They shoot citizen journalists, don't they?

Journalism in the era of citizens: Curating vs. outsourcing

Hanna Nikkanen

Contents
1. Introduction
2. History
3. Curating vs. outsourcing
4. Four cases
5. Upstream risks
6. Downstream risks
7. Conclusion

When we talk about "curating online content", we often talk about outsourcing risky activities to unprotected volunteers. What do journalists need to know about responsibility in outsourcing?

1. Introduction

Journalists used to be called the gatekeepers of the public
 sphere, but the public sphere no longer has walls or gates. There are two billion internet users in the world. Each one of them can publish a message without convincing a gatekeeping journalist of its importance.

The role that journalism plays in society has changed a great deal in the past fifteen years. This article will take a critical look at *curator journalism*, an umbrella term for the numerous ways in which professional journalists combine their own work with material found from online sources. [1]

---

1 http://www.cjr.org/realtalk/journalists_vs_curators.php

To understand the context of this article, we should look at five important trends.

1. Newspapers are facing a financial crisis. Advertising revenues dwindle as readers turn to the internet for their news. Media companies slash their budgets for labour-intensive and slow projects such as investigative journalism.
2. Non-professional journalism
3. , or citizen journalism, becomes nearly indistinguishable from professional journalism, as tools develop and become cheaper, internet penetration increases globally, and a new generation of so-called digital natives comes of age.
4. Massive caches of previously hard-to-come-by or entirely secret information is released into the public sphere by open data campaigns, leakers and whistleblowers.
5. Freedom of speech on the internet becomes a more pressing issue. Citizen journalists and whistleblowers take on many tasks previously performed by professional journalists, but they are targeted by hostile governments and individuals more aggressively than their professional colleagues would have ever been.
6. Internet hoaxes and astroturfing (the practice of someone, for example an advertiser, creating fake online personas to promote their views) become more common, and they often outwit the fact-checking measures of traditional media.

Some suggest that journalism as a profession is headed for extinction. Others take quite the opposite view and see professional journalism as a solution to the challenges presented above. This latter group talks about *curatorship*. (Or, often, *crowdsourcing*; but so many meanings have latched on to that word that its use in journalism has become rather confusing.)

A curator-journalist makes sense of the chaotic digital publicity for an audience that suffers from an information overload. Curators find, digest, fact-check and repackage information that thousands of others have published on blogs and social media sites or through small media initiatives.

This means, for example, that professional journalists quote blog posts and tweets in their reports a breaking news story, and amateur YouTube videos are reproduced in newscasts. Hackers and whistleblowers publish confidential information online and newspapers reproduce it with context and analysis. Citizen journalists produce entire investigative reportages which are then lifted into mainstream publicity by professional journalists scouring the net for fresh, free-of-charge material.

The emergence of the idea of the curator-journalist in the recent years has been accompanied by a charming enthusiasm. A liberal democratic fantasy, it holds the promise of a positive change through a free market of ideas and a laissez-faire approach to the pursuit of truth. As long as the internet keeps growing vaster and freer, the fantasy suggests, then kind, honest curators will naturally create better, more truthful media products. And that is not all: the audience will receive higher-quality information about the world, and increased openness will help civil societies flourish. A win-win-win situation.[2]

The idea of journalism as curatorship forges new kinds of relationships between citizen journalists (a vast classification if there ever was any – essentially, any internet user can

---

2   See, for example, Aitamurto: Kymmenen väitettä journalismin tuhosta - ja miksi niistä ei kannata huolestua. Helsingin Sanomain Säätiö 2010.

become a citizen journalist) and the traditional media. In this article, I will look at four examples of this kind of collaboration and the questions they raise about freedom of speech, the pluralism of voices in the public sphere and the responsibilities of publishers.

While I consider myself a firm believer in citizen journalism, my look at these alliances will be critical, and I will concentrate on the risks that the aforementioned laissez-faire approach may create for internet freedom, the safety of citizen journalists, and fair, honest, accountable reporting.

