power exercised by the media in the hands of the state or large global cooperation (McQuail, 2010, p.53). Whereas Conservatives argue that liberal bias of the news creates damage to traditional values. Shifting from the political and ideological aspects, social theorists focus on two autonomous attributes that characterized communication and concentrate on media activities. Media-centric theory suggests media as the prime mover in the society appreciating technology's advancement for creating smooth communication. Contrary to the previous one, socio or society-centric theory mainly views the media as a reflection of political and economic forces (McQuail, 2010, p.12). At the crossroads of these ideas, whether media drives society or not, Denis McQuail concludes, it is certainly true that mass communication theory itself is so driven, tending to respond to each major shift of media technology and structure (McQuail, 2010, p.53). In addition, the public's participation- individually or collectively- in mainstream journalism generates those responses.

The idea of democratic participant theory generates from the urge to bring homogeneity in media by removing monopolization (public/private) centralization of the press and top-down approach (Bajracharya, 2018). Mass media's power initially bases on the observation of their greater reach and apparent impact on society. Pairing

it with better access to technological advancement, the citizen starts enjoying the freedom of expression in an interpersonal manner and in communal, without getting guided by any central authority to control it (Vil'anilam, 2016). Online platforms have turned into digital space for them to share their democratic views. Since the communication channel is not centralized, it creates more scope for audiences to become mainstream journalism participants. These shifting roles have eventually brought positive changes despite skepticism about the direct power of mass communication (McQuail, 2010, p. 53). Besides this speculation, user-generated contents are creating a finer impact on society through social media.

The citizen participation in mainstream media poses overwhelming concerns- whether citizen journalism will take over the mainstream professionals. Dan Gillmor pins it down as information is an ocean, and newsmakers can no longer control the tide as easily as they once did. Participatory journalism is almost free from censorship, legal issues, and official code of conducts (Gillmor, 2006). The Democratic Participant Media theory confirms citizen journalists can 'serve as a watchdog to the development process of a nation by contributing their opinions and thoughts on the political, social, and economic fields' (Okorie et al., 2014, p. 16).

Citizen journalism: Impact on mainstream journalism

The factor of credibility is a big issue when differentiating the characteristic features of mainstream and citizen journalism. With the access to new technology, mainstream media's predominant role in collecting news straight from the first source experiences a drastic change in sourcing the information from the field level and somewhat becomes dependent on citizen journalism. Carr et al. (2014) assumes that with the increase in citizen journalism, the need to understand how individual predispositions interrelate with news sources to impact the viewpoints of news credibility becomes more and more crucial. Also, this phenomenon using a web-based experiment and examines the influences one's predispositions toward the media and politics have on mainstream and citizen journalism's perceived credibility (Carr et al., 2014). In Bangladesh's perspective the presence of grassroots news reporting by the people and for the people has enabled bloggers to perform as citizen journalists. Before publishing any news, the regular practice in mainstream media is the gatekeepers edited, polished, and sometimes censored the news before presenting it to the audience (Haq, 2014, p. 190-191). Scholars have discussed various types of citizen journalism activities. According to Kern and Nam there are three different indicators of activities of citizen journalism: purpose, production and profit oriented (Kern & Nam, 2009). The first indicator, purpose, relates the news gathering process where citizen journalists can affect and contribute to the society forming a civic dialogue. The second indicator, production, indicates whether citizen journalism emphasizes the gatekeeping role from professional journalists or lets citizens control the production or both. The third dimension, profit oriented, indicates whether citizen journalism is profit oriented through subscriptions and advertisements or is not-for-profit oriented toward voluntary journalism.

Citizen Journalism: Impact on media

Chinese researcher Xin concurs with Greg and postulates that citizen journalism has an impact on media. He focuses on the political and social consequences of the upsurge of citizen journalism in China (Simons, 2016). He also notes that the mainstream media of China is still under tight control where social conflicts are escalating, and nationalistic sentiments are worsening. Moreover, he suggests that the impact of citizen journalism on mainstream journalism and participation of the public is mostly discoursed of Western democratic societies. Furthermore, they concur that one knows little about citizen journalism, and its political and social impact in nondemocratic societies, in this case the country of China (Xin, 2010).

