Responsibility in Citizen Journalism: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract

In today's digital age, mobile technologies are constantly reshaping the ways in which information is disseminated and consumed. Citizen journalism has become ubiquitous thanks to social networks, blogs, and content-sharing platforms. This opens up the opportunity for anyone to become a journalist, regardless of professional experience or education. While professional journalists often undergo processes of editing and information filtering, citizen journalists can share their opinions and experiences directly in real time. This can lead to faster news dissemination and quicker responses to current events. However, it is important to be aware of the challenges that come with citizen journalism. Since anyone can become a source of information, there is a risk of spreading unverified information. Therefore, it is crucial for citizen journalists to be responsible and strive to verify the accuracy of their reports before sharing them with others. By sharing their experiences and perspectives, citizen journalists can inspire others to engage within their communities and advocate for the changes they wish to see. This fosters democratic dialogue and creates a space for diverse ideas and solutions. Through an analysis of available literature, we will highlight the challenges in the relationship between citizen journalism and professional journalism.

Keywords: citizen journalism, responsibility, ethics, misinformation, public voice

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Citizen Journalism - Concept and Definition

Citizen journalism represents a powerful tool that enables ordinary people to express their opinions, share information, and influence society through media. Radojković points out that "information has become a key factor of the modern world. It has become the most important production resource, a commodity that is increasingly traded, and the main source of power on a national and global scale" (Radojković, 2015). Instead of relying solely on professional journalists, citizen journalism gives everyone the opportunity to become part of the process of informing and shaping public opinion. The Internet has surpassed national borders and abolished

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the concept of geographical distance, paving the way for global interaction. What is crucial is that the Internet and Internet-based platforms provide the possibility for every individual's voice to be heard. As Bogdanović states, "information has never before been as easily accessible and widespread as it is now. The development of technology and information-communication systems has changed the way we communicate, learn, work, spend our leisure time, and meet new people" (Bogdanović, 2013: 70). Furthermore, digital media has made information available to everyone, significantly reducing the control over information flows once held by large media corporations and traditional journalists. In this way, individuals are no longer merely passive consumers of information; they now have the opportunity to be active participants in content creation. This change has created space for the development of citizen journalism, which involves the media participation of those who do not have formal professional training but possess basic knowledge of using digital platforms. This feature is at the core of citizen journalism, as it allows anyone with access to appropriate technology and basic digital literacy to participate in public debate and content creation. As Kostanjevac states, "Cambridge Dictionary defines citizen journalism as journalism 'carried out by people who are not professional journalists but who disseminate information using websites, blogs, and social media'" (Kostanjevac, 2023: 4).

Krstić observes that today there are almost no media outlets in the world that, alongside their classic form, do not also have an online presence with multimedia content. "Also, today there are almost no media houses that do not allow citizens to participate in the exchange of opinions and attitudes on current events, or even in the creation of news itself" (Krstić, 2011: 110). In this way, the media not only inform but also create space for citizen participation in news creation and shaping. On the other hand, Sikirica adds that "digital development has led to significant changes in the media environment of the 21st century. Besides the way of communication, the way users consume media has also changed. Users increasingly want to have an active role in creating media content, leading to the emergence of new forms such as citizen journalism" (Sikirica, 2023: 2). Global connectivity has transformed the media landscape, as now anyone, without formal training, can not only follow but also create and distribute news worldwide, contributing to greater diversity of information and pluralism of opinions in the public sphere. Krstić notes the same, stating that today's technology enables every individual to independently create and distribute news globally through the Internet, something that was once a privilege of professional journalists and media organizations (Krstić, 2011: 110). Here, Krstić points out the significant transformation of the public sphere, where it is no longer necessary to be part of a media organization to participate in the creation of public discourse. Ravnjak also notes that "citizen journalism can also be defined as a type of first-person reporting in which individuals adopt or imitate the role of a professional journalist in order to participate in news creation" (Ravnjak, 2019: 2). This means that, instead of the formal, objective distance characteristic of traditional journalism, citizen journalism is characterized by individuals writing and reporting from their own perspective. This type of reporting can include personal views, as well as the

emotions of the individual engaged in citizen journalism. Although different from traditional journalism, this approach contributes to audience engagement, as it provides a more immediate view of the topic, closer to the everyday experiences of other people.

