



Citizen Journalism in Bangladesh and Its Legal Aspects

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Abstract: *Citizen Journalism is the foundation of journalism across the world. Also, Human's instinctive virtue of curiosity, to know the unknown, to explore the unseen, and to gain knowledge about the undiscovered, has gotten us started on many great things over time and journalism is surely one of the bests of all. Citizen journalism is also known as public participatory, democratic, guerrilla, or straight journalism means ordinary people who are not professional journalists collecting and distributing information via the internet. This version of journalism may go extremely wrong if it is not monitored under lawful administration. It may also increase the vices of rumors. The paper argues for the monitoring of citizen journalism in Bangladesh in a way that doesn't control freedom of expression. At the same, it shall not be the cause of rumors and various other wrongs.*

Keywords: Straight Journalism, Lens of Law, Microblogs, Traditional Journalism, Online Journalism.

1. Prelude

The human instinctive virtue of curiosity, to know the unknown, to explore the unseen, and to gain knowledge about the undiscovered, has gotten us started on many great things over time and journalism is surely one of the bests of all.

Not too long ago, we couldn't imagine everyone starting their day off with the same ritual of having their breakfast or brewing their coffee while sitting down to read the newspaper. With the advancement of technology, the scenario has changed now a lot and a huge portion of it is now covered by online journalism! That brings us to this interesting topic of citizen journalism.

Citizen journalism is also known as public participatory, democratic, guerrilla, or straight journalism means ordinary people who are not professional journalists collecting and distributing information via the internet. This concept is based upon public citizens playing an active role in collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. Courtney C Ranch refines it as an alternative and activist form of news gathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions often as a response to the shortcomings in the professional journalistic field that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism.

There are two ways citizen journalism can operate. First is of course working on their own and secondly working with an organization. The first is actually the one with a bigger impact and fresher outcomes as they are not influenced by mainstream media. They are creating something by themselves. And thanks to the availability and affordability of technology, random citizens can participate in citizen journalism easily via social media or by creating websites or blogs, microblogs, and such.

Citizen journalism can give people a voice. They can make people aware of their rights being violated by reporting unfair events taking place around them. Citizens can also report an emergency situation such as natural disasters or fire incidents and breaking news faster than mainstream media. Some significant examples of citizen journalism are The 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the protests in Turkey, the Euro maiden events in Ukraine, the Syrian civil war, and the 2014 Ferguson unrest.

The most used critical analysis of citizen journalism is the spreading of misinformation as it's done by amateurs. Nonetheless many believe that citizen journalism is reshaping the world and the future of journalism in the broader picture. Furthermore, there is no consensus about the definition of citizen journalism. After understanding the definitions mentioned above the author is suggesting a definition of his own. Citizen journalism means the journalism that is covered or created by the audience themselves and no such thing as professional norms or practices exist in it. If there is no news that is not being covered by the mainstream media due to non-occurrence of opinion or political pressure, then crowd journalism somewhat satiates the need of broadcasting towards the citizens of a particular country. Now-a-days citizen journalism plays the role of a bridge between the mainstream media and the ordinary public.

2. Background of Citizen Journalism

Many scholars agree on the fact that the history of journalism is based on the history of citizen journalism. This assertion leads us to think that the modern age of communication had its inception in the fifteenth when the first printing press was introduced to the government departments and the public, to publish printed pamphlets in the West. Citizen journalism existed at least since the time of Thomas Paine when he published pamphlets like *Common Sense* that ignited the flames of revolution in 1776(Matheson, 2014). These early pamphlets were used for varying reasons, ranging from political apologies to providing manifestoes to preaching for and against predestination in theology. Nevertheless, there is no clear evidence pointing to the fact that these pamphlets had been used in the form of citizen journalism.