Xin (2010) also conducted four case studies of citizen journalism practices in China. The results of the study, is that the impact of citizen journalism on Chinese mainstream media and society is of multifaceted domains. That there is evidence that citizen journalism is used by mainstream journalism as news source, and as well as an alternative channel for distributing politically sensitive information (Xin, 2010).

User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content refers to the content (image, video, text, or audio) captured or created and then uploaded online by a user. According to Licitar, they will commonly use their mobile phones to capture a photo of the event, create a video, write a tweet or a caption describing their surrounding and experiences in order to inform and connect with other people (Licitar, 2018, p. 5). All those contents qualify to be mainstream media newsworthy. Similarly, not all that scribbled on digital platforms can be dubbed as citizen journalism.

User-generated content is an essential part of the revolutionary changes in the media we have witnessed since the early 2000s. The growing competition in the news media industry has paved the path for citizen journalists to create their own content. This has led to the fact that citizen journalists fighting for their audience's attention, try to work as professional journalists. On the other hand, the mainstream news media is seeking cooperation with citizen journalists.

Thurman (2008) stated how citizen journalism affects the process of broadcasting news. In his study implemented upon nine major British news websites, he notes and argues that the mainstream online news media are criticized for being slow to publish the news when compared to citizen journalism which utilizes in particular, the social media sites to broadcast and more importantly to promote independent news-related content (Thurman, 2008). Traditionally, the mainstream media is marked with either silence or look another way when carrying sensitive news. Whereas user-generated content, digital news, and seamless live streaming cover news from different viewpoints.

Three characteristics of user-generated content

1. It reflects on the personal opinion of the user, not of an organization.
2. It is considered as creative content. Therefore, the user gets the chance to spice it up by adding something on his own.
3. Usually, user-generated content is circulated online, and therefore, it is open to all users (Khan, 2020).

Road map for User-Generated Content to User-Generated Stories in Mobile-first Journalism

It is undeniable that for citizen journalism, the essential component is user-generated content. Besides user-generated content, there is another method to create content, which is referred to as user-generated stories. There is a significant difference between user-generated content and user-generated stories. This part of the article will manifest the two types of citizen's engagements on mobile journalism platforms and the perceptive difference between them.

Mobile journalism (Mojo) has become a buzz word in the last couple of years. Mobile journalists are known by the abbreviation mojo. Mojo means you can do broadcast journalism with only a mobile phone. Undoubtedly, mobile journalism is an emerging form of storytelling. It is an ongoing conversation between journalist and user. In this respect, mobile journalism is not just a technological phenomenon but has wider social and cultural significance than media platforms such as print and radio. Further, he adds, Mobile journalists are reporters who use a mobile or cell phone to shoot stills or video with the mobile's camera, capture and edit video, compose stories with fold-away keyboards. In a nutshell, we can say that by doing Mojo, can do any type of journalism on the go (Khan, 2020, p. 40).

Ivo Burum and Stephen Quinn mentioned in their book a set of digital storytelling skills and tools dedicated to empowering citizens, journalism students, and professional journalists appropriate for convergent change processes happening in many countries. In Ivo Burum and Stephen Quinn's observation, 'mobile journalism is an innovative form of storytelling with smart mobile devices to create news reporting-related content' (Burum & Quinn, 2016a, p. 16).

Ivo Burum & Stephen Quinn have underlined a rationale for their book 'Mojo: The Mobile Journalism Handbook' that provides a road map for training people to create user-generated stories that enhance grassroots journalism by creating an awareness of what the authors call new buzzwords in digital language. According to Ivo Burum, this is mobile content produced to a broadcast-ready state that is not as easily subsumed by mainstream media's vertical content streams. Following this, Ivo Burum suggests a set of skills and mobile technologies required to better purpose user-generated content into more purposeful user-generated stories produced by citizens to create a more diverse and less marginalized public sphere (Burum & Quinn, 2016b, p. 39).