I suggest that what we call curatorship should sometimes be called by a different name, *outsourcing*, and that this new interpretation might change the way we see journalistic responsibility in this changing media landscape.

Through four cases of collaboration between traditional and citizen media – leaks, activist investigations, and a hoax – I explore the responsibilities of traditional media in these new partnerships, both towards their audiences and their amateur content providers.

2. History

By the end of the first decade of the new millennium it was clear that the internet was killing newspapers. An increasing number of readers had decided that they preferred to read their news online, and advertisers were following them; yet most newspapers' online versions weren't creating enough revenue to cover their own costs. This led to a cannibalistic cycle where spending cuts affected journalistic quality, which led to a drop in readership, which led to a loss in revenue, which led to further cuts. [3]

These austerity measures were particularly hard on labour-intensive, slow and expensive projects. Funds for investigative journalism and travel were slashed.

In the meantime the amount of journalism globally produced by non-professional journalists had increased dramatically. Hundreds of millions of people suddenly had affordable, reliable access to the internet. Mobile technology made that access ubiquitous. The prices of disk space, bandwidth and semi-professional equipment dropped. The users of the internet, a once text-driven medium, embraced video – both as consumers and producers.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that consumers became producers and vice versa *everywhere* and *always*. Despite the rise of amateur news cultures and the crisis of traditional media business models, journalism continues to exist as a profession – but as one that is going through a turbulent identity struggle.

Still a few years ago the term "citizen journalism" was mainly used to refer to fairly simple forms of content: blogs published what would've once been a Letter to the Editor in a newspaper, gritty-and-fast news sites like Indymedia reported from ongoing protests. It rarely competed with professionals or questioned their ability to satisfy the audience's need for new information. That has changed.

Thousands of citizen journalists now compete with their more traditional colleagues in both

---

3   Philip Meyer: The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age. University of Missouri Press 2009; Johanna Vehkoo: Painokoneet seis, Teos 2011.

quality and impact. A blogger's exposé can shift public discourse more effectively than an article in a mainstream newspaper. Corporations, NGOs and activist groups have learned to produce fact-heavy, journalistically attractive material to back up their campaigns. Leak sites and open data projects offer citizens, journalists and citizen journalists equal access to vast caches of raw information. Amateur newscasts from the frontlines of war and disaster reach us before the first reporter has arrived at the scene.

All of this erodes our idea of the reporter as a first responder. A journalist is no longer our only pair of eyes and ears amid distant chaos or the sole interpreter of budgets, summits and geopolitical tensions.

The role of a professional journalist becomes something else: a surveyor and refiner of material produced by thousands of talented amateurs.

3. Curating vs. outsourcing

Curate, a word most often heard in art galleries, museums and zoos, is benign, yet hierarchical. From the Latin *curare,* "to care", it implies an existing collection of items being organized and cared for by a dedicated, responsible and almost omnipotent overseer.

What curating is not: a two-way interaction; a relationship.

There is another word that could be used to define the relationship between amateur online journalists and the professional journalists that use their material as a source. Instead of museums, we hear it in reports about business trends and the ethics of manufacturing. O*utsourcing*.

The comparison between outsourcing in industrial supply chains and in journalism is useful for three reasons.

1. It implies an economically motivated decision. A manufacturer will probably base their decision to outsource a part of the supply chain purely on costs. In journalism, the situation is often more complex and there are many other motivations to outsource (for example, pluralism, community relations and the fact that an amateur journalist may be the only source for the wanted information). However, as resources available for professional journalism dwindle, using free content from amateur sources certainly does become economically attractive, and this will inevitably influence outsourcing decisions made in media companies.
2. It implies a symbiotic, active, ongoing relationship, in which both partners benefit from the other's continued existence and well-being. A symbiotic relationship is not always equal: between institutional media outlets and citizen reporters or whistleblowers it is a partnership between a very large and a very small actor.
3. It implies responsibility. When a company outsources a part of their supply chain, it assumes responsibilities both upstream and downstream, to the contractor and to the consumers. [45]

