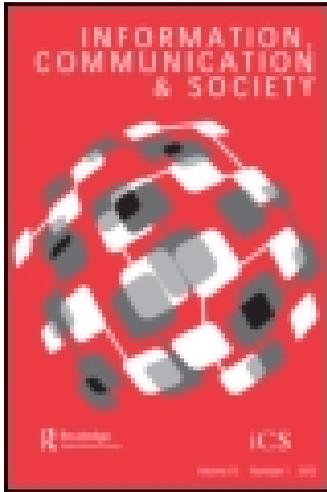


This article was downloaded by: [Skidmore College], [Andrew Lindner]

On: 23 February 2015, At: 13:21

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Information, Communication & Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rics20>

Professional journalists in 'citizen' journalism

Andrew M. Lindner^a, Emma Connell^b & Erin Meyer^b

^a Department of Sociology, Skidmore Colleges, 815 N. Broadway, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, USA

^b Department of Sociology and Social Work, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, USA

Published online: 19 Feb 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Andrew M. Lindner, Emma Connell & Erin Meyer (2015): Professional journalists in 'citizen' journalism, Information, Communication & Society, DOI:

[10.1080/1369118X.2015.1012530](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1012530)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1012530>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Professional journalists in ‘citizen’ journalism

Andrew M. Lindner^{a*} , Emma Connell^b  and Erin Meyer^b 

^a*Department of Sociology, Skidmore Colleges, 815 N. Broadway, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, USA;*

^b*Department of Sociology and Social Work, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, USA*

(Received 25 September 2014; accepted 19 January 2015)

Scholars, journalists, and laypeople alike have argued that the relatively new field of citizen journalism (CJ) offers a space where citizens can act as amateur reporters to challenge the dominance of mainstream media. However, contrary to popular expectations, a large number of CJ sites include current or former professional journalists as contributors, calling into question the new field’s independence from the mainstream media. Using a content analysis of a sample ($n = 326$) drawn from the largest sampling frame of English-language CJ websites based in the United States to date ($n = 1958$), we explore potential explanations for the presence of professional journalists as contributors on CJ sites. In a series of logistic regression analyses, we find evidence that for-profit CJ sites and those with editorial staffs are more likely to have professional journalists. Furthermore, we find that sites with professional journalists do not offer significantly different content when controlling for other factors. Based on these findings, we theorize that CJ websites seek out professional journalists as a means of gaining legitimacy within a new organizational field. These results indicate a growing professionalization within the field of CJ and the persistence of a public sphere dominated by elite actors.

Keywords: citizen journalism; professionalization; public sphere; Internet studies; organizational fields; media sociology

Over the past decade, scholars and popular commentators have heralded the growth of ‘citizen journalism’. Ranging from ad-funded micro-blogs to non-profit, crowd-sourced investigative journalism to the citizen-reporters of the ‘Arab Spring’, this emergent form has been hailed as a democratized alternative to corporate media. Yet, some evidence suggests that many of these supposedly amateur citizen journalists have worked as professional journalists (Carpenter, Nah, & Chung, 2013; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). In this study, using a content analysis of citizen journalism (CJ) websites, we explore the organizational characteristics and content of CJ sites with and without professional contributors. The findings offer initial insights into what professional reporters offer fledgling CJ ventures in terms of legitimacy and/or unique journalistic practices in a still developing organizational field.

This study has two key contributions. First, its sample is drawn from the largest and most generalizable sampling frame of English-language CJ sites in the United States to date, allowing us to observe the wider field of American CJ and not a mere subset. Second, by exploring factors associated with professional journalists’ participation in CJ, this study contributes to our understanding of professionalization within CJ and what it may mean for the future of journalism and

*Corresponding author. Email: alindner@skidmore.edu

the public sphere. We begin by reviewing existing sociological literature on CJ, the public sphere, and organizational behavior. Next, we describe our unique data set of CJ sites. Finally, we describe the findings of several logistic regression analyses and draw some preliminary conclusions.

Background

Journalism and the public sphere

What conditions are necessary for a democratic society? Though schoolhouse definitions of ‘democracy’ tend to focus narrowly on formal systems of representational government, equally important to any democratic society is the vitality of its civil society and institutions of political communication. A society with an elected legislature but a disengaged public and elite-dominated discourse is not a terribly democratic one. According to Habermas (1989), the backbone of a democratic society is a robust ‘public sphere’, or a space where ‘private citizens come together as a public’ to engage in critical discussion and debate. The ideal public sphere has four characteristics: (1) it is *inclusive* of people of different social classes, ages, races, etc., (2) has a *disregard of status*, judging people’s ideas on their own merit, not on the social status of the speaker, (3) engages in *rational-critical discourse*, and (4) addresses issues of *common concern*.

These conditions can exist in societies without representational government or be absent in societies with ‘democratically elected’ officials. Thus, according to Habermas’ (1989) account, the bourgeois public sphere flourished in the high-minded and open London coffeehouses and Parisian salons of the eighteenth century. These societies lacked formal democratic institutions, but the vital public sphere helped foment democratic social action nonetheless. Even if Habermas’ portrait of the public sphere in the eighteenth century is a bit more rosy than the historical reality as critics have charged (Fraser, 1990), his conception of the public sphere offers an idealized standard against which we can compare contemporary forms of democratic discourse.

In sharp contrast to the ideal, in contemporary western democracies, Habermas (1989) argues that the public sphere is jeopardized by a capitalist mass media system that both dominates and ‘pre-structures’ nearly all public debate. Substantial bodies of research across a number of disciplines have documented the shortcomings of professional journalism as practiced by mainstream, often for-profit, news outlets. From the tendency toward sensationalism (Semetko & Valkenburg, 1998) and outrage (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011) to the overreliance on official sources over activists (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) to underreporting of wrongdoing by corporate parent companies (Chomsky & Herman, 2008), the practices of contemporary ‘professional journalism’ tend to contribute to an elite-dominated public sphere in which discourse is structured non-democratically.