Analysts like, McChesney believes the 'accessibility of technologies and anywhere ability to communicate suggests we are in the midst of a communication and information revolution where a reporter or citizen shoots, edits, voices, and captions the story from the field' (McChesney, 2007, p. 3). In the last five or six years, quite a few pieces of content provided by citizen journalists finally made their way to mainstream media. For example, on October 22, 2019, Khaleda Akhter Lucky cut down the plants of the rooftop garden of a building called Nakshatrabari in the Dogormora area of Savar. Another lady named Sumaiya Habib captured the video of the incident and posted it on her Facebook timeline at 5:58 pm on the same day (UNB, 2019).

Materials and Methods

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The approach used for the generation of research data was desk study. We chose senior journalists and experts based on their work experiences in the relevant field for further studies. To understand the impacts, challenges, and opportunities of citizen journalism in the mainstream media, the study used in-depth interviews (IDI). The qualitative data was collected from those in-depth interviews with seven senior journalists and media managers from daily Prothom Alo, Ekattor Television, Jamuna Television, Oparajeo Bangla and academic Greg Simons and Suman Rahman. Simultaneously, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with citizen journalism project coordinators from daily Prothom Alo and Bdnews24. Those were selected by using purposive sampling method.

A standardized protocol of open-ended questions was used for both types of interviews. The differentiation was purely based on the participant's relation and experience with the content. For semi-structured, we opted for interviewees who were going to discuss it from their personal point of view, which they had experienced while working with citizen journalists. Here we followed the flexible interview protocol to guide the interviewees in a particular direction. It was important to provide them with supplementing follow-up questions to understand their thoughts, feelings and beliefs regarding citizen journalism. For the in-depth interviews, we had chosen interviewees from a strong organizational background where they could discuss the challenges they had faced while practicing citizen journalism. We had a defined and deliberate agenda while choosing this methodology.

As secondary data, the total number of 7 articles was collected from journals, periodicals, relevant publications, newspaper articles and govt. reports during 2019-2022. Based on the purposive sampling Prothom Alo and Bdnews24.com web platforms were selected for the study to see the strategies of citizen journalism projects on their websites. These two platforms are selected considering that they are actively practicing citizen journalism alongside their mainstream platforms. Whereas other mainstream news portals are not giving this option.

A total of 9 respondents participated in in-depth interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the interviews were conducted remotely using online platforms. The average interview lasted around 30-40 minutes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Several types of research-related materials were reviewed to understand the real impact of citizen journalism in mainstream media and analyzed in multiple cases where the question of citizen journalism's influence was raised. Thus, the study analyzed five cases here that have been an outbreak in Bangladesh from 2013 to 2021. They were reported in different online news media and social media. For authentication, only cases that the authors verified were selected.

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Results

Citizen Journalism practices in mainstream news media

The mainstream media of today has adopted a user-centered strategy, leaving the journalists to meet user needs. Henry Jenkins and other theorists saw user engagement as a crucial component of the new affective economy, in which the ideal media consumer was active, emotionally involved, and socially connected (Jenkins, 2006, p. 20).

With the help of different online platforms, users shuffle between them creating their own text, photo and video content and publishing it in mainstream media. Traditional news media companies such as Prothom Alo and Bdnews24 have a long relationship with citizen journalists because of their user-friendly websites where they can express their thoughts and encourage others to contribute to the conversation. The same pattern is noticeable in news TV channels where they are ready to incorporate citizen journalism as their open source. In this empowered and connected world, the value is placed on the open source where conversation is the kingdom. This is different from the old media models where content or distribution was king (Jarvis, 2005).

Prothom Alo

Prothom Alo is one of the influential daily newspapers in Bangladesh, established in 1998. Their online portal Prothomalo.com is the number one Bangladeshi as well as Bangla website in the world, based on traffic and page view.