Gillmor stated a more specific timeline by saying that citizen journalism was brought about by the political revolution in the late eighteenth century when writer and activist Thomas Paine published pamphlets that thrilled patriots and threatened loyalists in North America (Noor 2017, p. 56). Pamphlets were the primary form of media during the pre-revolutionary period through which people could express their views and opinions on contemporary and political affairs (Matheson, 2014). More often than not the content of the pamphlets offered different perspectives and solutions which were suitable for debates in the political forum of a democratic nation (Allan, Thorsen, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that the late eighteenth century was an important period for the growth of citizen journalism, given the role an ordinary citizen played in providing alternative outlooks by publishing pamphlets(Allan, Thorsen, 2014). However, with the change of time and the introduction of new technologies along with the change in the political scenario of the world, citizen journalism has taken on many different shapes and ordinary citizens have been practicing journalism one way or the other for a wide number of reasons. In the light of this thesis, citizen journalism is classified into three distinct periods that befits the history of citizen journalism (Noor 2017).

The periods range from the eighteenth century when pamphlets were the primary media of providing news and information to the modern age of the Internet that has enabled the people to tap into the well of information online (Miller 2019).

The first period is said to be the 'revolutionary era', the era when the people used to publish pamphlets to communicate with the public forums on current affairs (Miller 2019). The primary objective of 'revolutionary era' citizen journalism was mainly political and not to provide independent news analysis. This model is important because it provided opposing or alternative views which led many countries to become independent from the Western colonizers, in particular, the British (Rai 2016). The model was characterized by subjective journalism rather than objective(Rai 2016). One of the prime examples of this category is Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*- which challenged the authority of the British government and the monarchy and played an important role in igniting the flames of the American Revolution in 1776. Gillmor further said that Benjamin Franklin was another prominent citizen journalist in the infancy stage of media whose *Pennsylvania Gazette* was civic-minded and occasionally invited controversies due to its differing political news content (Jaeger, 2021). Although it was published as a newspaper between 1728 and 1800 (i.e. before the time period of the American Revolution), the *Gazette* provided its readers with a first-hand view of colonial America, the American Revolution, and the New Republic, offering important social, political, and cultural viewpoint of the time(Jaeger 2021).

The second model of citizen journalism falls into the category of '1960-1970s era', an era in which multiple underground newspapers (also known as the radical press) and pirate or underground radio stations emerged, first in the West and then in other parts of the world(Miller 2019). These underground media were also known as the countercultural 'community newspapers' in the USA and were used by vocal thinkers and authors who challenged the dominant American Culture head-on (Matheson, 2014).

In this model, citizen journalists debated about current affairs, advocating for a better world that was free of war, hatred, injustice, poverty, and ignorance, including the issues of misogyny and women's rights. For instance, *Radio Donna* in Rome, *Nanas Radioeuses* in Paris, and *Radio Pirate Women* in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s; and in this period, these

radio stations played a crucial role in promoting different social values, different cultures, and political opinions which more often than not challenged the government (Jaeger, 2021).

According to Harcup, This model gained rapid popularity after the Second World War in 1945. By the end of the 1970s, more than eighty-three citizen newspapers- most of which had an average of 10-12 pages with few to no advertisements- were in the publication in the UK alone, and sold somewhere between 100 to 85,000 copies on the streets. In the USA, this era saw substantial growth in citizen-media initiatives (in both printed media and radio), although there was a prevalent tradition of amateur radios even before the First World War (Wan-ifra, 2019).

Nevoseit says despite the rise of underground newspapers, there was no consensus among the citizen journalists upon the definitions of common terms, e.g., democracy. Citizen journalists themselves often both fabricated and documented news events and engaged in power struggles among each other within the very same organization. This novice behavior led to the blurring of the fine line between reporting and activism.

Lewes suggests that this model rose because the traditional media failed to uphold their democratic roles. Unfortunately, this model fell into decline because of some introduction of media reforms in the Western countries, whereby media organizations had to meet certain legal requirements. In the United Kingdom, for instance, radio stations had to obtain a 100-Watt license, which was unaffordable for most radio stations. This led many underground media outlets to shut down or become affiliated with the mainstream media(Wan-ifra, 2019).