Carey (2008) describes the current approach of the news media as an ‘information’ model rather than a ‘conversation’ model and Goode (2009) calls the professional journalism’s approach ‘vertical’ rather than ‘horizontal’. Both conceptions understand the contemporary press’s current approach as lacking in the type of inclusivity, disregard of status, and attention to issues of common (rather than elite) concern that Habermas (1989) saw as essential to the public sphere. But if professional journalism’s model has been ‘vertical’, ‘informational’, or elite-dominated, the great promise of the Internet is its capacity for expanding horizontal conversations. Many mainstream news outlets use online portals (e.g. CNN’s iReport) to facilitate citizen newsgathering, asking the public to submit photos, videos, and commentary on breaking events (Palmer, 2012). This form of ‘participatory journalism’, citizen-created content facilitated by a major news organization, represents a significant step toward a more ‘conversational’ model but still allows elites to define the agenda (Goode, 2009).

Citizen journalism

In recent years, scholars searching for powerful examples of the Internet's promise for a renewed public sphere have often cited the growth of CJ. Unlike participatory journalism, CJ is created independent of mainstream news organizations (Goode, 2009). While the term

citizen journalism' began to be used in the early 2000s, the practice of ordinary folks sharing news is older than journalism as a profession (Gillmor, 2004). Since the late 1990s, however, the Internet has drastically improved citizens' abilities to uncover the news themselves and provided more accessible means to disseminate this information. As Gillmor (2004) writes, because of the Internet 'we could all write, not just read, in ways never before possible. (p. 24)

Although CJ certainly has the *potential* to contribute to a democratized public sphere, much of the popular commentary and scholarship on the subject has veered toward the hyperbolic and romantic. Goode (2009) explains that 'there remains a tendency to invoke a modernist, heroic narrative in which individual citizens ... become flag bearers of a nascent "fifth estate"' (p. 1290). The Egyptian protester with a smartphone, the engaged citizen who files Freedom of Information Act requests in her spare time, the hyper-local blogger covering the misdeeds of his hometown Board of Education – these are the prevailing images of the citizen journalist. And they make two important and potentially inaccurate assumptions about CJ. First, these images imply that citizen journalists are 'ordinary' folks who are *amateur* journalists, untrained and not paid for their labor (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). Second, it constructs the citizen journalist *in opposition to* (or at least as an alternative to) mainstream professional journalism, outside the 'interpretative community' of the professionals and not obliged to adhere to their 'common set of beliefs and normative practices' (Robinson & DeShano, 2011, p. 3). As Waisbord (2014) enthusiastically describes it, 'The rise of digital CJ signals cracks in the control that industrial journalism had in the provision of information for mass publics' (p. 185). In the dominant story about CJ, a clear dividing line is drawn between professional journalists working for corporate for-profits and citizen journalists nobly working for the common good (Goode, 2009; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Waisbord, 2014).

In reality, the definitions of both 'professional journalism' and 'citizen journalism' are contested and the distinction between the two is murky. 'Professional journalism' is both an occupational category and a 'field of practice' (Waisbord, 2013, p. 15). As a field of practice, professional journalism is a body of knowledge, norms, and beliefs that are generally shared by practitioners. As an occupational category, professional journalists are people who are paid for engaging those practices that are seen as legitimate within the field. For our purposes, we define a professional journalist as a person with past or present occupational experience with a news organization that adheres to mainstream journalistic practices. This definition is sufficiently broad to include people with experience as a reporters, editors, and producers for print and broadcast media, but also professionals working for online publications that still adhere to most mainstream journalistic practices (e.g. Slate, Salon, Vox, etc.).

Even less settled is what CJ is. Many definitions of CJ tend to emphasize the relationship between citizen journalists and their communities. Carpenter (2010), for example, defines CJ as 'publishing information online to benefit a community' (p. 1064). Rutigliano (2008) defines CJ with four main points:

- 1) it is not produced by a traditional news organization; 2) it is produced by a group; 3) it is open to audience contributions and participation; 4) it strives to cover marginalized communities through recruitment of members of these communities and coverage of these communities. (p. 45)

For Rutigliano, CJ must serve not only a community, but specifically a community that is systematically excluded from professional journalism. By contrast, Goode (2009) seeks to expand

greatly the definition, writing, '[CJ] is (1) not an exclusively online phenomenon, (2) not confined to explicitly "alternative" news sources, and (3) includes "metajournalism" as well as the practices of journalism itself.' A reasonable compromise might be Kaufhold, Valenzuela, and Zúñiga's (2010) definition:

Citizen journalism is defined by a number of attributes which make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, and often unedited publication of content, and may feature plain language, distinct story selection and news judgment, especially hyper-local issues, free accessibility, and interactivity. (p. 517)

However, existing research has shown that some CJ websites share nearly all of the characteristics of professional journalism outlets, including profit orientations, paid contributors, and the editing of content before publication. (Carpenter et al., 2013). To capture the largest possible range of CJ, for the purposes of our study, we have sought to include all sites purporting to exemplify 'citizen journalism', 'citizen reporting', 'citizen media', and other related phenomena. In doing so, we allow for the possibility that existing CJ may violate some of the assumptions of existing literature.

What do we know about citizen journalism sites?

