

CIVIC & CITIZEN Journalism

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Credibility, the next great challenge

By **Nikhil Moro**
CCJIG Chair



Would Jane Doe the citizen journalist be more acceptable if she gained in credibility? Or would she become more credible if she were better accepted? It's a sort of causality dilemma that has weighed rather comfortably on my mind.

The fact is that as news consumers suffer fewer professional choices thanks to consolidation of electronic media businesses and closures of newspapers, citizen journalists are emerging central to our democracy. From movie scans to war policy analyses, from niche reporting to federal bailout commentary,

non-professionals are provoking the intellect – and the raw emotion – as never before.

It's as if Ms. Doe, with her digital camera and blog URL, is transforming from obscure squeaker to keynote speaker.

Is the marketplace of ideas better for it? I sure would like to know.

What I do know is that citizen reporter Jane Doe is no stopgap expediency. She is here to stay. As I try to figure out her long-term impact on journalism I am reminded of one of history's great lessons, which is that every new technology has managed to transform the credibility in human communication: The Chinese invention of paper about 1900 years ago enabled writing for the record. Five and a half centuries after that, Johannes

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Gutenberg's invention of movable-type printing transformed European handbills into regime-changing newspapers. Fast forward another 450

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HEALTH CARE REFORM: the press & public engagement

By **Mary Beth Callie**
CCJIG Co-Vice Chair/
Co-Programming Chair



President Obama has recently said that the "stars are aligned" for Congress to pass health legislation this year. The press' role and responsibility in engaging citizens in the health care debate will be the focus of an AEJMC panel (Friday, August 7, 1:45 p.m), co-sponsored by the Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group and the Newspaper Division. Panelists, including *Boston Globe* investigative

reporter Scott Allen and Trudy Lieberman of the *Columbia Journalism Review* (who also directs the health and medicine reporting program at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism), will consider how our press—beset by cuts, closures, and bottom line pressures—can provide investigative, explanatory, and empathic coverage that facilitates citizen understanding and participation in the process.

In a 1989 speech that sparked the emergence of the public journalism movement, Knight Ridder CEO James Batten stressed the press' role in building "community-connectedness"

and providing citizens with the information we all need to make wise decisions. When students and I converse about what they need to know to be engaged citizens and voters, we've considered how and why our university mandates that all students have health insurance, the idea of spreading risk, the concept of single payer, the differences between public and private insurance, and stories of the uninsured and underinsured. For a look into the power and politics of the health care business, along with

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Citizen journalism in higher education —A call for sharing information

By Kirsten Johnson
CCJIG Secretary



It occurred to me recently, while trying to pull together information on citizen journalism projects in higher education, that we (the higher education community) are doing a really bad job of sharing information. Shame on us.

There are some really great citizen journalism projects taking place at colleges and universities, but there's no central place (that I've found) to go to learn specifically about citizen journalism sites that are affiliated with institutions of higher learning. Sure, the Web site for the *Institute for Interactive Journalism*, j-lab.org, does a nice job of posting reports about projects it funds, but how about the many sites launched without the aid of those funds? There are also sites that

track the hundreds of citizen journalism projects going on across the country, but this information can be overwhelming and is not specific to higher ed. Wouldn't it be nice to have a place where we could share our "lessons learned" with one another?

Some colleagues and I in the Department of Communications at Elizabethtown College (Elizabethtown is a small town in central Pennsylvania) launched a citizen journalism Web site, we-town.com, last year with money obtained through an internal grant. Over the past year we've learned a lot about technology barriers, integrating students and their projects into the site, promoting the site, and motivating community members to participate. We've written papers and presented at conferences, but let's face it, the turn around time on papers and conferences is very long. Often, by the time something is published it is old and outdated. New technologies allow us

to share things instantaneously, so what are we waiting for?

My proposed solution is to set up a central repository (a wiki) for work being done specifically related to citizen journalism and higher education. The wiki would allow anyone to contribute his/her ideas. This could be a place to share information and materials with one another. Perhaps we could form a virtual community of practice, a place where those who have been experimenting with citizen journalism for a long time could mentor those who are new to the field. At the very least it could be a place to keep track of the citizen journalism projects specific to higher education that are taking place.