Prothom Alo has always been keeping citizen journalism high on the priority ladder. By giving readers reliable news, the gatekeeper ensures their needs are met. With that credibility and seeing the shift in mainstream journalism, they

have introduced an online news portal (prothomalo.com) in the early 2006 and added a platform for citizen journalism. Respondent 1 (R1) said, in May 2019, Nagorik Shangbad (Citizen News) started its journey under the Prothom Alo online portal. In the beginning, Durporobash was published as a supplementary once a week; later, in 2012, it shifted to the online platform. Durporobash is a segment dedicated to expatriates where they have been penning, regularly, the bliss and plight and other aspects of expatriate life. And local readers write about incidents they witness or come across and send them to Nagorik Shangbad segment for publishing.

In Journalists as gatekeepers, PJ Shoemaker defines, 'the role of the mainstream journalist as a gatekeeper includes writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating, and otherwise massaging information to become news' (Pamela et al., 2008, p. 73). However, with the new media expansion this role has narrowed down to a point where the traditional journalism largely depends on the amateur content to tell the story of what had transpired on the ground (Allan, 2017, p. 1). Respondent 1 (R1) proclaims from his experience on user-generated contents; the news outlet promotes content such as education, campus, study, travel, seeing and writing. Because this kind of engagement is merely to keep the content authentic and enable the readers to offer a platform where they can speak for themselves.

The traditional media is gradually feeling the need to incorporate citizen journalism into their news flow. This emerging sector can be a greater source of information to enrich their resources. But there is a certain hesitation which can be noticeable due to professional involvement. In Prothom Alo's citizen, Respondent1 (R1) single-handedly manages journalism desk. He says now they can upload 5 or 6 news on an average because of the lack of human resources, hoping to see the increase in future both in terms of contributors and gatekeepers.

Bdnews24.com

Bdnews24.com started its journey as the first online-based news organization in June 2006, with an active online writer, Toufique Imrose Khalidi as their Editor in Chief. Being the first platform for citizen journalism, Bdnews24.com has over 500 journalists and photographers around Bangladesh and beyond. The news portal offers free-to-access 24/7 news sources. While the mainstream press media operates through multi-interrelated sectors, in Bdnews24.com, a single moderator under the main desk and IT. Effectively handles the online portal the moderator coordinates with the sources, then forward the content to the editorial team. The moderator Respondent 2 (R2) mentions that since citizen journalism is a new concept in Bangladesh, the audience used to mix it up with blogs at the beginning.

Regarding live streaming, video content or photo, mainstream media has to be more cautious. Respondent 2 (R2) says their news organization takes a particular interest when someone is live streaming from the location where the actual incident is happening. It is undeniable to acknowledge the first-person testimony of witnessing an occurrence and recording that with the digital camera or mobile phone was widely prized for making a vital contribution to mainstream media (Allan, 2017, p. 1).

Challenges: Professional Journalists and news outlets encounter

Lack of awareness regarding the concept of citizen journalism

Respondent 3 (R3) says that Bangladeshi media needs to decide whether they want to engage citizen journalists in their platforms, that could be a newsgathering process to production. Because the term citizen journalism appeared to capture something of the countervailing ethos of ordinary person's capacity to bear witness (Zeng et al., 2019, p.4). Thereby these ordinary people as reporters provide with useful information or share the footage of an incident, they cover which creates an ostensibly new genre of reporting (Zeng et al., 2019, p. 4). In a similar vein, Downie & Schudson (2009) propose citizen journalism as an alternative, voluntary, and non-profit journalism conduct from a wide range of spheres and voices in society, which can operate freely and independently from all sorts of restrictions applied by the government and mainstream media (Downie & Schudson, 2009). Respondent 3 (R3) has seen that several breaking news events are first noticed and shared with the mass as video footage by these growing numbers of localized citizen journalists.