The last model of citizen journalism is being constructed now out of Internet Technology whereby every individual or media organization is able to produce news content independently or in collaboration. One of the noticeable features of contemporary citizen journalism is the 'speed, low cost, and global reach with which subjects can be brought to the national and international news agendas, including issues that are those in power would prefer to be ignored'. This model of citizen journalism gained its prominence internationally when the Twins Tower, in New York and the Pentagon were attacked on 11 September 2001. The people for the first time marked and noticed the eyewitness accounts on the internet. Allan writes the term 'citizen journalism' became popular in media discourse after the Asia tsunami in 2004 when the photos and videos had been uploaded by the tourists on their personal webpages or blogs and that appeared on television and in the print media (Miller, 2019). However, the mainstream media organizations did not perceive the importance of such news content, also known as user-generated content, produced by ordinary people, until the London bombings in 2005. This time the affected people sent their images captured in their personal phones and information to the BBC (Jaeger, 2021). Many different mainstream media organizations today frequently use user-generated content, encouraging their audiences to contribute their eyewitness facts or photo images. CNN has launched its own site, iReport, from the concept of citizen journalism in 2006 in which any individuals from any part of the world can publish their news articles or contents(Matheson, 2014).

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The most recent development in contemporary citizen journalism is the use of social media tools, such as Facebook Twitter, etc., which have become increasingly popular among users. Social media has become a feature of political and civic engagement for people around the world. However, the current media environment demonstrates a new emerging

media trend; citizen journalism and traditional media are merging to form a conglomerate and ordinary people are becoming part of the traditional media (Brown, 2010).

So, the history of citizen journalism may 'depend on the preferred definition of 'citizen journalism' being employed — or even of 'history' for that matter — let alone the perspectives, interests, and motivations of the person marshaling selected facts into a compelling narrative'. In other words, how we describe the history of citizen journalism may depend on how we understand it.

3. Differences Between Citizen Journalism and Traditional Journalism

Considering the effect of citizen journalism in our life in the present context, many conspiracy theories have emerged. Among those, one prominent theory states that citizen journalism is going to replace traditional journalism. But the features of both traditional and citizen journalism tell something different. Observing the features of both, it is observed that both kinds have their own differences whether it is the approach of collecting and propagating information or the accountability of the propagator of such news. Regarding citizen journalism, Peter Dooley suggests that "traditional journalism is the outside looking in. Citizen journalism is the inside looking out. In order to get the complete story, it helps to have both points of view (Okpara, 2015)." So, from his statement, it can be inferred that as per his view, citizen journalism and traditional journalism do not stand against each other rather in their work they complement each other in present times.

To begin with, in the case of traditional journalism the message can be subject to the control of the state or other organizations whereas citizen journalism remains free from any form of control or influence, as it has emerged from the right of freedom of speech of the citizens. Although there are some important factors that speak the vitality of citizen journalism at the same time it is undeniable that a report from a professional journalist would be different from that of a citizen sharing information.

A professional journalist is trained and is aware of the guidelines and code of conduct concerning his profession. Before publishing news, he needs to be aware of his duty to check and recheck the whole thing and whether it seems to be objective, imbalanced, and unfair or goes against the policy of any political party, group, or organization. The definition of a traditional journalist, coined by University of the West Indies lecturer Patrick Prendergast, underscores the importance of training in journalism: "A journalist is defined as a trained professional who, in the defense, protection, and advancement of the public's interest, uses media and communication platforms to pursue and report what is true with fairness, balance, and accuracy and always in recognition of the principles" (Sibanda 2015, P. 45). Hence, issues of objectivity, balance, and fairness are the fundamental basics of the profession and in case of any contradiction to such aspect; there is the scope of the journalist to be held accountable. Again, maintaining authenticity free from falsehood is a very essential principle of the profession with which there is no scope to compromise. Traditional journalists take pride in the fact that their products - whether it is the news or feature stories - embody values such as objectivity, accuracy, fact-checking and editorial oversight (Journalism 365, 2019). On the other hand, in the case of citizen journalism, the people reporting are neither trained in the basic fundamentals nor there are of the code of conduct of the profession as a result there is a chance that their reports might be biased, opinioned, and prejudicial or go against any stakeholders. The journalists and the media are held accountable for their reports if there is any false element found in them. Sometimes, the journalists or the reporters are sued for libel or defamation which may affect their reputation and in some cases, their career turns to end. But in the case of citizen journalism, there are no such accountabilities for them to maintain. The negative aspect of this is that this may grow up a bad tendency among them to feel encouraged to share or propagate the news without any fear or caution as there remains no liability on their part to check the credibility of the news.