Much of the existing literature on CJ has taken the form of theorizing the field (Allan, 2013; Goode, 2009; Waisbord, 2014) or case studies exploring the impact of CJ in a particular context. For example, Allan (2007) explored how citizen journalists (or 'instant reporters') during the 2005 London bombings posted videos, photos, and personal accounts to blogs. Television outlets eager for content quickly co-opted much of this reporting, but the net effect was to 'recast' the mainstream press's coverage to reflect the individual experiences of citizens. Other case studies highlight not the dramatic, event-based form of CJ, but community journalism, which often provides far more banal coverage of local issues and events. Rutigliano's (2008) study of four community CJ sites found that the sites offered 'increased coverage of people who are traditionally not found in mainstream news, or, if they are, are portrayed as stereotypes' (p. 2). Although such studies tell us much about the dynamics of particular forms of CJ and how they contrast with traditional media outlets, they tend to focus on the most idealized examples of CJ and tell us little about the wider field as a whole.

Other research has used qualitative interviews and survey methods to better understand the characteristics and aims of citizen journalists. In contrast to traditional reporters, citizen journalists 'focus on gathering and creating engaging content less regularly for a smaller, more homogenized group of people' (Carpenter et al. 2013, p. 2). In many cases, citizen journalists aim to rectify the shortcomings of mainstream media (Meadows, 2012), fill in gaps left by newspapers that have folded (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009; Robinson & DeShano, 2011), or complement the offerings of local professional journalism (Lewis et al., 2010).

A smaller set of studies have conducted quantitative content analyses to examine the characteristics and content of larger samples of CJ articles. In a study of 480 articles from 72 CJ sites and 482 articles from 50 paired online newspapers, Carpenter (2008) found that, compared with their mainstream counterparts, citizen journalists were far more likely to express opinions with 42.1% of CJ articles having 'more opinion than fact' as compared to only 11.2% among the newspapers. CJ articles were also less likely to cite any source and when they do cite sources, they are much less likely to be 'official sources'. Among articles from online newspapers, 75% of articles cited an official source as compared to only 30.3% of CJ articles. Fico et al. (2013), likewise, found that articles on CJ sites were significantly less likely to have local government sources. Not

constrained by norms and routines of professional journalism, CJ websites have the freedom to address issues that are overlooked by mainstream news organizations and give voice to traditionally marginalized groups. Carpenter (2010) has shown that CJ is 'slightly more diverse' than online newspaper content, with online newspapers covering more national- and state-level issues as opposed to community issues. On the other hand, Fico et al. (2013) argue that CJ sites do not offer a satisfactory substitute for newspapers because of the sheer volume of content that newspapers produce. Even if a larger percentage of the content of CJ sites is devoted to local issues, newspapers can produce more total articles. These results paint a portrait of CJ as a field with the potential to expand the public sphere to be more inclusive of unofficial sources, opinions, underrepresented groups, and local communities. At the same time, they tend to show that CJ is inevitably 'in conversation' with professional journalism, acting as an alternative, a complement, or a replacement.

Despite the apparent divide in the journalistic practice between citizen and professional journalists, some evidence suggests that a fair number of contributors to CJ sites are current or former professional journalists. A recent survey of 85 online community journalists (a subset of citizen journalists) found that 21.2% held a degree in Journalism or Mass Communication (Carpenter et al., 2013). Similarly, a 2009 Pew survey found that two-thirds of contributors to citizen media sites have worked as professional journalists (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). These findings call into question the popular image of citizen journalists as 'ordinary' and 'amateurs'. But if CJ's value for the public sphere is to offer content in marked contrast with mainstream news outlets, what do professionals have to offer CJ sites?

Organizations and legitimacy

A tremendous literature in sociology has focused on the patterns of organizational growth and the quest for survival. Particularly well documented is organizational isomorphism, or the tendency of organizations within the same field to adopt similar innovations and practices that have proved successful (Deephouse, 1996; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, DiMaggio (1991) famously documented the isomorphic tendencies within the field of art museums as philanthropic organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation and the American Association of Museums led to the creation of a new organizational paradigm: the educational museum. The practices of art museums that received regular sponsorship came to be viewed as legitimate within the field and were, thus, widely adopted. While DiMaggio (1991) emphasizes organizational adaptation, Hannan and Freeman (1977) tend to emphasize a sort of organizational survival of the fittest where the practices of more efficient organizations become legitimate due to the organization's success. Whether by adaptation or by natural selection, it is clear that within organizational fields, actors see the adoption of legitimate practices as the pathway to success.

Isomorphism particularly prevails in new or 'settling' fields where risk is high (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Organizations seek to mitigate risk by adopting established practices. For example, within various fields, organizations might achieve legitimacy by hiring employees with particular credentials, adopting particular policies, or adhering to established models of organizational hierarchy (Deephouse, 1996). Within the young organizational field of CJ, organizations might aim to reduce risk by adopting traditional journalistic practices such as relying on official sources, avoiding first person subjectivity, or by adopting the 'objectivity norm' (Schudson, 2001). Alternatively, CJ sites might attempt to establish their legitimacy by adopting traditional staffing patterns (e.g. an editorial staff) or by hiring professionalized workers. We anticipate that for-profit sites, which have a greater incentive to reduce risk and ensure survival (i.e. have 'skin in the game'), will be more likely to have professional journalists as contributors because of the legitimacy they offer. Moreover, we expect that sites with editorial

staffs, which have already adopted established staffing practices in professional journalism, will be more likely to have professional journalists.

In this case, what professional journalists have to offer is legitimacy by way of their past accomplishments. A perhaps more charitable understanding would be that professional journalists have skills and values that are particularly desirable to CJ websites. In this case, we would expect CJ sites that have a professional journalist as a contributor to engage in substantially different news practices. If professional journalists are brought in purely for the sake of legitimacy, it is not necessarily the case that their presence would significantly change the standard operating procedure at CJ sites. On the other hand, if they are sought out for their skills and professionalism, we would expect some differences in the type of content they produce. By exploring the processes behind the professionalization of CJ, we can better understand what motivates CJ sites to have professionals as contributors and whether professional staffing translates into professional practices.