If we look at the concepts of "upstream" and "downstream" from the point of view of an

---

4   See, for example, Perspectives in Responsible Sourcing: http://cscc.typepad.com/responsiblesourcing/
5   Vachon and Klassen 2009: Extending green practices across the supply chain: The impact of upstream and downstream integration. International Journal of Operations & Production Management, Vol. 26 Iss: 7.

industrial producer, this is what it might look like:

Upstream: Who shoulders the responsibility, should the contractor's workers fall ill because of poor working conditions?

Downstream: What kind of supply chain transparency and due diligence do the consumers require in order to make an informed choice about whether the product is safe and ethically produced?

Similarly, when a mainstream media outlet decides to procure a part of their raw content from amateur sources, it has upstream and downstream responsibilities.

Upstream: What will happen if an ill-planned media report places a citizen journalist in danger, or if a source is gagged by a government order?

Downstream: How will an audience member know whether an outsourced report is trustworthy?

4. Four cases

Case A. Torture in Egypt

Cairene media activist Noha Atef started chronicling incidents of police brutality and torture in Egyptian police stations and jails in 2006. "Torture in Egypt" was initially a traditional blog, publishing Atef's writings as well as linking to relevant articles. As the blog gained popularity and torture victims started sending more accounts to Atef, she focused on creating a searchable database of incidents, categorized by police station, city, type of torture and alleged perpetrator. The "Torturepedia" section of the blog features profiles of police officers implicated by victims, including photos and information about their personal lives.

At first, Noha Atef's blog Torture in Egypt aimed to compensate for certain failures by traditional actors: the national media was not reporting on torture, and human rights organizations did not have an online presence. Filling this void was a temporary task for Atef, one that was to last only until these larger actors would start fulfilling their task in chronicling the abuses and reporting about them. [6]

Atef's blog started gaining visibility in Egyptian online communities in 2009. Increased visibility led to a hike in the number of submissions from victims of police brutality, and as the online coverage became a subject of coffee table discussion in Egyptian homes and workplaces, a number of independent Egyptian newspapers – henceforth reluctant to write critically about the police – decided to start covering the issue.

Related projects have been successfully targeted by takedown requests by the Egyptian authorities. For instance, the photo-sharing service Flickr has deleted material from the "Piggipedia" image collection (founded by Atef and her fellow activist Hossam el-Hamalawy), presumably after receiving a copyright-based takedown request from someone within the Egyptian government. [7]

---

6 Personal communication, Noha Atef, October 4, 2012.
7 Connected in Cairo: Piggipedia "Censored": Internet Constraints on the Revolutionary Imagination.

Atef's family has received threats related to her work.

Case B. The Pig Factories

During the summer and autumn of 2009, Finnish animal rights activists entered dozens of pig farms in secret in order to document the animals' living conditions. The uninvited visitors' footage showed clear violations of animal protection laws: sick and injured animals and carcasses in crowded pens, being trampled by other pigs. [8]

In December 2009 the activists' spokespersons negotiated the first release of the video footage with a current affairs programme, A-Studio, at the Finnish public broadcaster YLE. An almost-simultaneous release of further images was negotiated with Fifi, an alternative online daily where I was the editor-in-chief. The material was quickly released to other media outlets through the "Sikatehtaat" ("Pig Factories") campaign website, and the story was widely reported. Two of the activists, Karry Hedberg and Saila Kivelä, later offered to be interviewed with their own names; this helped prolong the media attention that the story received.

Politically, the campaign was a major success. It lifted an issue that had previously been considered a fringe interest into the mainstream, and the ensuing public debate was overwhelmingly critical of the pig farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture.