With regard to collecting information, the process of collecting information is also different in both cases. The former is dependent on collecting information through mainly primary sources; interviews, data surveys where the journalist synthesizes and analyzes the data and produces news content for the public. On the other hand, citizen journalism has more to do with crowd-sourcing (Barban Dangerfield, 2015) where the crowd collects, analyses and synthesizes, and publishes it. Again, when it comes to the publication of news, the professional media follows an organized manner but in the case of citizen journalism, as various people give their information from their aspect or understanding not following any definite manner, there might be a lack of coherence and have no dissemination in them.

Finally, there is a very crucial factor where in citizen journalism, people tend to blur out the line between fact and fiction but for traditional journalists, journalism is based on fact, never on fiction. This is a distinct difference that can never be ignored and journalists who cross that line are usually regarded as committing professional suicide (Macharashvili, 2012, p. 19).

4. Citizen Journalism and Public Harassment: An Old Nexus

As per research, 88 percent of women have experienced sexual or nonverbal harassment while out conducting chores, and 62 percent of them claim to restrain their activity and enforce strict timetables while they are unaccompanied (CARE Bangladesh, 2020). However, 81 percent of them said they would never report to authorities because they were ineffective and showed no empathy for people. The number of people molested on the road, both males and females, was always high. People not feeling safe enough to make reports to law enforcement has long been a typical occurrence due to the complexities that these imply. Yet, social networking has arrived in a period when we can express what we like and bring issues to light without having to deal with the legalities and complexity. Still, publishing stuff on the internet not only raises awareness but can also lead to the appropriate authority being contacted. For example, the Dhaka Tribune reported on Oct 24, 2018, that three policemen had been identified and then were questioned for harassing women on the roads. This inquiry originated from a video that was posted online, showing how these cops harassed this victim in the guise of doing their "responsibilities".

5. Citizen Journalism: In the Lens of Law

The "generalizer" for behavior is indeed the law. It's also stated that law consistently upholds a pattern rather than specific behaviors. Law also shapes and governs. As a result, analyzing the legal elements of independent journalism is difficult since it necessitates a consideration of the guidelines and principles of an action that evolved as a reaction to structures. In terms of professional journalism, laws and legal frameworks include standards of conduct that balance freedom of speech with other competing interests, and then one after the other provide appropriate shields which are necessary to flow facts. Unfortunately, citizen journalism doesn't really fit into that framework. As a result, the legal issues of citizen journalism are governed more by by-laws governing citizens than by-laws governing media.

The grounds that justify citizen journalism would be as follows:

Freedom of speech is essential in every advanced democratic system, as it helps national sovereignty to practically control the democratic system through political discussions, deliberations, and public condemnation. Freedom of expression, in fact, is perhaps the most effective instrument in the ongoing quest for answers, which includes investigations, discussions, and disagreement.

The Constitution of Bangladesh, just like most constitutions, protects freedom of speech and expression. According to *Article 39 of the Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh*:

"1. Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed.

2. Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offense—

(a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; and are guaranteed" (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972).

According to *section 6 of the Right to Information Act, 2009*:

"(1) Every authority shall publish and publicize all information pertaining to any decision taken, proceeding, or activity executed or proposed by indexing them in such a manner as may easily be accessible to the citizens.

(2) In publishing and publicizing information under sub-section (1), no authority shall conceal any information or limit its easy access.