As Krstić further emphasizes, citizen journalism emerged as a response to the crisis of public communication. The contemporary practice of political communication adopted by the media diminishes citizens' knowledge of public affairs, discourages their political engagement, breeds mistrust in the government and political institutions, and adversely affects the conduct of political life (Krstić, 2011: 108). This means that traditional media increasingly succumb to political and commercial interests, leaving citizens often misinformed about important public issues. Citizen journalism, on the other hand, allows citizens to take an active role in informing. Jevtić provided another definition of this type of journalism, describing it as the simplest and most popular - "citizen journalism is a situation in which people, officially known as the audience, take up journalistic tools to inform each other" (Jevtić, 2016: 33). Citizen journalism, with its participatory nature, attempts to address the contemporary problems of the media by enabling citizens to be more actively involved in public discussions, either as recipients or creators of information.

Applying a communication perspective, Bogdanović states that citizen journalism is "a form of interactive mass communication in which the roles of communicator and recipient are alternately intertwined. In the online world, the media and journalists no longer have the exclusive right to access the public sphere, and their role as 'gatekeepers' is increasingly threatened by the networked, direct, and public communication enabled by access to the world wide web" (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). In the context of citizen journalism, this statement means that networked and immediate communication allows everyone to contribute to public discussions, bypassing traditional media filters and providing more authentic and diverse voices in the public sphere. Sikirica also notes the same, stating that information no longer reaches the audience in a one-sided manner; instead, communication occurs between the media and the audience (Sikirica, 2023: 7).

Another definition of citizen journalism can be taken from Bogdanović's description that it is "a concept of the modern era that involves the active participation of citizens in gathering, creating, analyzing, and disseminating information" (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). In addition to this definition, Sikirica provided an apt definition, stating that "citizen journalism, simply put, refers to a media concept that involves journalistic activities of average citizens" (Sikirica, 2023: 6). As Ravnjak explains, "the idea of citizen journalism is that people who are not trained to be professional journalists, independently or in collaboration with others, use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, amplify, or verify mainstream media" (Ravnjak, 2019: 3). Additionally, Krstić states that citizen journalism has created the possibility for "any citizen to take a photograph or video recording of certain events, people, and situations that deserve to be news" (Krstić, 2011: 109). Bogdanović observes that Internet users no longer need professional intermediaries to create, publish, and share messages. He views this as a facilitating

circumstance and adds that the widespread availability of computers, digital cameras, mobile phones with cameras, and Internet access has made it possible for anyone to be in the right place at the right time (Bogdanović, 2013: 70). In journalism, being in the right place at the right time means having the opportunity to capture an event in its essence, without later interpretations. When a citizen journalist is present at a key moment, they can provide a perspective that directly conveys the reality unfolding before them.

For clarification, Sikirica further lists some synonyms and similar expressions that refer to the same phenomenon—citizen journalism. "There are various other terms used for citizen journalism, such as 'public journalism,' 'independent journalism,' 'network journalism,' 'open-source journalism,' 'collaborative journalism,' 'mass journalism,' 'community journalism,' 'network media,' and so on" (Sikirica, 2023: 8). These terms illustrate how adaptable citizen journalism is and how it allows for different forms of citizen participation depending on context and technological capabilities. The common denominator for all these terms is the democratization of information sharing, where any individual can take on the role of a reporter or narrator. Sikirica also enumerates various manifestations of citizen journalism on the Internet. He mentions some examples of citizen journalism that we can find in the media—blogs, citizen media, citizen stories, collective interviews, comments, forums, and polls. Citizen media are photographs, videos, and audio recordings created by non-professional individuals and published in the media. "Citizen stories are written submissions by readers on current topics, including suggestions for news, which are then selected and edited by journalists for publication. Collective interviews are those interviews where questions are asked by readers, typically moderated by a professional journalist. Comments are various reviews of articles or other online items. Forums are Internet platforms where debates on various topics are initiated by citizens, while polls are current questions posed by journalists to which users are asked to provide multiple-choice or binary answers" (Sikirica, 2023: 8). These different forms of citizen journalism clearly demonstrate how significant and diverse the role of individuals in the digital space has become. All these forms of citizen journalism enrich the media space in their own way, providing the opportunity for information to be spread directly by the participants or witnesses of events themselves. It is precisely this opportunity for choice that citizen journalism offers that makes it an increasingly important segment of the contemporary media landscape.