In Bangladesh prospects, citizen contents in the mainstream media are still very low. Still, today, while reporting a case, the news agency mostly depends on the professional's information rather than on the local citizens who have witnessed the case. In her final note, Respondent 3 (R3) stresses the fact that the current scenario in Bangladesh about the use of citizen content is very low because most of the citizens are not aware of the concept of citizen journalism. She mentions that the citizens must be made aware first of the concept and process of citizen

journalism, and only then the concept of citizen journalism will flourish, interaction will be increased and be a legit news gathering source in Bangladesh.

Lack of morality and reliability

Collect, collaborate, and then disseminate- these are the three simple forms where journalists work. A closer look at these actions states that only by emphasizing the sources, the role of a journalist comes to seem comparatively minor (McNair, 1998, p. 6). Fact checking the internal credibility is one way to justify the course, but the main challenge appears when the audience questions the authenticity or credibility of the news. Here comes the moral and ethical obligation of the journalist both in terms of exploiting the source or the private space of the news source.

Apprehensively, Respondent 4 (R 4) states that the lack of morality of mainstream journalism in social media reflects the absence of practicing journalistic rules and regulations. As a result, the audience is facing confusion about information where their trust gets shaky. Bangladesh Press Council has a set of policies for journalists working for newspapers or agencies, which they need to abide by. This code of conduct helps the media and journalists act responsibly in their professional activities.

In 2002, the press council act was amended. However, newspapers, news agencies, and journalists are not complying with the code of conduct or morality in many cases. With the 21st century's technological advancement, mainstream media has started harnessing social media as a source for their news. It is noticeable that the mainstream media outlets' competition over uploading news on social media first sometimes put their ethics in a compromising situation. Dr Shafiu Alam Bhuiyan, Professor at Film & Media Studies, Dhaka University, said in an interview to Deutsche Welle (DW) when it comes to ethics in journalism in a general sense, we can safely say that is not obeyed properly, which, along with other factors, attributes to the competition about who can be the first to publish some news by any means (DW, 2021).

For mainstream journalist's irresponsible or partial attitude, people cannot pin their trust in them. Respondent 5 (R5) highlights some key responsibilities of mainstream journalism and suggests important considerations journalists must follow carefully. He identifies professional journalism as the only type of mainstream journalism. His thought echoes with Jürgen Habermas's theory that if we situate journalists as a key facilitator of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991, p. 5), then the question we must ask who speaks through the news (Franklin & Carlson, 2011, p.1). In that respect, if the journalist fails to verify the content beforehand, then the blame goes to him. The reason is apparent that the reporter's task is to assemble rather than the construction of the meaning (Bell, 1991). From audience's perspective, this ordinary structure often escapes our scrutiny, and they straightway associate the journalists with the news (Franklin & Carlson, 2011, p. 1).

While discussing the main challenge, which mainstream journalism is facing today is the spread of fake news via social media platforms. Respondent 5 (R5) says the main responsibility of a journalist is to probe before publishing any news. Respondent 5 (R5) mentions that;

Social media does not dominate the mainstream media, where the respondent identifies the mainstream media as a news medium and social media as a medium solely for communication purposes. There might be multiple chances that an incident could be witnessed by citizen journalist first hand, and they immediately shared that on online, readers then look for credible reporting from a professional news site.

In such cases, Respondent 5 (R5) states that mainstream media journalists only publish news after investigating it thoroughly. Furthermore, in the Bangladeshi context, Respondent 5 (R5) mentions and stresses that citizen journalism- the new form of journalism- is in a fledgling state because anyone can access mass communication via technological advances. With the power to respond, ordinary citizens practice their democratic right overlooking the fact they need proper education, training, and collaboration skills (Franklin & Carlson, 2010). According to Respondent 5 (R5);

For a citizen, it is very difficult to perform one's dutiful task as a journalist, firstly due to the process involved in retrieving the accurate information of an event, or a phenomenon, when one is a sole individual, rather than being a corporation of a news agency.