(3) Every authority shall publish a report every year which shall contain the following information, namely:—

(a) Particulars of its organizational structure, activities, responsibility of the officers and employees, or description and process of decision making;

(b) lists of all laws, Acts, Ordinance, rules, regulations, notifications, directives, manuals, etc. of the authority including the classification of all information lying with the authority;

4. The authority shall publish all such policies and decisions if it frames any policy or takes an important decision and shall, explain the reasons and causes in support of policies and decisions if it is necessary.

5. The report made by the authority under this section shall be free of charge for public information and the copies of these reports shall be stocked for sale at a reasonable price.

6. All the publications prepared by the authority shall be made available to the public at a nominal price.

7. The matters of public interest shall be published and publicized by the authority through press notes or through any other means.

8. The Information Commission shall frame instructions by regulations which are to be followed by the authority while publishing, publicizing, and obtaining information and all the authority shall follow them.

The provision was written above under the Right to Information Act, even though it does not specifically talk about social media platforms and citizen journalism, but it still does recognize people's right to information.

6. Human Rights and International Laws on Citizen Journalism

Freedom of expression is one of the most universally recognized human rights. Even though Citizen Journalism is not very formal, it is still a platform to exercise one's freedom of expression. Some of the regional and international conventions that approve the right to expression as a right are mentioned below:

According to *Article 19* of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UDHR 1948)."

According to *Article 19* of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*:

"1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals (ICCPR 1966)."

According to *Article 5* of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*, everyone shall enjoy the right to freedom of opinion and expression without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law.

According to *Article 13* of the *American Convention on Human Rights*:

"1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression. This right includes freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other medium of one's choice.

2. The exercise of the right provided for in the foregoing paragraph shall not be subject to prior censorship but shall be subject to subsequent imposition of liability, which shall be expressly established by law to the extent necessary to ensure:
 - a. respect for the rights or reputations of others; or
 - b. the protection of national security, public order, or public health or morals.
3. The right of expression may not be restricted by indirect methods or means, such as the abuse of government or private controls over newsprint, radio broadcasting frequencies, or equipment used in the dissemination of information, or by any other means tending to impede the communication and circulation of ideas and opinions.
4. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 2 above, public entertainments may be subject by law to prior censorship for the sole purpose of regulating access to them for the moral protection of childhood and adolescence.
5. Any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitements to lawless violence or to any other similar action against any person or group of persons on any grounds including those of race, color, religion, language, or national origin shall be considered as offenses punishable by law (ACHR, n.d.).”

According to *Principle 1* of the ***Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression***:

Freedom of expression in all its forms and manifestations is a fundamental right and inalienable of all individuals (Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, 2002).

Thereafter, again *Principle 5* of the same Declaration states that:

“Prior censorship, the pressure exerted upon or direct or indirect interference in any expression, opinion or information transmitted through any means of oral, written, artistic, visual or electronic communication must be prohibited by law. Any restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the imposition of obstacles to the free flow of information, violate the right to freedom of expression (Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression, 2002).”

And *Principle 6* of the aforementioned mentions:

“Everyone has the right to communicate his/her views by any means and in any form. Obligatory membership or the requirements of a university degree for the practice of journalism constitute unlawful restrictions of freedom of expression. Journalistic activities must be guided by ethical conduct, which should in no case be imposed by the State.”

According to *Article 9* of the ***African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights***:

“(a) Every individual shall have the right to receive information.

(b) Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinions within the law (African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981).”

According to *Principle I* of the ***Declaration of principles on freedom of expression in Africa***:

“1. Freedom of expression and information, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other form of communication, including across frontiers, is a fundamental and inalienable human right and an indispensable component of democracy.

2. Everyone shall have an equal opportunity to exercise the right to freedom of expression and to access information without discrimination (Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, 2002).”

Thereafter again, *Principle II* of the same Declaration states that:

“1. No one shall be subject to arbitrary interference with his or her freedom of expression.

2. any restrictions on freedom of expression shall be provided by law, serve a legitimate interest and be necessary and in a democratic society (Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa, 2002).”