Citizen Journalists - Definition, Classification, and Rights

Based on the above, it can be concluded that citizen journalists are ordinary people who use available technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, to create and share journalistic content. They do not work for traditional media outlets but operate independently or as part of independent journalism projects. "Citizen journalists can be defined as individuals who are not professionally trained, yet still report on events in their surroundings and local community. Citizen journalists

or amateur reporters are nothing more than the audience, that is, viewers, readers, and listeners of mainstream media" (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Ravnjak provides a closer definition of individuals involved in citizen journalism, stating that "citizen journalists publish content related to various topics, often covering issues that are not reported by mainstream media. Citizen journalists generally have no hidden agendas; they simply wish to report on what they have witnessed" (Ravnjak, 2019: 5). This definition highlights the key motivation of citizen journalists, which differs from the professional media agendas. Citizen journalists often act out of a personal need to share information they deem important for their community, especially when traditional media neglect these topics for some reason. According to this interpretation, their role is particularly significant during times of crisis or when quick on-the-ground information is needed.

Husejnefendić offers an interesting and unusual definition of the term citizen journalist. "Once an audience, now a medium - this is a brief explanation of the phenomenon of citizen journalism" (Husejnefendić, 2016: 309). This brief but precise definition by Husejnefendić illustrates the fundamental change in the role of individuals in the media world. Once a passive audience, which could only consume content created by professional media, has now transformed into an active participant and creator of information. Citizen journalism blurs the boundaries between the audience and the media—the audience is no longer merely a consumer but also a content producer, creating and sharing information through digital platforms.

Vukojević and Vučetić have defined three groups of creators in citizen journalism.

1. **Accidental Journalists (Witnesses)** – According to these authors, the first group includes "individuals who collaborate with professional journalists by forwarding their raw content, such as photographs or videos from the scene, to newsrooms that then use them for their own media stories" (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14). The authors refer to these individuals as so-called accidental journalists or witnesses. Moreover, the content they create is also called "accidental journalistic work." As the name suggests, "accidental journalists" find themselves on the scene unintentionally, usually as witnesses to an event. This group consists of individuals who unintentionally find themselves at the scene of an event, often in the role of witnesses (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14).

2. **Independent Citizen Journalists** – The second type of citizen involved in journalism is those who individually and freely publish content on their own network platforms. This type of journalism is what most of the public think of when they hear the term citizen journalism. Since the previous type were "accidental journalists," the authors call this type of journalist "independent citizen journalists." The topics they cover are not typically found in the everyday repertoire of traditional media (Vukojević, Vučetić, 2022: 14).

3. **Citizen Journalism Analysts** – The third group of citizen journalists

consists of those who use traditional media as resources for creating their own content. They are defined as individuals who spend their time following news, debates, and rumors from a wide range of sources. These citizens are valuable, according to the authors, because they confirm the importance of certain news through their commentary and analyses. Their contribution lies in analyzing and commenting on topics already covered by professional media. These citizen journalists thus confirm the significance of certain topics and contribute additional context and understanding through their analyses. They monitor media content, reprocess it, and present it differently, often adding their own stance or perspective on events.

The Democratic Nature of Citizen Journalism

The features of citizen journalism, such as promoting diversity of perspectives, encouraging active citizen participation, transparency, and accountability, are certainly democratic in principle. Citizen journalism allows the voices of ordinary people to be heard, free from editorial policies or corporate interests. This diversity of opinions ensures that perspectives that might not be featured in traditional media are heard, thereby enriching public debate and the democratic process. Instead of being passive consumers of information, people become active contributors in the process of informing.

Social networks, blogs, and online platforms allow anyone to express and share their opinions, experiences, and information with the public. This democratization of the media sphere empowers citizens to engage in public affairs, which is crucial for maintaining a vibrant democratic society. In this way, an open space for debate is created, which further contributes to the democratic process by allowing citizens to hear different arguments and perspectives, fostering informed decision-making. As Licitar states, "citizen journalism contributes to the democratization of society. This is especially important when it comes to censorship. Citizen and other independent media not only inform people but critically question various issues and make government actions more transparent" (Licitar, 2018: 6). Licitar emphasizes here that citizen journalists can provide alternative information that is crucial to the public. Through their activities, citizen journalists become the voice of the community. They address topics that traditional media ignore due to commercial interests.