11 pig farmers eventually sued Kivelä and Hedberg for defamation. The prosecutor demanded 180 000 euros in damages, a prison sentence for Hedberg and a suspended sentence for Kivelä. The mainstream media outlets that had published the activists' footage were not charged with any crimes. All charges except for one minor one were abandoned by a district court in 2011, but the plaintiffs have appealed the verdict, and the case continues. [9]

Case C. A Gay Girl in Damascus

Amina Abdallah Arraf al Omari, a Syrian-American English teacher and queer activist, published her writings on her blog A Gay Girl in Damascus in February-June 2011, during the early months of the Syrian uprising. Arraf's story was picked up by numerous international news sources, and she was described by "a heroine of the Syrian revolt" by The Guardian, whose reported had interviewed Arraf by email. When Arraf was reported to have been kidnapped in early June 2011, the story spread quickly through major Western news organizations. Among others, the Guardian, Washington Post and Fox News reported the disappearance, and the US State Department announced that it was looking into the issue.

Six days after the disappearence The Electronic Intifada published an article claiming that Arraf was not a real person. Instead, the writers believed her to be a fictional creation by an American couple. Soon, Tom MacMaster, an American postgraduate student at

---

http://connectedincairo.com/2011/06/11/piggipedia-censored-internet-constraints-on-the-revolutionary-imagination/

8 http://sikatehtaat.fi/sikalat-2009

9 Etelä-Suomen Sanomat: Pääosa syytteistä nurin sikatilojen salakuvausjutussa. November 15, 2012.

Edinburgh University, confessed that he had been Amina all along. [10]

"I do not believe that I have harmed anyone – I feel that I have created an important voice for issues that I feel strongly about," MacMaster wrote on Arraf's blog on June 12th.

The reaction of the public was overwhelmingly negative. Gay bloggers in the Middle East accused MacMaster of stealing their voice and trivialising their problems; Syrians complained that the al-Assad regime would use the hoax to accuse all opposition activists of being foreign puppets. (That, to some extent, happened.)

Case D. The Balatonring leak

In 2009, Hungarian investigative journalist Tamás Bodoky requested to see a feasibility study that had convinced the Hungarian government to grant 74.7 million euros in state aid and 55 million euros as a loan from the Hungarian Development Bank to "Balatonring", a new motor race course in Sávoly. The journalist's request was denied. [11]

Soon, three developments were on the way. An internet campaign targeted the Prime Minister, demanding him to publish the study. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union pursued the issue in court. Sources from within the institutions involved started leaking materials to Bodoky and the HCLU.

The collaboration between one professional journalist, bloggers, an NGO, whistleblowers and hundreds of ordinary internet users resulted in a partial disclosure by the government, and eventually a judge ordered the entire study to be made public. This revealed clauses that would have effectively channeled government money into private hands, and eventually the Hungarian Development Bank retreated from the project, leaving investors looking for private funding.

Several participants in the campaign later reported that they felt pressured by their employers to drop the subject, and some feared for their safety. Bodoky ended up quitting his job at the popular news portal index.hu because of a disagreement with his employer over the way his corruption-related stories were edited. He went on to found the Átlátszo Center for Investigative Journalism and a related news portal, atlatszo.hu.

5. Upstream risks

Earlier I talked about the responsibilities that must be defined when a manufacturer outsources a part of their production. Some of those contracts are made with upstream partners: people and companies involved in the early parts of the manufacturing process.

When traditional journalism outsources content production to online communities and citizen journalists, those upstream partners are often regular people who tend to enjoy fairly limited access to financial and legal resources. The risks they face may be greater than those that a professional journalist does, and their ability to cope with those risks is

---

10 Benjamin Doherty: Reflecting on the Amina hoax. http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/benjamin-doherty/reflecting-amina-hoax-coverage-analysis-and-investigation

11 Personal communication, Balázs Dénes, June 22, 2012; Tamás Bodoky, June 24, 2012; Tivadar Huttl, June 25, 2012

limited.

An armour of professional visibility and institutional backing protects a professional journalist: if they land in legal trouble, a publisher will provide lawyers, and if they get threatened or hurt, a global community of outraged colleagues will speak out. Citizen journalists can rarely rely on similar support. Thus citizen journalists are more vulnerable than professionals to violence, frivolous lawsuits and extrajudicial online takedowns.