7. The Barriers of Citizen Journalism

a. Citizen Journalism to Public Harassment & Public Harassment to Citizen Journalism- A reciprocal call:

While generally public harassment leads to citizen journalism, more often than not citizen journalism turns into public harassment. For example, in 2015, a video went public, where a teenage boy was fighting with his friend outdoor

somewhere in a comparatively isolated area. While, this caught the attention of the property authority, this teenager also had to go through massive bullying online which was totally unneeded.

b. Abusing Social Media to Get Popular:

Many people use Citizen Journalism and social networking services as a way of getting attention, which is, being welcomed by the people. These people either sometimes spread fake news or exaggerate the real ones to spice it up, to gain the attention of the people easily. Sometimes, they'll make things up to make it seem that these things happened to them, which in fact, did not happen. People go as far as to spread false news about celebrities dying. For example, last year in August, the news took over the social networking service saying that Dwayne Johnson died while doing a stunt that failed miserably (Schenk, 2019). People kept sharing this post without verifying the authenticity of the news or checking on his official account just to be sure. And this is just a single example of this kind. There are hundreds of such cases where people use social media and citizen journalism as a tool for gaining cheap popularity. Like, during the recent quota reformation movement that was going on back in 2018, some students at Dhaka University posted that their hall rooms are being raided and vandalized. And some people hungry for attention, decided to take advantage and gain some likes and shares started sharing a 3-month-old video describing that, it is footage of the vandals trying to break into the halls. People who were not aware of this, in good faith kept sharing this video and kept making it viral until some other people pointed out that it was forged.

Hence, the legitimacy of the news that is spread through citizen journalism through social media is to some extent doubtful.

c. Biased and One Sided Aspect:

Posts posted on the internet by ordinary people are not exactly neutral and unbiased. They only get to know about the side of the story from the perspective of the author. Because most people write and give opinions about an issue according to their beliefs. So, if a fight occurs between two parties, each group will think that their cause is justified. Therefore, if someone puts up a post on social media, they will most likely write it in a way that sounds more slanted towards the group that they support, or belong to.

d. Creates Unrest:

Sometimes, people keep spreading news whether it be true or false about a certain incident so much, which spreads unnecessary fear among people. This does not appease or deescalate the situation but rather makes people frustrated and afraid.

e. Escalates Resentment:

There is a certain amount of people out there who use social media and citizen journalism to spread fear, resentment, and abhorrence. They'll just find random news about a Muslim or a Black doing something wrong and present it in a way as if that news and the criminal in that incident represent the whole community, and individual crimes like theft and murders do not occur otherwise. There are several pages and groups in social media that are specifically created to hate a particular community, and all the haters to unite so that they can spread their hatred more effectively towards those communities by posting fake news, ignorant comments, and offensive memes. They even make YouTube channels and make hate videos that are later shared by them and their fans on social media sites (Abdelkader, 2016).

f. An Open Platform for scams:

A number of people, for their own gain, take advantage of public sentiment and earn money through fraudulent activities. They post photos of patients or a person deep in poverty and put up an emotional caption and ask for money for their treatment and wellbeing.

8. Mechanisms to utilize Citizen Journalism for Public Welfare:

Despite the cons of Citizen Journalism, it can actually be used as a means of lessening public harassment. Below is given some proposals that will effectively help in making use of citizen journalism as a mean of reducing public harassment in Bangladesh:

- Firstly, Bangladesh needs to enact an Act that shall deal with citizen journalism and its issues. This will not only ensure justice to the victims of harmful citizen journalism but having a separate labeled Act will also make more people aware that they even have recourse to wrongs that happened to them on a social media platform.
- Such Act, like the *Amsterdam Recommendations. Freedom of the Media and the Internet. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)* must include a provision that states that, prosecution of criminal content, such as child pornography, must be warranted and on the Internet all existing laws must be observed. However, the basic principle of freedom of expression must not be confined and there is no need for new legislation (Amsterdam Recommendations, 2003).

This shall allow people to express themselves freely, as well as keep the guilty minds away.

