Citizen Journalism: How User-Generated Content Changes the News Media

What is citizen journalism?

- How does it differ from the other types of journalism (e.g. traditional, public)?
- When was it launched?
- What are the reasons of its appearing?

What is user-generated content?

- How are users generating the content (which tools, media forms do they use)?
- What are the main values of user-generated content?
- What’s the difference between information provided by professionals (journalists, editors) and amateurs (users, experts, pundits)?

What are news media?

- What is news?
- Which traditional news media exist?
- Is Internet a news medium? Why?

Can users create news? If yes, can they be called journalists?

Is there a tendency of replacing traditional journalism with citizen journalism?

What is the future of journalism in the era of interactive media and user-generated knowledge environment?
INTRODUCTION

As could be seen from the several questions mentioned above, theoretical framework of my master thesis limits to three core concepts: user-generated content, news media and citizen journalism.

How did the concept of citizen journalism originate? This is not just a result of technological innovation but rather a phenomenon that appeared as a combination of different social, political and technological processes.

For better understanding the logic of concept’s structure I suggest you to look at the following concept map:
The background of citizen journalism includes the origins of public journalism and creation of user-generated content. The last became possible with appearing of Internet, Web 2.0 and suitable media platforms.

According to the structure of my work, I need to explore the consequent theoretical basis:

- The revolution of journalist profession with the invention of modern technologies
- Changes in news media forms
- Web 2.0 users and their language

The books I have chosen for my research can be figuratively divided into these three sectors. However, each book has synthesized information which can be relevant to any of the mentioned topics. The division of literature into groups is extremely relative.

Here is an initial bibliography with following selective annotation which includes the most important theoretical works for my master thesis.
The revolution of journalist profession with the invention of modern technologies

Changes in news media forms

Web 2.0 users and their language
2. Bowman S., Willis C. (2003). We Media. How audiences are shaping the future of news and information. Published online in PDF and HTML formats: http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/
ANNOTATION

The revolution of journalist profession with the invention of modern technologies
(Historical background)

Fang, I (1997)
A History of Mass Communication. Six Information Revolutions

Six periods in Western history that fit the description of an information revolution

There are six revolutions: Writing revolution, Printing revolution, Mass Media revolution, Entertainment revolution, Communication Toolshed Home and Information Highway

Each information revolution appears to share certain characteristics with the others. For example:
- Each is based upon the invention of more than one tool of communication, such as papyrus and the phonetic alphabet, paper and printing, television and satellites, computers and Internet etc.
- The need of physical transportation to send information has been reduced as communication replaced transportation of messages

There is a tendency in information world to be changed.

The pace of information revolution is speeding up. The second revolution arrived 1,700 years after the first crested. The last four, each quite distinct, have overlapped during the 19th and 20th century.

The main accent of the 6th revolution is made on physical transportation of information. It is said that people will stay at their homes most of the time because everything will be available in the Internet (working, shopping, studying etc). But it’s not the core point of the situation that is happening now. People will always need physical transportation even to fix the computer they use.

There is also a wrong prediction that Internet will replace common social activities. It does not.

The book is a good overview of media history showing the tendency of changing in a media world. It can be good in comparing recent situation (spreading of citizen journalism) with the previous background.

Rosenberry, J., Burton, St. John III. (2010)
Public Journalism 2.0

Root principles of public journalism and citizen journalism; differences between news definitions for citizen journalism and their trained counterparts → how these differences play out in print and online. What citizen journalism can learn from public journalism?

Models of audience participation in journalism:
- Traditional journalism
- Public journalism
- Interactive journalism
- Participatory journalism
- Citizen journalism
The beginning of Public Journalism (1980s). Public journalism scholars cite the public’s disgust with the 1988 presidential campaign as a catalyst for ideas to treat elections. movement of Knight-Ridder group.

How public journalism principles and practices offers journalists, scholars and citizens insights into how digital technology and other contemporary practices can increase civic engagement and improve public life.

**Web 2.0 affects both journalists and citizens.** Journalists’ media is less popular, that of citizens - more. How to win? Start to use the same tools.

The idea of public involvement started already in 1980s because of democratic processes in society, against presidential campaign. So, it existed before Web 2.0. Then technologies allowed users to generate their own content. UGC + idea of public journalism = citizen journalism

Note: UGC influenced not only journalism but also other fields such as art, music, politics, etc.

The book gives a good classification of public and citizen journalism; gives a suggestion where citizen and professional journalists might find synergy


Is citizen journalism - blogging, open-source newsgathering, wikis, informational “mash-ups” and citizen journalism sites - transforming the nature of news? Revolution of newsgathering.

Citizen journalists feel compelled to practice journalism NOT because they see the ethos of professional journalism as illegitimate, or because they wish to invent a new form of journalism. Rather, they feel compelled to do journalism because they believe that professional journalists are not doing their jobs.