In short, citizen journalism can be threatened more easily than professional journalism.

Censorship, intermediary liability and net neutrality

In case A, the Egyptian image-sharing project Piggipedia found some of their content deleted by Flickr without explanation. This kind of seemingly arbitrary censorship by private online services rarely affects major media companies. A large company can afford to host content on their own servers, making them independent of services such as YouTube and Flickr. When it comes to internet service providers, a large company can generally trust that the value of their business alone creates an incentive for the ISP to avoid conflictive measures, such as unexpected content takedowns. [12]

Smaller, non-professional media have been dealt a much weaker hand. Service providers know that it will generally be cheaper to quit hosting a small client's controversial content than to become involved in legal battles with would-be censors.

The erosion of net neutrality (the principle that all network traffic is of equal value, regardless of the origin, destination or type of data, and one type of traffic can't be prioritized over others) poses another risk for non-professionals. Small, volunteer-based groups often use high-bandwidth services – for example streaming video – yet won't be able to pay for prioritized traffic.

Frivolous lawsuits

In case B, the Finnish pig-farmers decided to press charges against a group of activists, but not the mainstream media. The farmers' demands were rather drastic, which raised the suspicion of the lawsuit being an example of SLAPP, "strategic litigation against protected speech": an attempt to use the possibility of high legal costs, long court processes and jail sentences to scare activists and citizen journalists off the case.

SLAPP is not very effective tool against established professional journalists, who can generally rely on their employers to buffer the cost and time drain involved in a long lawsuit. Self-funded citizen journalists, on the other hand, may see the possibility of a lawsuit as debilitating, even when the suit is clearly frivolous.

Violence and unemployment

In case A, Noha Atef's family received threats because of Atef's investigative work. In case B, the risk of physical violence did not manifest, but it could have: in an earlier case, a Finnish fur farmer shot at a group of five animal rights activists as they were leaving the farm, injuring several of them.

---

12 See, for example, Rebecca MacKinnon: Consent of the Networked. Basic Books 2012.

In case D, a number of people – from government whistleblowers to anti-corruption campaigners, citizen journalists and professional journalists – started feeling threatened as their investigation into high-level corruption gathered momentum. The importance of leaks as a journalistic source has increased dramatically with the emergence of whistleblowing online services, such as WikiLeaks, and recent years have seen several high-profile cases where whistleblowers have been fired from their jobs and sometimes prosecuted.

Loss of sources' anonymity

Security concerns often force citizen journalists to operate anonymously. Digital technology makes it easier for a professional journalist to make contact with an anonymous source, but the protection of their anonymity can be complicated. In some unfortunate cases, a professional journalist's oversight in digital security has lead to a citizen journalist being outed, even harmed. [13]

Temptation to outsource risky activities

The animal rights activists of case B have pointed out in interviews that many professional journalists have complained to them about their superiors' reluctance to allow their own staff to engage in investigative journalism that carries both legal and physical risks. However, the same superiors are willing to accept such material from citizen journalists. [14]

From a corporate social responsibility point of view the question is whether these risks should fall under the responsibility of the mainstream media outlets that use citizen journalists as their content suppliers. The question, which I will not attempt to answer here, concerns the outsourcing contract between the buyer and seller of content services. Can these risks somehow be shared?

6. Downstream risks

When we shop at, say, a toy store, we tend to understand that most of the products on sale are not manufactured by the actual brands. They are made by nameless subcontractors halfway across the world, and the only reason why we trust them to be safe to use is the seller's responsibility: a consumer with a grievance can direct their complaints to the brand, not the distant subcontractor. This responsibility creates an incentive for the brand to make sure that the subcontractor is not stuffing their teddy bears with toxic fibers. If this wasn't the case, and sellers could shift blame to mysterious nameless factories on other continents, we probably wouldn't trust their wares much.