Ravnjak states that "citizen journalists become advocates for democracy in countries where the political system prohibits the publication of relevant information or censors it, and sometimes even the only accurate source of news. Not only do citizen journalists publish news to inform the public, but they also critically examine social issues and activities carried out by the state" (Ravnjak, 2019: 5). Ravnjak's analysis highlights the importance of citizen journalists as key actors in the fight for freedom of information in countries and societies where the media is under political control. In situations where official sources are limited or completely silenced, citizen journalists often become the only reliable channel for conveying truthful

information. Their role goes beyond merely reporting the news, as citizen journalists become not only informers but also defenders of democratic values.

Davidović says that "citizen journalism is an important defensive strategy against media manipulation, whose underdevelopment points to a passive, disinterested, and anxious public. Citizen journalism is a process of involving 'ordinary citizens' in creating and transmitting information to the media. Through the continuous engagement of the audience, media content becomes more diverse, balanced, and sensitive to marginalized members of society" (Davidović, 2020: 16). Davidović is essentially saying here that the media becomes less susceptible to political and commercial interests when citizens are active participants in creating media content.

Licitar also emphasizes that citizen journalism will be present in our society if certain conditions are met — "if the middle class is well developed, if they have available technological capacities, if the audience is dissatisfied with traditional media, and if they have the desire to be heard and listened to" (Licitar, 2018: 7). His premise clearly illustrates the framework within which citizen journalism can truly exist in its best form. A developed middle class is key because it usually possesses the resources and educational level that enable active participation in content creation. Additionally, available technological capacities, such as fast Internet and affordable devices, provide the foundation for creating and distributing information. Dissatisfaction with traditional media also plays a significant role as it motivates citizens to take the initiative in informing the public themselves. Through these conditions, citizen journalism can develop as a tool for community empowerment, allowing them to be informed in a way that is relevant and authentic to their experiences. On the other hand, freedom from censorship or regulatory restrictions gives citizen journalists the opportunity to report on topics they consider important, which may not be of interest to or acceptable for traditional media. Due to the absence of oversight, citizen journalism becomes a space for free exchange. Radojković specifically mentions that "the absence of oversight is beneficial for achieving greater freedom of expression, and this positively affects the recipients of information" (Radojković, 2015: 306).

Different forms of content, such as news, comments, and blogs, spread rapidly across the Internet, enabling different social groups to contribute to public discourse and present their perspectives. This process empowers individuals to become active creators of information rather than merely passive consumers. Krstić, considering this phenomenon, states that "citizen journalism is a form of development for modern society in which information is power; it is just a matter of how that power is distributed, not in whose hands it is—whether held by journalists or citizens, information in the form of news, comments, blogs, emails, newsletters, or forums spreads across the Internet at an unstoppable speed, illuminating all aspects of the society we live in" (Krstić, 2011: 109). In the era of digitalization, the boundaries between those who hold the power of information and those who receive information have become blurred. Power is no longer exclusively in the hands of professional journalists or media organizations. Thanks to digital media and the flourishing

development of technology, citizens are becoming key actors in creating and spreading information.

Radojković states that "the easy availability of information to anyone who is a networked world citizen has created in people a sense of communication freedom and participation in global events" (Radojković, 2015: 306). Networked citizens can comment on news, share information with their followers, and participate in debates happening on a global level. This contributes to a sense of participation and allows people to feel as though they have a voice in the global arena. Stamenković and Milenković interpret that "participation in public debate, with the development of new technologies, is available to everyone who is computer literate" (Stamenković, Milenković, 2014: 634). The interaction between citizen and professional journalism, as well as their synergy, contributes to creating a more comprehensive media landscape, providing a more complete picture of the event being reported. This collaboration has the potential to create a more diverse media space, offering higher quality information that results from both direct experience and professional investigation.

Sikirica says that an important aspect of citizen journalism is that it can complement professional reporting and indicate which topics need further investigation (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Citizen journalists bring topics from local communities or events of which they are direct witnesses, which professional media may be unable to cover due to limited resources or editorial priorities. Licitar similarly sees this potential collaboration between traditional and citizen journalism, noting that "citizens become contributors to the media, using different forms of information distribution. A term often used when explaining citizen journalism is 'citizen media.' Citizen media contribute to the diversity of media sources" (Licitar, 2018: 7).

Bogdanović adds how important a dialogical communication system is in the context of media pluralism. He states that citizen journalism thrives precisely because of the dialogue and discussion enabled by two-way communication, and the content created by users is popular due to its immediacy, personal tone, and individual experience (Bogdanović, 2013: 71). Ravnjak introduces the category of honesty into the discussion, stating that "citizen journalism today is increasingly perceived as a form of honest reporting conducted by citizens from anywhere" (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). By introducing this new category, Ravnjak further emphasizes the perception of citizen journalism as an authentic and sincere form of reporting. This type of reporting is raw and offers direct depictions of events without the mediation of editorial policies.