- Bangladesh, under the *Press Council Code* has **Code of Conduct 1993** (2002 as amended) for the Newspapers, News Agencies and Journalists of Bangladesh (Press Council Code, 1993). Like this one, Bangladesh should make another Code by which citizen journalists have to abide by.
- **Anti-pornography Act, 2012** was enacted by the government of Bangladesh to make a restriction in the sharing and making of pornography by the individuals as it brings a devastating result not only for the individual involved in it but also for the greater society.

Citizen journalists should also be brought under the scope of this Act, so that people cannot spread pornography in the name of citizen journalism and cannot be victimized by it.

- *Section 57(1) of the ICT Act, 2006 (Amended 2013)* states that, “If any person deliberately publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the website or in any other electronic form any material which is false and obscene and if anyone sees, hears or reads it having regard to all relevant circumstances, its effect is such as to influence the reader to become dishonest or corrupt, or causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the state or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organization, then this activity will be regarded as an offence (Star Online Report, 2018).” Social media should be specifically included in this provision, so that offenders cannot find any loopholes and escape punishments.
- *Section 16 of the Digital Security Act 2018* states that, “(1) If any person defames any person or institution in website or any electronic arrangement under the section 499 of the Penal Code (Act No. 45 of 1860), it will be an offence. (2) If any person publishes or broadcasts on the website or any electronic device deliberately which is false or obscene and perverts or pollutes human mind, makes defamation in terms of money or belittles socially, it will be considered as an offence; or (3) If any person publishes in any website or electronic arrangement that hurts the religious feelings of others after seeing that, it will be considered as an offence. (4) If any person commits any offence under the sub-sections (1), (2) & (3), he/she will be convicted to maximum 5 (five) years imprisonment or fined 5 (five) lac taka or both (Digital Security Act, 2018).” This provision should also add social media and other platforms to avoid loopholes.
- *Section 18 of the Digital Security Act 2018* states that,
“(1) For the interest of any investigation into the offence under this act, the director general or the officer with the rank of police super or officer authorized by him/her will exercise the following powers:
(a) To take the possession of computer, computer program, computer system or computer network or any digital device, digital system or digital network or any program, information, data which have been stored in any compute or compact disc or removable drive or any other way or access into the same.
(b) To make any person or organization bound to supply the traffic of information or data.
(c) To do what is reasonably required to do with a view to fulfilling the purposes of this act.

2. Under this act, the director general or the police officer can take the assistance of any expert person or specialized organization for the interest of the investigation and the government will bear the costs in this connection (Digital Security Act, 2018).”

This provision can also be added in the cases of citizen journalism, as sometimes the offenders delete their posts that had already caused enough harm. And going through their computers and other gadgets brings out evidence against them.

Recently, an announcement was made by RAB to raise consciousness about the injury that fake news on social media platforms causes, and how to steer clear of these (Sun Online Desk, 2018). More announcements and informational videos like this should be made to raise awareness about the importance and fair use of social media platforms and citizen journalism.

9. Conclusion

In the past, there were only two TV channels and a few newspapers and a group of dedicated journalists, and fewer people around us. And so, it was easier for people to express themselves, and media was more filtered and reliable. However, now there are countless channels and newspapers, one for each political affiliation and political agenda. Furthermore, there are all types of influence and coercion on the mainstream media on censoring and editing out any information, which may actually sometimes be the crucial ones. Hence, overall, the media now is manipulated and adulterated and there is less and less scope for people to rely on the mainstream media in this age of globalization. Thus, in the era where freedom of speech is slowly being criminalized, citizen journalism has actually become a more reliable and informative source of news. It does not only bring important news to light but also helps in dealing with problems like public harassment.

To conclude, Citizen Journalism must never be seen as an alternative to mainstream Journalism, rather should be considered supplementary to it. Hence, like mainstream Journalism, Citizen Journalism should never be tried to be completely systemized, as that would take away the essence of it. Nevertheless, it should be brought under some kind of regulations to avoid the abuse of it and focus more on bringing people together and fighting public harassment.

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