With an optimistic note, Respondent 5 (R5) concludes that if these citizens join together hand in hand to establish citizen journalism in Bangladesh, it can disseminate accurate information and thus become a reliable source of information besides mainstream journalism. And only that might help citizen journalism to flourish in Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

Rumor is putting citizen journalism at risk

The overwhelming challenges for the mainstream news portals are the possible risk of spreading fake news. With the advancement of technology and people's access to information 24/7, credible news organizations have the potential to distribute false news in the form of breaking news errors (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). While talking to Respondent 6 (R6), he says, today what we understand about fake news by definition is completely different from what it was twenty years ago.

With the help of the internet, fake news spread with such a magnitude that it can be difficult to restrain from reaching a significant number of users since the internet was massively accessible to everyone. The circulation of fake news sometimes exceeds the circulation of proper news on social media and online portals.

An article from a fake news website claiming, Pope Francis shook the world, endorsing Donald Trump for president- it engendered almost a million shares by readers during 2016's USA election (Richard et al., 2018). This kind of very made-up information to polarize voter's opinion during election time is the political component of fake news (Quandt & Singer, 2009).

In Bangladesh's context, citizen journalists are prominently active on social platforms, and their unfiltered contribution certainly increases the risk of creating and spreading fake news. The creator of Hashtag Our Stories, Yusuf Omar, expresses his concern about the spread of false information on social media. For instance, when a fire breaks out somewhere, people take no time to upload pictures or videos and share those, some of which were actually captured from past fire incidents. People even propagate death rumors (Prothom Alo, 2019).

From the deep-rooted superstitions, a sudden rumor starts spreading regarding head required for Padma Bridge. In July 2019, social media was overflowing with the news that the Padma Bridge construction would require severed human heads. It went viral to the extent that the Padma Bridge Construction Project's chief office circulated a notice asking not to pay heed to such rumors and terming the rumor as baseless. When examining the situation, it is clear to note that false news is both a sign of and a problem with a larger issue (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). Taking the lead on the incident and how that vague idea stirs people in general, Respondent 6 (R6) points out fake news is a constructive reality.

It is an easy way to manipulate people's emotions because it tends to mislead and misguide the audience, and it is kind of persuasive influence and communication, which is not honest, it is deceiving.

Nevertheless, the question remains why do people spread such news when there is no real gain from here? This argument can be justified with the concept that these informants are not engaging in actual news coverage instead generating profit through social media circulation of false information mimicking the style of contemporary news (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). After that, many leading news outlets reported the apprehension brewing out of this rumour at Padma Bridge and its vicinity.

The complexity of fake news becomes severe when mainstream news portals fall for that and circulate it without verifying it. That leads to them in a vulnerable state where both audience and professional experts question their moral judgment. The death of Taslima Begum Ranu is a classic example. On July 20, 2019, Taslima Begum Ranu was mistaken as a child smuggler and beaten to death. It took only seven to eight minutes to kill her by beating and thrashing her head against the wall. The mob flared up to the extent that they even kept beating after her lifeless body went beyond all pain. People around the spot captured the video, getting it viral through social media. Later, mainstream media gave it extensive coverage. The video clip of a mob killing Ranu, obtained from citizen journalists, was uploaded on the Facebook page of Daily Prothom Alo. Usually, the phrase fake news refers to entirely fabricated content masquerading as news to turn a profit which is not always true. News outlets do not spread false news for profit, it is not their strategy, says Melissa Zimdars, inaccuracies in terms of the false report immediately corrected or retracted (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020, p. 2).

While discussing the outbreak and impact of fake news on any news platform regardless of which segments of journalists are generating it, Respondent 6 (R6) narrates,

It is not just the problem of citizen journalists; this is much deeper. Because this is going down to the basics of politics and not only politics; fake news does not necessarily solely a political component, an economic component as well.

Reflecting on these above issues, what could be the strategy to stop fake news from generating social and mainstream media? From his expertise on this very topic, Respondent 6 (R6) points out, there will always be a temptation for not only from the citizen journalists but also from the mainstream to use fake news for whatever reason. The lines between news and fake news are getting blurrier (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). There is a massive division increasingly growing in society regarding political, social, and religious ideologies. Respondent 6 (R6)

suggests, it is important to train the audience, few people at a time, anticipating the moves on any particular sections. Even, Yusuf Omar also believes that the solution lies in educating the audience on mass media. People must be educated on how to spot fake news so that they do not spread it around. Because blocking or censoring news is constraining the audience's right to access information.