Bogdanović further says that the emergence of citizen journalism "corresponds with the strengthening of democratic aspirations and ambitions in traditional societies, accompanied by civic activism, the reaffirmation of the concept of participatory democracy, the expansion of economic freedoms into the social, political, and cultural spheres, and a new communication situation enabled by the emergence and development of the Internet, primarily Web 2.0 and the widespread availability of modern digital communication devices" (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). This phenomenon is significant in societies that are transitioning towards greater democratization, as

citizen journalism allows for critical thinking and gives a voice to those who were previously marginalized or silenced in any way.

Licitar also points out that "citizen involvement in the news process breaks down media hegemony. This means that citizen journalism contributes to media pluralism. Moreover, citizens do not have hidden agendas; they are merely reporting on what they see and experience" (Licitar, 2018: 9). This implies that traditional media, such as television, radio, and print media, have, until recently, held full dominance in the process of creating and distributing news. On the other hand, citizen involvement in news creation challenges the established media hegemony, allowing information to come from diverse sources. When citizens take on the role of journalists, they create alternative narratives, making media hegemony, which entails control over information, increasingly difficult to maintain. This opens up space for a critical examination of everything presented in the media. Licitar also notes that this type of journalism is "a response to mainstream traditional media, which often neglect public interests and have biased portrayals of events and news. The two main elements that can be seen in these definitions are: the public begins to create content, and this content is a response to the shortcomings of professional journalism" (Licitar, 2018: 9).

Sikirica further emphasizes that "citizen journalism has enabled people to raise their voices about issues they believe deserve more attention" (Sikirica, 2023: 7). Krstić, on the same topic, states that "the goal of citizens' participatory role is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, and relevant information, which is the foundation of every democratic society. Citizens participating in this process want to investigate an event or provide information from the scene of an event, the kind of information that major media might overlook" (Krstić, 2011: 110). Thus, citizen journalism serves as a corrective to traditional media, providing alternative sources of information and enabling communities to be informed about issues relevant to them.

Davidović says that developed citizen journalism is largely attributed to a deliberative political culture and a tendency toward democratic progress (Davidović, 2020: 16). Deliberative processes involving discussions and dialogues allow citizens to feel like important actors in political life. The same author notes that media content is increasingly enriched with diversity, balance, and sensitivity toward marginalized sections of society, all thanks to the constant contributions of the audience—that is, the citizens. Citizen journalism can also be defined as the mobilization of ordinary people, or amateur citizens, who play an active role in their community and the media they consume (Davidović, 2020: 16). Krstić recognizes the connection between citizens' political participation and the role played by citizen journalists.

He emphasizes that citizen journalists are not merely neutral observers but are often personally engaged in the issues they report on. "Citizen journalists are often active in certain movements, local initiatives, or non-governmental organizations, and even political parties" (Krstić, 2011: 108). Such an approach allows citizen journalists to provide insight into events from the perspective of a participant, rather than just as an external observer.

Licitar concludes his considerations by stating that "citizen journalism has its positive characteristics and roles in society, such as informing or educating the public, contributing to a more vibrant democracy, and making every action and event more transparent" (Licitar, 2018: 11). In this way, knowledge is spread among wider layers of the population, and critical thinking is strengthened. These characteristics together make citizen journalism an important factor in building an open and participatory society, ready to face the challenges of today.

Professional Media and Citizen Journalism

The growth of alternative news sources has, on one hand, created a more diverse media landscape, while on the other, it has posed numerous challenges in reporting that have the potential to become problematic. First and foremost, alternative media are not subject to the same standards of journalistic ethics and fact-checking as traditional media. This can lead to the spread of misinformation and fake news. Blogs, podcasts, and social media often rely on subjective opinions and perspectives, which can jeopardize the objectivity and reliability of the information reaching a wider audience.