Hypotheses

Based on the existing literature, we hypothesize the following:

H1: At least some CJ sites will include content contributed by current or former professional journalists.

H2: CJ sites with greater incentive to establish legitimacy, including for-profits and those with editorial staffs, will be more likely to have journalists on staff.

H3: CJ sites with current or former professional journalists will reproduce a range of traditional journalistic practices to greater degree than CJ sites without current or former professionals. These practices include (H3a) adhering to the objectivity norm by using more fact than opinion, (H3b) using official sources, (H3c) avoiding the use of the first person, and (H3d) rarely linking to other CJ sites.

Methods

Sample

To test the current study's hypotheses, we conducted a content analysis of the largest sample to date of English-language, CJ websites based in the United States. Two features of this study's sampling design distinguish it from all previous research. First, most previous quantitative studies of online CJ have conducted their analyses on the article level, using a small number of sites and a large number of articles or posts (Carpenter, 2008, 2010; Fico et al., 2013). By contrast, because the current study explores the effect of characteristics that vary between websites (specifically, the presence of a former or current professional journalist), the unit of analysis for this study is the site. A second important difference involves our sampling frame. While a few studies have explored site-level characteristics of CJ sites (Carpenter et al., 2013; Lacy, Riffe, Thorson, & Duffy, 2009), they have tended to rely on small convenience samples of no greater than 80 websites. The current study differs from previous research by dramatically expanding the universe of sites in the sampling frame and then drawing a random sample of more than 300 sites.

Developing an accurate sample framing for a population of websites is inherently difficult. There is no equivalent of the telephone book for the web and, given the low entry cost of creating a new website, sites can appear and disappear overnight. To develop a sampling frame, a team of three researchers conducted a variety of web searches for 'citizen journalism', 'citizen media', 'citizen reporting', etc. Through these searches, we identified directories of CJ sites and used a snowballing sampling method to pull in self-identified CJ websites. We then followed links on

those sites to expand our sample. To be included in our final sampling frame, the sites: (1) had to explicitly describe itself anywhere on the site (typically in the title or the 'About' page) as being engaged in CJ or be identified as CJ by another source, (2) had to be based in the United States and available in English, and (3) could not be connected to any professional news organization.¹ These selection criteria were sufficiently broad to include sites specializing in audio and video content. These efforts produced a sampling frame of 1247 currently active websites and 711 inactive websites. Even though our sampling frame is much larger than previous research, this study is potentially subject to sampling bias. There is no such thing as a perfect sampling frame in the study of organizational forms on the Internet, so we cannot be entirely confident that our sample is representative of the historical population of CJ sites.

From the 1247 active CJ websites, we randomly sampled 350 sites for a content analysis with over 50 variables. A team of three researchers hand-coded these sites over a six-week period in June and July of 2013. Because of the dichotomous nature of most of the measures, it was relatively simple to achieve inter-coder reliability. However, 10% of the cases were double-coded as reliability check and over 95% consistently was achieved. After all coding, full information was obtained for 326 cases. For each site, we coded site-level information (e.g. founding information, non-profit status, etc.) and content information (e.g. political topic, focused on a geographic community, etc.) drawing from 'About' pages, mission statements, contributor profiles, and the 10 most recent posts/articles posted on different calendar dates. Because all content measures were captured at a single time point, we are unable to establish the time sequence and causal order of adopting various organizational characteristics including a for-profit model, an editorial staff, and the hiring of former professional journalists.

Measures

For hypotheses H1 and H2, our primary dependent variable was whether the site had a former or current professional journalist as a contributor (yes = 1, no = 0). This information was typically obtained from contributor profiles and 'About' pages. It is possible that some sites may have had professional journalists who did not disclose their identities, but background information was typically available.

For H3, we had four dependent measures of journalistic practice. First, borrowing a measure from Carpenter (2010), we asked coders to assess, 'Is the site mostly fact (centered on providing the public with information based on facts) or mostly opinion (predominantly opinion or speculation ... tend to focus on one person commenting on a particular issue, event, or person)?' 'Mostly opinion' was coded 1, mostly fact was coded as 0. Our second measure of journalistic practice was use of an official source and, using Carpenter's (2008) typology was coded for any quote by a government official, official non-profit or for-profit spokesperson, or representation of an academic institution or thinktank (present = 1, not present = 0). Our third measure was any use of the first person (e.g. 'I', 'me', 'myself') by a contributor other than in the context of a quotation (present = 1, not present = 0). Our final measure was the presence of a link to any other self-identified CJ site (i.e. another site in our sample) (present = 1, not present = 0).

We controlled for the presence of an editorial staff (i.e. one or more individuals explicitly designated as an 'editor' or any mention of content being edited by website 'staff'), any user-created content (i.e. content not produced by regular contributors with publishing rights) as well as whether the site was focused on a geographic community and/or a political topic (present = 1, not present = 0). We also controlled for a site founding in a presidential election year (yes = 1, no = 0) to allow for any unique characteristics of short-term campaign-based blogs. Finally, to control for any effects related to a CJ site being founded during a year with a poor labor

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for citizen journalism sample.