Citizen journalists describe their work in ways similar to traditional journalism, except for the significance they place on interactivity.

The profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history when, for the first time, it is threatened by not just new technologies and competitors but, potentially, the audience it serves.

Good explanation of citizen journalists’ mission. Article should be discussed in comparison with other articles from the same book (Public journalism 2.0)


As user-generated services and online communities gain popularity, established media institutions are facing one of the biggest challenges in their time. How established media institutions launch mobile services as a strategy to regain market power. How mobile services are understood to be more directed towards individual users.
In the 1990s, media institutions started launching **Internet services**, and during 2000s they are moving towards **mobile phones**. The use of these 2 platforms has two main functions for traditional media institutions: channels of distribution and channels of communication.

**Channels of distribution** help media institutions to spread their news more widely. Some examples are newspapers’ online services, broadcasters' Web-TV services and mobile distribution of text, music and video.

**Channels of communication** - receiving feedback from the audience, for example, SMS-based television (Pop Idol), forums, comments, etc.

All established media institutions analysed seem to view the exploitation of mobile media in **parallel** with their online activities. Making the new media platforms their own by transferring well-known content categories and brands.

This article proves that traditional media **are not replaced** with new media platforms. Old media tries to be **innovative** and quickly reacts to new media devices making it profitable for itself. Means, that newspapers or TV don’t disappear but try to find new tools to keep the market positions.

This point of view **changes the discourse** of my thesis. Previously I was more inclined to the statement that new media replaces the old one. Actually, it maybe transforms it rather than ejects.

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**Brody, E. W. (1990)**  
Communication tomorrow: new audiences, new technologies, new media

The book demonstrates the power of Information Age.

Those who read and listen will be more and more skeptical of message content.

Quite **old theory**, wrong predictions.

**Gitelman, L. (2006)**  
Always already new: media, history and the data of culture.

Tries to measure the newness of new media. **What forms media history?**

All media were once new.
Changes in news media forms


The book is about practices and techniques of writing and editing for an online audience and helping journalists to take full advantage of the new opportunities offered by digital media.

Specifics of online audience. How to purposefully blend text, graphics, multimedia, hypertext and interactive elements. How trends in personal publishing, especially blogging, and social networking are forcing change in journalism?

Generally speaking, journalists should:
- Maximize truth
- Minimize harm
- Provide a fair account

How journalists attract audience nowadays (competing with citizen journalism)?
- Making news fun (“Budget Balancer” - try to balance the Minnesota state budget; “Candidate Match Game” made by USAtoday.com - get an idea of which presidential candidates come closest to your own view)
- The Institute for Interactive Journalism jlab.org
- Mobile news
- Twitter (limit to 140 characters, making news brief)

Online writers and editors are expected to interact with the audience
Web users don't merely read, they interact

Online media are not static or just one-way

How do traditional media involve participants to make journalism? What are the values of user-generated environment? Goals of online writing journalists.

Main changes of journalism (more democratic, making news fun, interactivity, reporting fast and briefly)
Values of traditional journalism (credibility, responsibility, influence, sustainability)
Values of online journalism (accuracy, reasonableness, transparency, fairness, independence)

Technology-driven changes are democratizing the profession

Interesting links of citizen journalism websites:

Principles of Citizen Journalism www.kcnn.org/principles/
News of the Future www.gannett.gci/ingocenter
Traditional journalism with assignments made by citizens www.newassignment.net
Traditional media leverage participatory journalism. Examples:
- CNN tries to segregate user-generated content (UGC) into a separate site [www.iReport.com](http://www.iReport.com). But how do they choose what to publish? The editors “make no guarantees about the content”!
- Korea’s OhMyNews, the world’s largest pro-am news site, with tens of thousands of citizen reporters who are paid for their stories. Use the rule “every citizen is a reporter”.
- New West Network collects contributions from citizens in several cities and towns in eight states.

This book made me think of following questions:
New media leads to raise of citizen journalism (the technologies and social situation made it appear) Should I give examples of Estonian media? Should my thesis be more concerned to journalists or citizens? How do journalists and “people formerly known as audience” use the new media? Equally? Will the new media replace the traditional media? (probably not) Will journalists retrain themselves or just lose their jobs? How did participatory journalism start in Estonia (if it actually did)? Talking about traditional media should I limit theory with only print media or include TV and radio as well?


One more book about online journalism. How to handle journalistic communication in a hypermedium.

The online journalism is subject to the same obligations and the same set of fundamental values as the other forms of journalism. It’s accurate, understanding, independent. What is new? An attraction value. Can online journalism be as much attractive as TV and newspapers?

Book was written in a time when online started to develop. There was a question how to make online journalism more popular. Now the more important question for my research is how to save traditional journalism (and is it necessary to save it at all?)