Another issue with alternative sources of information is their fragmentation. Today, citizens often choose to follow those sources that align with their personal views, creating an "echo chamber" effect. In such an environment, people are more likely to receive only those pieces of information that confirm their existing worldview. Sikirica recognizes some of these challenges and says, "traditional media are no longer the only way of informing, and they face significant competition from alternative news sources such as blogs, podcasts, audiovisual clips, and social media. Many researchers precisely identify shortcomings in this type of journalism" (Sikirica, 2023: 2). Jevtić, in the same tone, points out the key elements that separate these two concepts, professional journalism and citizen journalism, or these two modes of informing, or more precisely, these two types of participation in information dissemination—responsibility and reliability (Jevtić, 2016: 33). Citizen journalism has sparked many debates and stirred the perception of traditional, i.e., professional journalism. Despite a growing number of supporters of this trend, there is also an increasing number of those who oppose it.

Roberts lists the aspects by which citizen journalism differs from professional journalism. The first is that citizen journalists do not work from a newsroom but report from anywhere, often from the comfort of their own home. Another difference mentioned is the use of amateur multimedia devices and the dissemination of unverified information. Ethical practice is also an issue; citizen journalists do not adhere to it, and there is no regulation, no so-called filters, and gatekeepers (Roberts, 2019: 412). As Krstić notes, the most frequent critics of citizen journalism are precisely professional journalists, that is, "individuals who have a university degree in journalism or have received professional training elsewhere for this job, so based on their knowledge and skills, they have a detailed understanding of the profession and can properly fulfill their journalistic duties" (Krstić, 2011: 111). Matović

observes that "the professionalism of journalists is qualified by journalism standards and ethics, established during the dominance of traditional media" (Matović, 2012: 141).

Radojković sees a problem in the lack of knowledge of the journalistic code by citizen journalists. He says that "the problem lies in the fact that they do not know the agreed rules and therefore do not consider their application, which is necessary for respecting the dignity of others. On the other hand, professional journalists are obliged to adhere to the code of professional ethics" (Radojković, 2015: 309). Here, Radojković points out a fundamental problem in citizen journalism—while professional journalists are responsible for adhering to ethical standards that encompass categorical values like accuracy and impartiality, citizen journalists are often unfamiliar with these rules or do not consider them binding. This can lead to situations where individuals' rights are not respected and unverified or sensationalist information is spread.

Davidović expresses the same concern, stating that "it is questionable whether the information gathered by citizens is valid if it is not based on the foundations of professional journalism, learned in journalism education. The information published by the media undergoes a series of filters shaped by professional principles, whereas in citizen journalism the reverse logic applies—'publish first, then filter'" (Davidović, 2020: 22). Bogdanović notes the importance of the role of editors and the verification of each piece of information, stating that "this gives credibility, but significantly reduces the effectiveness of official media when it comes to sudden and crisis situations where the speed of reporting is imperative" (Bogdanović, 2013: 71).

Sikirica states that "some consider citizen journalists to be 'an unpaid version of professional journalists' who still respect the rules of the profession, while others argue that citizen journalists are those who do not have the time to fully deliver a story or lack the technical skills to create a coherent narrative" (Sikirica, 2023: 8). This view recognizes the value of citizen journalism as a supplement to professional journalism, especially in situations where professional journalists are unable to cover certain events. The challenge remains how to ensure that citizen journalists have access to the necessary tools and knowledge to make their stories as high-quality as possible, thereby reducing the gap between professional and citizen reporting.

However, as Bogdanović emphasizes, "professional journalists criticize citizen journalism because they believe it lacks quality, that amateurs are unable to separate important facts from trivial ones, and that such journalism is too personal" (Bogdanović, 2013: 72). Despite these criticisms, citizen journalism offers a valuable perspective that is often beyond the reach of traditional media. Sikirica says that "it is risky to fully rely on their information, given that they generally do not adhere to the rules of multiple fact-checking. Therefore, such information should always be verified additionally" (Sikirica, 2023: 8).

Krstić states that "unlike traditional media, where the filtering process is hierarchical and information undergoes assessment before being published, on the Internet every piece of information is made available to everyone, with filtering occurring through the self-regulatory mechanisms of the Internet itself" (Krstić,

2011: 109). The hierarchical process mentioned by the author ensures accuracy but often limits the types of information that will be available, depending on editorial policy, media ownership interests, or political pressure. On the other hand, on the Internet, every piece of information is immediately available to the wider public, with filtering occurring in a different way—through self-regulatory mechanisms such as user comments, content ratings, sharing, and the like.

Radojković further discusses the importance of information sources in the verification process, stating that "in professional journalism, rumors rarely pass because it is impossible to determine the source of this type of information, and without a source, they cannot be credible. Facts and data published by the media and professional journalists must be verified, not products of imagination or assumptions" (Radojković, 2015: 309). This means that professional journalists understand their duty is to provide accurate, impartial, and informative content, which involves avoiding sensationalism and the spread of misinformation.