	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
<i>Site characteristics</i>					
Founding year	326	2000	2013	2006.17	3.344
Founded in election year	326	0	1	.24	.430
City size (thousands)	207	1.355	8391.880	702.938	1247.539
For-profit	326	0	1	.36	.486
Professional journalist contributor	326	0	1	.46	.496
Editorial staff	326	0	1	.43	.493
Political topic	326	0	1	.36	.481
Community focus	326	0	1	.61	.489
<i>Site content</i>					
Uses first person	326	0	1	.71	.456
Used official source(s)	326	0	1	.83	.372
Employed journalists per journalism Degree in founding year	326	0.790	1.470	1.068	0.166
More opinion than fact	326	0	1	.30	.459

market in professional journalism, we controlled for the number of employed journalists reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) divided by the number of new graduates in the year of founding reported by Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates (Becker, Vlad, Simpson, & Kalpen, 2012). This measure captures scarcity in the labor market by capturing both the total number of journalism jobs and the number of new entrants.

Due to the dichotomous nature of all dependent variables, we conducted logistic regression analyses which estimate the odds of an outcome appearing on a site based on the independent factors. Because it is not possible to know the time sequence of various factors, our models do not aim to be causal. Rather they estimate the odds of the co-occurrence of various factors.

Findings

Descriptive statistics for all variables are reported in Table 1. As anticipated – and contrary to the popular image of citizen journalists as amateurs – 46% of sites included at least one former or current professional journalist as a contributor. Although not a majority, this finding tends to support our first hypothesis that professional journalists make up some portion of the contributors to CJ sites (H1) and challenges the popular image of citizen journalists as amateurs.

For example, *Atlantic Yards Report* (<http://atlanticyardsreport.blogspot.com/>) in many ways fits the romantic ideal of muckraking CJ by acting as a watchdog for corruption in 22-acre Atlantic Yards (later redubbed Pacific Park) development in Brooklyn, NY. However, the sole proprietor CJ site is run by Norman Oder, a career journalist who is the former executive editor of *Library Journal* and has freelanced for the *Village Voice*, *The American Lawyer*, and the *Columbia Journalism Review*. While Oder’s status as a paid professional journalist would be enough to disqualify his site as CJ according to some scholarly definitions, he sees no such tension. Speaking as part of the Grassroots Media Conference panel, Oder said,

I’m the most mainstream person sitting on this panel, and I don’t think there’s a contradiction between using mainstream training and experience in the service of grassroots media. In fact, I think that grassroots media, held to professional standards, can be more intellectually honest and more responsible than the mainstream media. (Oder, 2007)

Downloaded by [Skidmore College], [Andrew Lindner] at 13:21 23 February 2015

We also argued that, following patterns well documented in the organizational literature, CJ sites might have sought to mitigate risk by hiring professional journalists who offer legitimacy. In particular, we hypothesized (H2) that for-profit sites, which have a financial stake in the success of the site, and sites with an editorial staff, which already adhere to the traditional hierarchy within mainstream journalism, would be more likely to have professional journalists as contributors.

AllVoices.com, a CJ site founded in 2007, exemplifies this pattern. Borrowing lyrics from Cleveland rapper Drastic, one article on the site described it as ‘a citizen-journalism website for writers who “live life and write.”’ However, AllVoices has adopted many of the trappings of mainstream news organizations including a for-profit business model earning revenue from sponsored content and a ‘team of professional editors [who] curates all content’. AllVoices welcomes contributors from ‘all walks of life, from full-time freelancers looking to build a larger following to desk jockeys who want to keep the creative juices flowing’, but writers are selected by the editorial staff after an application process. Contributor bios on the site often highlight experiences in professional journalism (e.g. ‘[The writer is] a former credentialed Ohio statehouse journalist’). For a CJ site such as AllVoices, newly hired professional journalists bring not only writing and reporting skills, but also the legitimacy of credits within the field of professional journalism. The results of several analyses tend to support this claim.

Figure 1 uses a Venn diagram to illustrate the proportion of the sample with some combination of a professional journalist, an editorial staff, and a for-profit organizational model. Of all sites in the sample, 32.1% had none of these three characteristics. However, what is immediately evident is that for-profit sites tend to have either an editorial staff, a professional journalist, or both. In fact, the most common staffing model for for-profits was to have both an editorial staff and at least one professional journalist contributor, representing 16.2% of the entire sample. Also apparent is the significant overlap between sites with an editorial staff and those with professional journalist contributors – 70% of sites with an editorial staff had a professional journalist contributor.

These findings hold up in the logistic regression analyses in Table 2. As seen in Model 4, controlling for other factors, for-profit sites have 1.889 times the odds ($p < .05$) and sites with editorial staffs have 6.736 times the odds ($p < .001$) of having a professional journalist contributor. Editorial staff and for-profit explain 16.7% of the variation in whether sites have a journalist

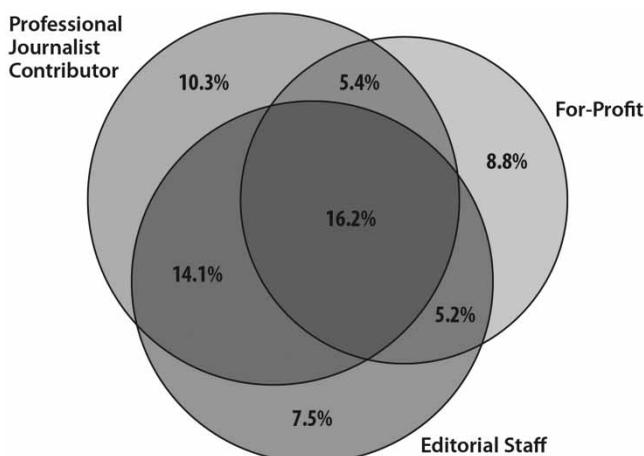


Figure 1. Proportions of sample with a professional journalist contributor, an editorial staff, and for-profit. Note: Percentages represent the proportion of the entire sample within that subset; 32.1% of sites had none of these three characteristics.