When a media outlet outsources content production, it, too, may have to answer questions about their responsibility towards consumers – particularly about the truthfulness of their reports.

Not all of curator journalism is lazy. However, curating is sometimes used as an excuse to set the bar low for journalistic integrity by journalists who are either lazy, pressed for time

---

13 See, for example, Matthieu Aikins: The Spy Who Came In From The Code.
   http://www.cjr.org/feature/the_spy_who_came_in_from_the_c.php?page=all
14 Personal communication, Saila Kivelä, March 15, 2012.

or simply unaccustomed to verify sources online. [15]

Hoaxes

Case C is probably the most widely know online hoax that has recently managed to fool traditional journalists. Amina Arraf's blog is, as such, unremarkable; the internet is teeming with similar invented identities. Their creation certainly cannot (and probably should not) be prevented. As the famous New Yorker cartoon declared already in 1993: "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog".

Astroturfing

Governments, political movements and corporations have embraced the practice of posing as a citizen journalist, a social media user or an internet commenter to promote a view or a product. Technical solutions for massive astroturfing operations – i.e. managing hundreds of fictional online personas – already exist, some developed by national security services with the hopes of influencing political processes overseas.

Access to a credulous journalist can be a jackpot for a professional astroturfer. When a respected media outlet publishes outsourced content, it lends its own credibility to the source. This, along with the size of the audience, makes mainstream media attention very attractive to someone trying to influence public opinion.

Invented internet personas become problematic when they slip through the fact-checking mechanisms of traditional media. Audiences tend to assume that there is a more-or-less watertight process of fact verification in place before a story gets published; yet cases like Amina Arraf's prove that this is not always the case, especially when journalism moves towards curatorship of online content.

Bias

Curating content is hardly a neutral task. The use of local content can lend an air of authenticity to a news report, but the process of picking a few online voices out of a pool of hundreds of options will inevitably amplify certain voices and mute others; and opinions that are not represented online are ignored altogether.

Pre-existing biases in the newsroom will not disappear with the inclusion of internet sources. In case D, the Hungarian news portal index.hu grew wary of an employee's method of collaborating with citizen journalists, activists and whistleblowers when their work on a corruption story started to affect local politicians and businessmen. Eventually the journalist had to leave the publication and pursue the story without the security and scope provided by a wealthy publisher.

In case C, the success of Tom MacMaster's hoax in the European and North American media may be partially explained by journalists' subconscious bias. Out of hundreds of thousands of Arab voices in the blogosphere, Western journalists flocked to the one that was in fact not an Arab voice at all, but a Western one. It is important to note that this was done out of pure intentions: the journalists were genuinely touched, each for their

---

15 See the Nieman Report for summer 2012: Truth in the age of social media.
   http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/issue/100072/Summer-2012.aspx

individual reasons, by Arraf's story. [16]

When a curator-journalist chooses an individual voice out of a seemingly infinite marketplace of information, it is hard not to be influenced by one's pre-existing ideas of the world.

Subconscious *cognitive bias* is a profoundly human experience. We fall prey to so-called *confirmation bias* when we remember information selectively, forgetting about things that don't support our own beliefs; we display *wishful thinking* when we report about things that we would like to be true instead of things that are true. On an individual level, cognitive biases are nearly impossible to avoid. (A recent study in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology even suggests that a high cognitive ability makes people more vulnerable to bias, simply because they believe themselves to be intelligent enough to be impartial.) [17]

Cognitive bias can become a collective media phenomenon when a large number of journalists approaches an issue from a similarly biased angle, thus amplifying similar voices across the media field.