Citizen journalists, who often publish information in real time without prior source verification, can frequently lead to the dissemination of unverified or incorrect information. In a similar tone, Sikirica says that "the biggest difference is that citizen journalists do not answer to anyone, are not bound by any contract, and do not have an owner. This fact can be considered an advantage as they do not have to fear being fired, having their salary reduced, or facing any other consequences" (Sikirica, 2023: 12). This independence further allows citizen journalists to freely express their views and cover topics that might not be addressed in traditional media.

Radojković states that "the lack of control is simultaneously a normative gap that can be exploited in a harmful way. Often anonymous, a communicator in citizen journalism can always abuse their autonomy. At their own discretion, they can send misinformation into the public space, spread rumors and gossip, present their imagination and fantasies as facts, fabricate data that suits their needs, etc." (Radojković, 2015: 310). Since they are not subject to the same professional standards and information verification as professional journalists, citizen journalists have greater freedom to present their fantasies and subjective views as facts. This kind of unverified or incorrect information can have serious consequences for society and individuals, including spreading panic, damaging the reputation of individuals or institutions, and undermining democratic processes.

Jevtić emphasizes that "supporters of citizen journalism, apart from taking the good intentions of ordinary citizens as an axiom, often argue against the notion that a professional journalist is separable from their own biases, as well as the idea that the politics of their reporting are shaped by political and economic groups that have influence over the media organization they work for, i.e., that professional journalism is conducted under the watchful eyes of those in power, media magnates, and their political allies" (Jevtić, 2016: 33). In this context, citizen journalism is seen as a counterbalance to professional journalism, which operates under such constraints. According to supporters of this approach, citizen journalists are able to report without pressure and censorship. Unlike conventional media institutions that operate as hierarchically organized structures based on profitability, citizen

journalism encourages the formation of connected communities that prioritize dialogue, cooperation, and equality among participants.

Krstić points out that it is necessary to be careful and insist on the distinction between citizen and professional journalism, despite all the advantages that citizen journalism brings. "Regardless of the current position of the media, whom they serve, in whose interest they work, and how they report, citizen journalism should not be equated with, surpass, or supplant professional journalism. Professional journalists are first and foremost trained for the job and are guided by certain ethical norms and professional standards, whether they work in electronic media—radio or television—or online media" (Krstić, 2011: 109).

Radojković particularly emphasizes that professional journalists adhere to certain ethical norms and professional standards, which is extremely important to avoid manipulation. Ethical norms include respecting principles such as truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in reporting. "Communicators in citizen journalism are ethical to the extent that they are as individuals, as bearers of social roles in everyday life" (Radojković, 2015: 310). The same author, in favor of citizen journalism, points out that values such as transparency, quality, ethics, and responsibility are sometimes merely nominal advantages of professional journalism over citizen journalism. "For these values to become advantages that will allow the journalism profession to survive in the information society, it is necessary for all its principles to be implemented in practice" (Radojković, 2015: 310).

However, like professional journalists, citizen journalists should also be aware of certain ethical values that can influence their civic duty. Although they do not have to work as professional journalists, citizen journalists should respect ethical guidelines. Some of the ethical values that Ravnjak (2019) suggests citizen journalists should adhere to are "maximizing and efficiently minimizing harm, that is, evaluating the public interest against the harm that could result from publishing information" (Ravnjak, 2019: 6). As the author emphasizes, they should present facts, offering what they have truly seen without speculation, rumors, and conjectures. Moreover, they should never plagiarize or manipulate video and photographs. In conclusion, "a citizen journalist must be transparent and identify every possible conflict of interest" (Ravnjak, 2019: 6).

These values help ensure that citizen journalism is credible and contributes to social well-being, rather than causing potential negative consequences. This means that citizen journalists must be aware of the potential impacts that the information they publish could have on individuals and the community. Rumors and speculations can easily turn into misinformation, which can harm individuals. It is essential that the content be authentic and presented in a way that is true to what actually happened. Adhering to ethical standards such as minimizing harm, accuracy, avoiding manipulation, and transparency is crucial for maintaining public trust in citizen journalists. If citizen journalists follow these guidelines, their reporting can be a valuable tool for shedding light on topics that mainstream media might overlook, thus contributing to the plurality of information and strengthening democracy.