Table 2. Logistic regression analyses of sites with a professional journalist contributor.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Profit	2.443 (13.722)***	1.916 (6.143)*	1.893 (5.496)*	1.889 (5.311)*
Editorial staff		4.971 (38.944)***	6.414 (39.175)***	6.736 (38.424)***
User-created content			.328 (8.024)**	.321 (7.992)**
Political topic			.352 (10.913)**	.346 (10.373)***
Community focus			.540 (4.064)*	.482 (5.367)*
Employed journalists per degree at founding				.599 (.379)
Founded in election year				.756 (.801)
R^2	.045	.167	.214	.222

Note: Odds ratios presented with Wald statistic in parentheses; $n = 326$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

contributor or not, with editorial staff alone explaining more than 12% of the variation. Taken together, these findings strongly support the hypothesis (H2) that for-profit sites and those with editorial staffs are more likely to have professional journalist contributors. Although the findings here do not allow us to establish a clear time sequence about whether a for-profit model, an editorial staff structure, or a journalist contributor tends to come first, the findings do suggest that these organizational forms tend to co-occur.

Since past research has indicated important differences in the work of citizen journalists and professional journalists (Carpenter, 2008, 2010), we also examined whether sites with professional journalist contributors produce content that is more reflective of traditional journalistic practice. One of the most firmly held beliefs in contemporary American journalism is the objectivity norm. From J-School to the newsroom, the adherence to ‘fact’ over ‘opinion’ is consistently reinforced with professional journalists (Schudson, 2001). For this reason, we hypothesized that sites with a professional journalist contributor would be less likely to emphasize opinion over fact (H3a). At the bivariate level, this hypothesis proved correct. As seen in Model 1 in Table 3, sites with journalist contributors had .369 the odds of emphasizing opinion over fact as compared those sites without professional journalists ($p < .001$).

However, further analyses tend to suggest that this apparent relationship is due to other factors. In Model 3, the presence of a journalist contributor becomes non-significant when accounting for whether the site has an editorial staff. In other words, the structure of an editorial staff – not the presence of a professional journalist – is what appears to reduce opinionated content. Even this editorial staff effect appears to be the consequence of the focus of the site. Sites focused on a geographic community are significantly less likely to emphasize opinion over fact, while sites dedicated to political topics have 2.836 times the odds of non-political sites of having more opinion than fact (both $p < .001$). Controlling for community and political effects, sites with professional journalist contributors and/or editorial staff do not produce any less opinionated content. For this reason, we must reject H3a.

Additionally, we examined CJ websites and their reliance on official sources. Much past research has documented the tendency of mainstream news sources to rely heavily on official

Table 3. Logistic regression analyses of sites with more opinion than fact.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Journalist contributor	.369 (13.166)***	.410 (10.108)***	.555 (3.753)	.707 (1.143)	.544 (3.133)
Profit		.684 (1.797)	.795 (.618)	.756 (.807)	.719 (1.003)
Editorial staff			.391 (7.999)**	.425 (6.040)*	.592 (2.007)
User-created content			.651 (.840)	.938 (.017)	.894 (.047)
Political topic				5.259 (32.937)***	2.836 (10.252)***
Community focus					.216 (22.240)***
Employed per degree					2.662 (1.091)
R^2	.045	.048	.086	.185	.250

Note: Odds ratios presented with Wald statistic in parentheses; $n = 326$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

sources, privileging them over unofficial sources. We hypothesized that CJ websites with a former professional journalist would be more likely to reference official sources in their articles than CJ websites lacking a former professional journalist (H3b). As seen in all models presented in Table 4, the relationship between the presence of former professional journalists and the use of official sources was non-significant, leading us to reject H3b.

The use of first person is heavily discouraged in journalistic best practices, leading us to examine its usage in CJ websites. We hypothesized that CJ websites with a former professional journalist on staff would be less likely to write in first person than websites without a former professional journalist (H3c). At the bivariate level, this proved correct, as websites with professional contributors had .420 the odds of using first person as compared to sites without professionals ($p < .001$). Upon further examination, however, it was apparent that this effect was due to other factors. The presence of an editorial staff, as seen in Model 3 of Table 5, made the

Table 4. Logistic regression analyses of sites using official source(s).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Journalist contributor	.996 (.000)	1.056 (.030)	1.043(.016)	1.192(.255)	1.040(.012)
Profit		.814 (.424)	.838(.304)	.838(.299)	.821(.353)
Editorial staff			1.006(.000)	1.105(.074)	1.327(.536)
User-created content			.583(1.675)	.671(.891)	.687(.732)
political topic				2.464(5.745)*	2.203(3.346)
Community focus					.909(.067)
Employed per degree					3.248(1.406)
R^2	.000	.001	.012	.028	.032

Note: Odds ratios presented with Wald statistic in parentheses; $n = 326$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5. Logistic regression analyses of sites using first person.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Journalist contributor	.420 (11.758)***	.475 (8.193)**	.925 (.066)	1.087 (.070)	.912 (.080)
Profit		.568 (4.657)*	.700 (1.579)	.713 (1.370)	.670 (1.799)
Editorial staff			.151 (34.621)***	.156 (31.999)***	.199 (23.144)***
User-created content			1.414 (.829)	1.677 (1.753)	1.678 (1.618)
Political topic				2.510 (7.865)**	1.489 (1.134)
Community focus					.359 (8.503)**
Employed per degree					4.100 (2.275)
R^2	.038	.052	.167	.190	.219

Note: Odds ratios presented with Wald statistic in parentheses; $n = 326$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

journalist contributor effect non-significant. Websites with an editorial staff had .151 ($p < .001$) the odds of using first person as compared to websites lacking a former professional journalist. In other words, it is the existence of the organizational structure of an editorial staff rather than journalistic training that makes the use of the first person less likely. For this reason, we reject H3c.