Online journalism must stimulate audience interest

Author is speaking only from the journalist’s point of view. Audience is interpreted only as consumers, not like active participants (book published in 1997)

Book can be useful regarding the early development of online journalism

This article provides an authors’ view of how the news stories, published in the Internet ("hyperstories"), must look like. Author describes the methods of writing a hyperstory, hyperstory prototypes, psychological model of the reader, hyperstory databases.

The hypermedia news story would not be a single file or text with accompanying photos or graphics. It would have many sections or blocks, each though of a separate computer file. The hypermedia news story is a network of computer files that are interlinked.

To fully serve as a news medium, a computer-based interactive system requires a wide range of links or choices within stories.

Attractive and surprising headlines, access to databases, many people involving, high users activity...

I think author gave more or less right prediction of what has actually happened 10 years after. In this article I see the prototypes of Wikipedia and other modern media resources. However, author underestimates the possibilities of Internet. According to his notion, Internet is only a medium. But Internet is actually an essential part of our lives.

Being a journalist himself, author is trying to reform the journalists’ methods according to the spread use of computers. The article shows that journalists were aware of news concept changing already in 1997. And their predictions came to be. Their concept of linking refers to interactivity. That’s the core of new media and new journalism today.


The current practices and future possibilities of Web Journalism; the characteristics of the Web that distinguish it from traditional media.

The Web as an individual news medium

The WWW is a news medium in the sense that all web sites need to post new information to keep visitors coming back

The Web is destined to change journalism, particularly in its news-gathering and presentation functions

The book provides several proofs that Web is really changing journalism
Web 2.0 users and their language


This book provides readers with a cultural/historical account of the blog, analyzes the different aspects of this growing phenomenon in terms of its past. Author introduces a history and analysis of a truly democratic technology that is becoming more important to our lives every day.

Book answers the question: How seriously can we take the blogs?

The blogs that became so popular over the last eight years are more than just a function of technology. The blogs are simply allowed by technology, not that they are caused by it. The cultural forces that lead individuals to adopt the blogs so readily as a means of political expression arose long before the technology appeared.

Press moved away from people because it became too commercial and professional (unlike the blogs).

Government has been too slow to regulate Internet (as they regulated press, radio and TV). That’s why blogs went out of control. It allowed blogs greater latitude in expressions than can be found in other media.

NB! The political blogs has been a spontaneous response by the public to the failures of professional, commercial journalism. But not the ONLY response. Remember about Public journalism movement (see the book Public Journalism 2.0). 1990’s. Knight Redder organization working from ideas generated by journalism scholar Jay Rosen.

Citizen journalism. The origins of citizen journalism lay in 19th century. The newspapers who didn’t have enough money and resources had to compete with other editions and somehow fill the pages with news. They often published letters from people (for example, about foreign countries they visited). This was a simple and relatively inexpensive way. Cheap journalism. Editors were happy to get it.

Bloggers may serve the same function nowadays. The official publishers can print their stories in order to narrow a gap between journalism and audience. But they are not so eager to do that.

Citizen journalism is not a planned movement as Public journalism. It appeared occasionally.

Liebling’s theory: the reporter (records the events), the interpretive reporter (adds meanings to events) and the expert (the commentator, the pundit). Bloggers are the last type.

Journalists don’t want citizen’s help. They are sensing these changes as attack.

NB! Even though many news media entities sponsor their own blogs, they often view them more in a “letters to editor” context than as a new way for the professional journalists to relate to the public, possibly leading to an entirely new type of journalism. Instead of sensing that the blogs may provide a new intersection between citizens and journalists, many within the profession are unwilling to see them as more as unwarranted amateurs.
The blogs allow media amateurs to participate in high-profile discussions avoiding appealing to official media. When the pundits have no reputation outside of the media to protect, they are more likely to fall to the temptation of using the media to their own advantage instead of expressing knowledge through the media. Their focus narrows only to themselves.

Are our media responsible for the people or to the people?

Why journalists have lost their power and respect? They blame technologies but actually the reason is their attitude. They think of themselves like of a very special elite, they are not willing to work with public.

professionals + citizens

If the profession is going to regain its respect from the public, then, the reporters need to become the public’s adjutants, making sure they are putting into public hands the information needed for resolution of the questions the public is addressing. Citizen journalism is attempting to do exactly that, but would certainly welcome the professionals, too.

Journalists have been taught the covering, not the topic.

NB! The most relevant book to my thesis. Studies about blogs are essential for my work as far as they are directly connected with citizen journalism.

Bowman S., Willis C. (2003). We Media. How audiences are shaping the future of news and information. Published online in PDF and HTML formats: http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/

“My readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, no matter what his or her beat. And it’s a great opportunity, not a threat, because when we ask our readers for their help and knowledge, they are willing to share it — and we can all benefit”

Participatory journalism: The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.

The book provides several proofs that Web is really changing journalism