Trained manpower limits the output

Creating media content suitable for this platform of social media requires training and logistics, both of which are in dire shortage in the country, which is why mainstream media cannot fully harness the benefits of social media. Due to the lack of training and training materials, many people are questioning this genre of journalism. Foreign institutions for higher education may come forward to promoting this new-genre journalism specific to the digital platform.

'Hashtag Our Stories' co-founder Yusuf Omar advised Bangladeshi media outlets to emphasize user-generated content. He claims that Bangladesh has a lot of user-generated material. If media outlets only publish certain pieces from them, a new genre will emerge.

I think many media houses could not reach that level. You don't yet have enough manpower to dedicate a team to video editing for Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram and other digital tasks (Protbom Alo, 2019).

Respondent 7 (R7) mentions that his news outlet often reproduces contents for new media as a TV news channel. These contents are first published on mainstream media, i.e. news media in this case. The respondent further mentions that these contents are reproduced and broadcasted via social media using his news outlets social media team. On that note, Respondent 7 (R7) puts his emphasis on: To produce social media content, one needs to be acquainted with the tools and have adequate knowledge about social media.

Mobile Technologies and Social Media Tools Empower Citizen Journalism

The fundamental nature of journalism is collecting and collaborating information and then disseminating those so that the recipient is benefited. Interactive journalism is the key to the potential outcome and successful engagement. Respondent 8 (R8) puts his emphasis:

The core point of journalism is that we want interactive communication to make it work. The more interactive our communication gets, the more readers we can connect with us.

Despite, the first and prime objective of journalism mainstream media has failed to capture the interactive part. In this respect, traditional print news media faces a conceivable limitation compared to the uprising social media platform. Because it is time-consuming, not easy to access, and a set protocol must be maintained even before the reader or audience can see their response or feedback on print.

Another side of this discourse is that the impact on mainstream journalists becomes more relevant with the increasing levels of user-generated content, internet, mobile and social media in Bangladesh. Respondent 9 (R9) has echoed potential job openings for reporters. According to him, besides additional reporting skills, mobile and social media skills are the fundamental requirements for both new reporters and senior journalists. Today's news comes faster than ever due to citizen journalists who publish newsworthy content instantly from the field.

Over time, it is vivid that user-generated contents have drawn increasing public and scholarly recognition of their importance to journalism (Quandt & Singer, 2009, p. 138). Citizen journalists not only provide the news; most of the time, but their participation in news platforms also adds accuracy. This dramatic change's primary reason is the ability for ordinary citizens to self-publish (Cooper, 2017). On cyberspace, giving extra advantage to mainstream media. For example, Respondent 8 (R8) says:

Suppose I said that 5 people died in an accident. But one audience member commented that I know 7 people died there in the accident, I was present at the spot. We used to get some support from our audiences like this. The published comments used to work as a supplement of the news. The news became more justified for these comments.

In The online journalism handbook, Paul Bradshaw and Lilsa Rohumaa emphasized the media revolution of the last decade where anyone can broadcast 24/7 the world, share and exchange information in the real time (Bradshaw, 2013). There was a time when individuals had limited options regarding expressing their frustrations or raising their voice on a social platform, or even pointing out the social discrepancies. Now, with access to the internet, it becomes readily available for him to talk about all the burning issues without even exposing himself. The access to social media as a content sharing platform has made it easier where citizen journalists can share their thoughts, opinions, sometimes even defy censorship (Bradshaw, 2013). Talking about the same issues, Respondent 8 (R8) refers:

'In fact, some news contents of social media have gone viral on its own for which the government even had to make some changes in policy making as well.'