One possible example of this is the English-language mainstream media coverage of the Arab uprisings in 2011, in which social media sources and bloggers were often quoted as "authentic" voices of the region. Those sources tended to be young, English-speaking, educated, urban, middle-class and culturally liberal – easy for Western journalists and audiences to relate to, and certainly quite representative of the small segment of the region's population that spends a lot of time online. When the first post-uprising elections in Egypt and Tunisia resulted in conservative victories, many people in the West reacted with surprise: the voters' choice did not reflect at all the supposedly authentic voices that they had previously observed in news reports from the region. [18]

Online debate used as an excuse to disseminate rumours

At its most unambitious, curator journalism equals publishing rumours under the pretext that they were already reported online. The responsibility for the veracity of the presented story, or the ethics of reporting it, is delegated to the original source. The reporter claims to be merely "reporting the online debate", while in reality the mass media attention will inevitably feed into the calamity and become a part of it.

For example, American media scholar Henry Jenkins has suggested that the visibility and longevity of the so-called birther movement in the United States – a politically conservative movement claiming that president Obama was not born on U.S. territory – may have received a considerable boost from mainstream media reports that were not addressing the question of Obama's birthplace directly, but rather reporting about the online debate surrounding the issue. [19]

7. Conclusions

16 Jillian York: Doubting Amina. http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102768/Doubting-Amina.aspx
17 Jonah Lehrer: Why Smart People Are Stupid. http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/frontal-cortex/2012/06/daniel-kahneman-bias-studies.html
18 Korpiola and Nikkanen: Arabikevät. Avain 2012.
19 Personal communication, Henry Jenkins, June 22, 2012.

In this article I have tried to outline the risks involved in outsourcing content production to citizen journalists. This is not to say that I personally oppose the practice. Quite the opposite; I believe that stories like Noha Atef's provide ample proof that interaction between citizen journalists and traditional journalists may greatly increase the quality of both as well as give valuable support for the surrounding civil society.

However, I believe that the mainstream media is often naive and careless in its view of "curating" social media and citizen journalism.

Potential worrying trends in curator journalism:

1. Seemingly pluralistic reports become, in fact, more monotonous, as journalists use online sources to cherry-pick the views that correspond with their own (often subconscious) agenda. Filter bubbles – situations where a member of the audience only receives information that corresponds with their pre-existing views and values – become increasingly impermeable.
2. Lack of financial resources for in-depth reporting increases the amount of citizen media quotations in news reports, but decreases the amount of time spent fact-checking said quotations. Successful hoaxes and instances of astroturfing are common. Audiences lose faith in professional journalism and the crisis of the traditional media deepens.
3. More and more citizen journalists and whistleblowers are killed or imprisoned because of their work. Sometimes their security has been compromised because of their uncompensated collaboration with professional journalists. Censorship, both government-mandated and private, threatens citizen journalism. The erosion of the principle of net neutrality benefits large companies, but complicates things for everyone else.

The solutions for these problems will be complicated and varied. Different media outlets use online content in very different ways, and therefore the concerns they must address are not the same. A general method of responding to the aforementioned worrying trends would be frustratingly vague: "Better journalism" – or, a slightly more detailed to-do list for professional journalists:

1. When quoting citizen journalists in a story, the more context, history, and transparency the reader is given, the better. Who is the blogger being quoted, how were they found, and why were they chosen from among possibly thousands of others? Any quality news organization should have editorial processes and ethical guidelines that aim to identify and prevent the cherry-picking of online quotations, similar to ones that are in place when choosing interviewees. The more complicated the subject is, the more expertise is required from the people who are in charge of the outsourcing process.
2. Fact-checking measures must be developed to correspond to the challenges, and resources used for fact-checking should increase, not decrease. [20]
3. News organizations must define their responsibilities towards external content producers, even highly unusual ones, such as whistleblowers or hackers. This will mean, for example, a commitment to cover potential legal costs, or to participate in

---

20 Lila King: Vetting Citizen Journalism. http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102767/Vetting-Citizen-Journalism.aspx

campaigns against the persecution of citizen journalists. Ethical guidelines for outsourcing content must be developed. Censorship, surveillance and other internet freedom issues must be analyzed not only from the (often rather protected) point of view of the news organization, but also from the point of view of the regular people whose voluntary labour the organization benefits from.