

Citizen Journalist: A Case Study of Audience Participation in Mainstream TV News Production in India

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Abstract : This paper examines citizen journalism in India, specifically the inclusion of user-generated content (UGC) by mainstream media, by focusing on the case study of the Citizen Journalist show on CNN-News 18, a national television news broadcaster. It studies the processes of production involved in Citizen Journalist to find out how professional journalists and citizens interact to put together the show in order to help readers understand the relationship between journalists and the public in the evolving media landscape of India, the world's largest democracy, and a leader in the Global South. Using an in-depth case study approach involving newsroom ethnography, interviews, and an examination of Citizen Journalist content, it studies the implications of audience participation for traditional journalistic routines and values - specifically gatekeeping and objectivity. Citizen Journalist began to much fanfare and promise about including neglected citizen views and voices. Based on evidence gathered, this study, however, argues that claims made by CNN-News18 about democratizing news production through Citizen Journalist were overstated. It made some effort to do this and broadcast a lot of important stories. But overall, in terms of bringing in citizen voices, it did not live up to its initial promise because the show was anchored in traditional journalistic norms and roles and the channel's economic imperatives. Professional journalists were ironically the producers of 'citizen journalism' in this case. Mainstream media's authority in defining journalistic work -who says what, where, when, why, and how- remains predominant in India. This has implications for democratic participation in India. The example of Citizen Journalist -the model it followed, its partial success, and many limitations- could well presage outcomes for other news outlets, in India and beyond, which copy its template.

Keywords : citizen journalism, digital journalism, participatory journalism, public sphere

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