In addition to examining the extent to which CJ websites referenced official sources, we analyzed whether or not CJ websites linked to other CJ sites, and whether linking patterns were affected by the presence of a former professional journalist. As seen in Table 6, CJ websites with a former professional journalist were significantly less likely to link to other CJ websites ($p < .01$). Thus, our findings affirmed H3d.

Taken together, the findings suggest that CJ sites with professional journalists do not produce substantially different content than other CJ sites. However, organizational forms such as for-profits and sites with editorial staffs that already have some form of established structures are more likely to have professionals. These findings tend to suggest that the presence of a substantial

Table 6. Logistic regression analyses of sites linking to other CJ sites.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Journalist contributor	.340 (8.069)**	.368 (6.708)*	.431 (4.153)*	.483 (4.064)*	.352 (5.461)*
Profit		.607 (1.736)	.659 (1.172)	.652 (1.226)	.645 (1.170)
Editorial staff			.603 (1.384)	.635 (1.109)	1.021 (.002)
User-created content			.968 (.003)	1.137 (.052)	1.140 (.048)
Political topic				1.950 (3.706)	.854 (.144)
Community focus					.134 (19.808)***
Employed per degree					1.684 (.220)
R^2	.029	.036	.042	.054	.123

Note: Odds ratios presented with Wald statistic in parentheses; $n = 326$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

number of professional journalists in the field of CJ is more about legitimacy than the skills and news values that professionals contribute.

Discussion

In our sample, a large portion of CJ websites (46%) have a former professional journalist on staff, reaffirming other recent findings (Carpenter et al., 2013; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). The results also revealed that for-profits and sites with editorial staff were more likely to have a former or current professional journalist on staff. We theorized that more risk-averse organizational forms, such as for-profits that have a financial stake in the site's success, would be more likely seek the legitimacy and skills offered by professional journalists. Another interpretation of these findings is that for-profit sites and those with editorial staff are simply more able to afford the services of professionals. In other words, these sites have professionals not only because of risk-aversion, but also because of access to greater resources. Unfortunately, revenue and page view data were not available for most of the sites in the sample. Whether due to resources or strategic decision-making, sites with other traditional organization features are more likely to have professionals. And, yet, to a great extent, the content of sites with and without former professional journalists is quite similar. For that reason, the addition of former professional journalists to a CJ website seems to function as a means by which a website may legitimize itself, rather than fundamentally changing the content of the website.

Our findings suggest two avenues for future research on the professionalization of CJ. First, this study has focused squarely on what professional journalists have to offer CJ sites rather than considering professionals' motivations for moonlighting as citizen journalists. Using interviews and case studies, future scholarship ought to better understand why professionals work as citizen journalists. Second, given the highly statistically significant effects of editorial staff on the content measures, future research should devote attention to the role of editorial gatekeeping on CJ sites.

Professional citizen journalism and the public sphere

Many commentators have envisioned CJ as an alternative to, or even a remedy for mainstream journalism as practiced at traditional media outlets. These amateur journalists, so the story goes, have been inspired to report on their communities, give voice to marginalized groups too often neglected by newspapers, or challenge the journalistic objectivity norm. Unlike the mainstream media, citizen journalists have been cast as heroes of civic responsibility, uncorrupted by the lure of market demand. Yet, even the most simple of analyses reveals some major discrepancies between the reality of the situation and the glossy potential the field holds.

Citizens engaged in their communities, both local and national, can post their opinions to a website, a blog, or a message board. However, mere posting 'is openness in the most trivial sense' (Hindman, 2009, p. 18). The question is not who posts, but who gets read. Habermas' ideal was not a freely accessible salon packed full of people talking to themselves. Rather, his vision for the public sphere requires good ideas to be heard regardless of the speaker's status. As Hindman's (2009) study of political blogs convincingly demonstrates, 'If we look at citizens' voices in terms of the *readership* their postings receive, political expression online is orders of magnitude more unequal than the disparities ... in voting, volunteer work, and even political fund-raising' (p. 17). The vast majority of web traffic flows to a small number of elite websites, staffed by professional writers whose political ideas and style fall well within the mainstream. For all that has changed in the Internet age, the type of contributors and content that are seen as legitimate are still defined in very traditional ways.

Even though citizen journalists are celebrated for their supposed rejection of mainstream journalism, professional journalism still maintains a greater share of the authority to define which organizational structures, practices, and norms are seen as legitimate within online journalism. As CJ sites compete within their organizational field for legitimacy, resources, and, ultimately, the kind of democratic voice that comes having from a large audience, a substantial minority of them incorporate professional journalists as contributors, most likely because of the legitimacy they offer. If, indeed, for-profit sites and sites with editorial staff are among the more successful and widely read CJ sites, it would be ironic that most successful CJ turns out to be produced by professionals. At the same time, much of the work that most closely matches the romantic ideal of CJ may lack the legitimacy to have a democratic voice.

To some extent, the presence of for-profits, professionals, and editorial staffs suggests the sort of professionalization and organizational maturation that occurs in many different fields and is, perhaps, inevitable. These developments have the potential to make CJ sites operate more efficiently and potentially produce more consistent content. On the other hand, it represents precisely the type of structuring of the public sphere that has troubled Habermas and other social critics. What is clear is that the most romantic accounts of amateur journalists operating outside the structures of professional journalism do not stand up to empirical scrutiny.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank John Stelter and Zach Lipp for their contributions to data collection and Ryan Larson for helpful suggestions. The data used in this study were collected with a grant from the Division of the Sciences at Concordia College (Moorhead, MN).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. It is important to note that there are websites that would generally fit some definitions of CJ, but are not included in our sampling frame because they do not explicitly describe themselves as engaged in CJ and have been labelled as such by other sites. By the same token, many of the sites in the sampling frame would be excluded by one scholarly definition of CJ or another. Rather than selecting on the basis of a preferred definition of CJ, the current study uses self-identification or identification by others as the primary selection criterion.