If you are interested in participating please send me an email at johnsonka@etown.edu or give me a call at (717) 361-1258.

Let's start working together.

Call for submissions: NRJ special issue Focused on "The future of community journalism"

The rapid changes in the newspaper industry have turned more focus in recent years to what appears to be one of the more stable branches of the newspaper business—small-circulation daily and weekly newspapers generally referred to as "community newspapers." In light of these developments, the *Newspaper Research Journal* is accepting research articles and conceptual/theoretical essays that will shed light on "The Future of Community Newspapers" for a special issue of NRJ (tentatively scheduled for the winter 2011 issue).

This call is for articles that provide insights into the modern role of community newspapers, as well as suggestions that would help community newspapers to adapt to the changing marketplace. Both social-scientific and cultural/critical approaches will be considered, as will

mixed-methods approaches. Preference will be given to articles that draw upon and advance media theory, although insightful non-theoretical, descriptive studies will be considered.

Submissions will undergo NRJ's usual peer-review process, and must be original research that is not under review with any other publication (although modified conference papers will be considered). NRJ's published guidelines regarding length, citation style, and formatting of tabular material will apply. The deadline for submissions is Dec. 1, 2009.

Submissions should be sent as Microsoft Word files to guest editor Bill Reader of Ohio University. E-mail them to reader@ohio.edu.

Guide to CCJIG research sessions in Boston

AEJMC Convention Thursday August 6

Civic/Citizen Journalism and the Political Realm

•8:15 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

“Reporting by the People: A Case Study of Citizen Journalism during the 2008 Election,” Rebecca Coates-Nee, K. Tim Wulfemeyer and David Dozier, San Diego State University

“Frequency of Links to Primary Source Material in the Hyperlinking Patterns of Political Blogs,” Mark Leccese, Emerson College

“What’s Journalism Got to do with it? Political Blogs and Bloggers,” Tom Bakker, Klaus Schoenbach and Claes de Vreese, University of Amsterdam

“Interacting is Believing? Examining Bottom-Up Credibility of Blogs Among Politically Interested Internet Users,” Daekyung Kim, Idaho State University

Moderator: Burton St. John III, Old Dominion University

Discussant: Kirsten Johnson, Elizabethtown College

Scholar-to-Scholar Session

•1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

“How Citizen Journalists Conceive of and Practice Community in One Midwestern City,” Cathy DeShano and Sue Robinson, University of Wisconsin, Madison

“Online and Offline Citizen Journalism News: Which do our Young Adults Believe In?” Charlene Wee and Julian Lin, National University of Singapore

“Discourse in the Malaysian Sociopolitical Blogosphere Amidst Racial Politics,” Jun-E Tan and Indrajit Banerjee, Nanyang Technological University

“Is Blogging Journalism? Analyzing the Blogosphere’s Perspective,” Michael Sheehy, University of Cincinnati; Hong Ji, Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism

“Sniffing Out Sleeping Dogs: Web 2.0 and Reconceptualizing the Public Sphere and Guard-Dog Media,” Ryan Thomas and Mary Grace Antony, Washington State University

“Sustaining Hyperlocal Media and

Citizen Journalism: In Search of Funding Models,” David Kurpius and Karen Rowley, Louisiana State University; Emily Metzgar, Indiana University

“New Media’s Contribution to Presidential Debates,” Pamela Brubaker, The Pennsylvania State University

Discussants: Burton St. John III, Old Dominion University; Kirsten Johnson, Elizabethtown College

AEJMC Convention Saturday August 8

The New “New Journalists” of the Digital Age

•3:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.

“Anyone Can Know: Citizen Journalism and the Interpretive Community of the Mainstream Press in a Mid-Western City,” Sue Robinson and Cathy DeShano, University of Wisconsin - Madison

“The Blogger as Journalist,” Gerry

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Health

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empathic perspectives, we turn to the work of journalists, such as Jonathan Cohn’s book *Sick*, Donald Barlett and James Steele’s *Critical Condition*, Frontline documentaries (*Sick around the World* and *Sick Around America*).