Conclusion

Analyzing the technological changes that have led to the rise of citizen journalism, this work further highlights the broader social changes that have enabled every individual to become an active participant in the process of informing and shaping public opinion. The technological revolution, particularly the development of the Internet and digital platforms, has transformed the existing media structure and opened the door to new actors in the sphere of public information. In this dynamic, citizen journalism takes on a particularly important role, as it contributes to the democratization of information and the decentralization of power that was once reserved only for professional media and journalists. Citizen journalism becomes a platform for marginalized or neglected voices, allowing them to be heard and to contribute to shaping social reality. Citizen journalists, whether in the role of witnesses to events or active participants in their communities, provide authentic stories and perspectives that traditional media often overlook or insufficiently cover.

However, while citizen journalism brings many advantages, we cannot ignore the challenges it faces. The lack of formal education, ethics, and training among many citizen journalists creates room for unverified information and misinformation. Professional media undergo editorial filtering and verification systems that ensure accuracy and reliability in reporting, whereas citizen journalism is more devoid of such structures. This means that the information created by citizens often relies on individual perspectives, which can lead to issues such as misinterpretation of events, unverified rumors, and even direct manipulation.

One of the greatest challenges citizen journalism faces is precisely the lack of mechanisms for verifying the accuracy of information. Without editorial teams and checks, there is a significant risk of spreading information that is not credible, which can lead to public misinformation and the creation of false narratives. In addition, the expansion of citizen journalism can contribute to public polarization, as citizens, guided by personal perceptions and beliefs, often report from subjective perspectives, emphasizing aspects that are personally significant to them while neglecting other aspects that are crucial for objective understanding.

Despite these challenges, citizen journalism plays a key role in the democratization of the media space and contributes to strengthening participatory democracy. Its power lies in its ability to amplify the voices of ordinary people and provide an alternative version of reality that is not always available through the lens of traditional media. Citizen journalism brings to light stories and topics that are neglected or suppressed due to commercial interests, political pressures, or editorial guidelines followed by professional media. One of the key aspects of citizen journalism, according to many authors, is its role in creating platforms for dialogue and information exchange.

To overcome the challenges faced by citizen journalism, it is crucial to introduce education in media literacy, which would provide citizens with basic knowledge about ethics, fact-checking, and responsible reporting. In addition to education, the development of digital tools for verifying the credibility of information can play a

key role in reducing the risk of spreading fake news and misinformation. Only in this way can citizen journalism, despite its shortcomings, become a valuable resource for democratic society. Its ability to empower citizens, create space for diverse voices, and contribute to pluralism, a rich dialogue, and the building of a more inclusive media space makes it an indispensable element of modern information dissemination.

Through education and the application of ethical principles, citizen journalism can continue to be a powerful tool for promoting transparency, empowering communities, and spreading diversity of opinion, thereby directly contributing to building a stronger and healthier democracy.

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Odgovornost u građanskom novinarstvu: Izazovi i perspektive

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Apstrakt

U današnjem digitalnom dobu, mobilne tehnologije konstantno oblikuju načine na koje se informacije šire i konzumiraju. Građansko novinarstvo postalo je sveprisutno zahvaljujući društvenim mrežama, blogovima i platformama za deljenje sadržaja. To otvara mogućnost da svako postane novinar, bez obzira na profesionalno iskustvo ili obrazovanje. Dok profesionalni novinari često prolaze kroz procese uređivanja i filtriranja informacija, građanski novinari mogu direktno u realnom vremenu deliti svoja mišljenja i iskustva. Ovo može dovesti do bržeg širenja vesti i bržih reakcija na aktuelne događaje. Međutim, važno je biti svestan izazova koje nosi građansko novinarstvo. S obzirom na to da svako može postati izvor informacija, postoji rizik od širenja neproverenih informacija. Stoga je ključno da građanski novinari budu odgovorni i da nastoje da provere tačnost svojih izveštaja pre nego što ih podele sa drugima. Deljenjem svojih iskustava i perspektiva, građanski novinari mogu inspirisati druge da se angažuju u svojim zajednicama i zalažu za promene koje žele da vide. To podstiče demokratski dijalog i stvara prostor za raznolike ideje i rešenja. Kroz analizu dostupne literature, istaknućemo izazove u odnosu između građanskog i profesionalnog novinarstva.

Ključne reči: građansko novinarstvo, odgovornost, etika, dezinformacije