In the context of Bangladesh, the advancement in technology and access to social media have developed simultaneously. This multiplicity helped to galvanize newspapers online strategies and persuade them to invest more in terms of technology as Bradshaw sees it (Bradshaw, 2013). The constantly growing dependency on social media's content has created a disadvantage to mainstream journalism and their online site. Respondent 8 (R8) has seen over time, and people are getting adoptive towards the selected social media sites than to the newspapers designated online sites. Respondent 8 (R8) refers:

'Maybe in some places, they have overpowered mainstream media already. The main damage or change that has caused social media is, no one goes to Prothom Alo.com now.'

Most of the time, technology is mistaken as a strategy to get closer to the audience; instead, it should be treated as a tool. Because technology does not change societies or social processes just by coming into being but they can affect social processes through both mundane and innovative use (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Recommendation and Limitations

'If journalism is literature in a hurry, online journalism is even more hurried than that' (Haq, 2014, p. 186). There is a significant gap noticeable between citizen journalism and mainstream media. The lack of proper initiative to develop these resources points out the difficulties the press and media houses face. Citizen journalism is flourishing in Bangladesh because whenever ordinary people encounter any problem, they flag it using social media platforms. Interviewees have suggested if we can give proper training to the citizen journalists on how to use mobile technology and social platforms to disseminate their news than they can connect with a greater audience. As technology has always been at the 'forefront of newsgathering and the journalistic process' (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019, p. 43). This step can lead to a more democratic participatory environment where traditional media houses can gather legit news from grassroots sources and interact with them via citizen journalism.

The scope of public speaking keeping the interest of ordinary people's opinion enables them to act as a news source, which also lets them exercise the power to respond (Franklin & Carlson, 2011). However, there is a vivid gap between creating user-generated content to user-generated stories. Citizen journalism focuses on the stories more than the content since the first one generates spontaneously. The trusted online news portals such as Prothomalo.com and bdnews24.com encourage them to create content for publishing houses editorial policies.

This article's significant limitation is that it fails to capture the core of citizen journalists' perspective while discussing citizen journalism. Further research and investigation would justify their thoughts and how and why they contribute to the mainstream media, less not reshaping it. As a prosumer¹, citizen journalists contribute to the mainstream news portals with or without any monetary commitments. Over time, it becomes evident the relationship between the source, and then the receiver has been altered; the receiver has gained the same power as the sender (Haq, 2014, p.179).

Conclusion

The narrative of this paper is to understand the practices of citizen journalism by mainstream news media, what kind of challenges they are facing and how mobile technologies and social media are creating an impact in Bangladesh. Considering the fact that citizen journalism is a new concept, which is massively generating content for both the traditional field and social media yet seeking validation. The challenge is evident due to the lack of structural framework and credibility of the news and the news creators. Journalists being the 'gatekeeper' establishes that every information has to go through a set of protocols, such as gathering, fact checking, editing, and disseminating for the audience (Pamela et al., 2008). Marching with that experts consider citizen journalists as the 'watchdog' who do not receive their full acceptance in the mainstream as their fellow parts (Okorie et al., 2014). For primary data collection, we have conducted extensive semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The respondents have shared their opinions and views regarding citizen journalism, citizen journalists' morals, limitations, shortcomings, advantages, and prospects. These narratives emphasize the growing impact of citizen journalism in mainstream media (Franklin & Carlson, 2011). While participating actively in social media to bring justice or reformation, citizen journalism stresses that, this model of the new news source is have the power to speak publicly.

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Author contributions

Dr. Abdul Kabil Khan: Resources, primary data collection, conceptual frame working and writing;

Syeda Sadia Mehjabin: Field research, data acquisition, data interpretation, and writing original draft;

Mamunor Rashid: Data analysis, reviewing, editing, corresponding to editor and reviewers.

Conflicts of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest for the publication of this work, according to the authors.

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ⁱ Alvin Toffler (1980), in his book *The Third Wave*, argues that consumers are a phenomenon of the Industrial Age. As society moves toward the Post-Industrial Age, so will the number of pure consumers decline? They will be replaced by 'prosumers,' people who produce many of their own goods and services. (Philip Kotler 1986, p. 510)