In Massachusetts, the Boston Globe—not in the best of health itself, at least financially—has played a leading role in informing the public about the creation and implementation of its new health care system. In its 2008 series, “Unhealthy System,” the Globe’s investigative Spotlight team focused on a health finance system that rewards big hospitals and has contributed to a cost crisis in Massachusetts. The series received a third place award from the Association of Health Care Journalists. More recently, the Globe has focused on key implementation issues, such as

age-based pricing. Both the series and recent coverage have generated significant reader feedback on the Globe’s Web site, Boston.com.

On the Web, Boston’s NPR news station WBUR FM has provided another key resource, with its “CommonHealth” Web site and blog. Created in 2007, the Web site includes posts from diverse stakeholders, along with WBUR stories and updates, a special documentary series, statewide call-in programs and the only broadcast tracking and in-depth reporting on the law and its impact. In April, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting awarded WBUR a MySource Community Impact Award for Engagement.

At the national level, Trudy Lieberman has provided an ongoing review of health care reporting in “Campaign Desk,” for the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Lieberman stresses the need for health care reporting that

helps ordinary people understand basic concepts, such as the differences between public and private health insurance. “Man-in-the-street” interviews conducted by Lieberman’s CUNY students revealed much confusion about those differences. Without understanding of those basics, people will be disconnected from the debate, and ill equipped to understand the details of reform.

Lieberman has also called for coverage of real cost containment questions, such as capping spending. In March, for example, she discussed insufficient media coverage of the successes and failures of Massachusetts mandated health insurance plan, especially of “serious cost-containment measures that would have assured the program’s future, but would have cut into the profits of the state’s powerful medical and insurance interests.”

Credibility

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years: Guglielmo Marconi's founding of wireless telegraphy birthed the great medium of radio and then, only some 30 years later, Vladimir Zworykin's electron scanning tube grew into television. Eventually in 1970, Robert Maurer et al.'s invention of optic-fiber cable enabled massive telecom networks, and finally RAND Corp.'s Internet spawned a decentralized multitude of blogs.

Generally, it is clear that the newer the technology the smaller its gestation period and the quicker it has gained in credibility. So what, actually, is credibility? Maybe B.J. Fogg of Stanford should answer that one. I would suggest credibility enfolds an unfailing attribution to sources, a transparency in newsgathering and in subject, a detail in narration, and of course a logic in argumentation.

The record indicates that we may

expect blogs, tweets, iReports and other such technology to get rapidly more credible as they nudge into the intellectual space historically engaged by legacy professionals. Amra Tareen of AllVoices is already offering cash incentives for the best Ms. Does because "citizen journalism only works if the content is high quality," even as Arianna Huffington of HuffPo is exploring a "distinction between saving journalism and saving newspapers." The *New York Times* and *Boston Globe* have collaborated with a personalizable content reader intriguingly named Kindle DX (for "deluxe"), and Fox-owned WJBK is hoping to replace the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* as they transition from daily home delivery to thrive a week in order to survive.

Regardless of the business model utilized – using donations (spot.us), using volunteers (chitowndailynews.org), going nonprofit (voiceofsandiego.org) or aggregating (everyblock.com) – there can be no doubt that citizen journalism's next great challenge is

generally to increase credibility.

I am watching and, I suspect, so is everyone else at the Civic & Citizen Journalism Interest Group.

Research

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Lanosga, Indiana University

"The Future of News? A Study of Citizen Journalism and Journalists," Brad Schultz, University of Mississippi; Mary Lou Sheffer, University of Southern Mississippi

"Practicing Place: Sharing, Collaboration, and Collective Action in an Online Urban Forum," Patrick Wehner, University of Pennsylvania; Dana Walker, University of Michigan

Moderator & Discussant: Jeff South, Virginia Commonwealth University