Notes on contributors

Andrew M. Lindner is Assistant Professor at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY and Trends Editor of *Contexts*. He teaches courses on mass media, political sociology, sociology of sport, and research methods. His primary research interests are in the role of the state, the market, and civil society in structuring journalism. His work on these topics appears in publications such as *Social Problems*, *Contexts*, and *The Sociological Quarterly*. [email: alindner@skidmore.edu]

Emma Connell is a graduate of Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. There she studied political science and philosophy, with a particular interest in ethical policy creation. [email: emmacconnell@gmail.com]

Erin Meyer is a graduate of Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, where she studied sociology, Spanish, and English. [email: emeyer00@gmail.com]

ORCID

Andrew M. Lindner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4347-8787>

Emma Connell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7474-7719>

Erin Meyer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0241-0383>

References

- Allan, S. (2007). Citizen journalism and the rise of “Mass self-communication”: Reporting the London bombings. *Global Media Journal*, 1(1), 1–20.
- Allan, S. (2013). *Citizen witnessing: Revisioning journalism in times of crisis*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., Simpson, H., & Kalpen, K. (2012). *Annual survey of journalism and mass communication graduates*. Retrieved from http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Graduate_Survey/Graduate_2012/Graduate_2012_Page.php
- Carey, J. W. (2008). *Communication as culture, revised edition: Essays on media and society* (p. 240). London: Routledge.
- Carpenter, S. (2008). How online citizen journalism publications and online newspapers utilize the objectivity standard and rely on external sources. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85(3), 531–548. doi:10.1177/107769900808500304
- Carpenter, S. (2010). A study of content diversity in online citizen journalism and online newspaper articles. *New Media & Society*, 12(7), 1064–1084. doi:10.1177/1461444809348772
- Carpenter, S., Nah, S., & Chung, D. (2013). A study of US online community journalists and their organizational characteristics and story generation routines. *Journalism*, 1–16. doi:10.1177/1464884913511567
- Chomsky, N., & Herman, E. S. (2008). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Deephouse, D. L. (1996). Does isomorphism legitimate? *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4), 1024–1039.
- Deephouse, D. L., & Carter, S. M. (2005). An examination of differences between organizational legitimacy and organizational reputation. *Journal of Management Studies*, 6(2), 3–23.
- DiMaggio, P. J. (1991). Constructing an organizational field as a professional project: US art museums, 1920–1940. In P. J. DiMaggio & W. W. Powell (Eds.), *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis* (pp. 267–292). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fico, F., Lacy, S., Wildman, S. S., Baldwin, T., Bergan, D., & Zube, P. (2013). Citizen journalism sites as information substitutes and complements for United States newspaper coverage of local governments. *Digital Journalism*, 1(1), 152–168. doi:10.1080/21670811.2012.740270
- Fligstein, N., & McAdam, D. (2012). *A theory of fields*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing. *Social Text*, 26(25), 56–80.
- Gamson, W., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1–37. doi:10.2307/2780405
- Gillmor, D. (2004). *We the media*. Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, Inc.
- Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media & Society*, 11(8), 1287–1305. doi:10.1177/1461444809341393
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Hannan, M. T., & Freeman, J. (1977). The population ecology of organizations. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 82(5), 929–964.
- Hindman, M. (2009). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kaufhold, K., Valenzuela, S., & Zúñiga, H. G. De. (2010). Citizen journalism and democracy: How user-generated news use relates to political knowledge and participation. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 87(3/4), 515–529.
- Lacy, S., Riffe, D., Thorson, E., & Duffy, M. (2009). Examining the features, policies and resources of citizen journalism: Citizen news sites and blogs. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, 15.
- Lewis, S. C., Kaufhold, K., & Lasorsa, D. L. (2010). Thinking about citizen journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(2), 163–179. doi:10.1080/14616700903156919
- Meadows, M. (2012). Putting the citizen back into journalism. *Journalism*, 14(1), 43–60. doi:10.1177/1464884912442293

- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363.
- Oder, N. (2007, February 25). *On objectivity, neutrality, and integrity in covering AY* (Atlantic Yards Report). Retrieved from <http://atlanticyardsreport.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-objectivity-neutrality-and.html>
- Palmer, L. (2012). “iReporting” an uprising: CNN and citizen journalism in network culture. *Television & New Media*, 14(5), 367–385. doi:10.1177/1527476412446487
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009). *Citizen-based media*. Retrieved September 25, 2014, from <http://stateofthedia.org/2009/special-reports-summary-essay/citizen-based-media/>
- Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). “Anyone can know”: Citizen journalism and the interpretive community of the mainstream press. *Journalism*, 12(8), 963–982. doi:10.1177/1464884911415973
- Rutigliano, L. W. (2008). *Covering the unknown city: Citizen journalism and marginalized communities*. The University of Texas at Austin.
- Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism*, 2(2), 149–170. doi:10.1177/146488490100200201
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (1998). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93–109.
- Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication*, 28(1), 19–41. doi:10.1080/10584609.2010.542360
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *Occupational employment and wages, 2012: News analysts, reporters and correspondents*. Retrieved October 14, 2013, from <http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes273022.htm>
- Waisbord, S. (2013). *Reinventing professionalism: Journalism and news in global perspective* (p. 200). Cambridge: Polity Press. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=aRQKP2s0z4 kC&pgis=1>
- Waisbord, S. (2014). Citizen journalism, development and social change: Hype and hope. In E. Thorsen & S. Allan (Eds.), *Citizen journalism: Global perspectives* (Vol. 2, pp. 185–198). New York, NY: Peter Lang.