

Action! Livestreaming as means of civic engagement: A case study of citizen journalism in Egypt and Syria

By Rebecca Bengtsson¹

Abstract

This article focuses on the use of livestreaming by citizen journalists in Egypt and Syria to accomplish social change, and on citizen journalism as an act of civic engagement. As an analytic frame, Dahlgren's (2009) six modes of civic engagement are used to better understand the role of citizen journalists in a changing society. Through a number of qualitative interviews with citizen journalists, traditional journalists and Bambuser, this article concludes that citizen journalism not only played an important role in regards to civic engagement in Egypt and Syria during the recent uprisings in the countries, but continues to do so in the present.

Keywords: Egypt, livestreaming, media convergence, public sphere, social change, Syria.

Introduction

With the growing usage of new and online media for spreading news and information, and through the increasing use of mobile phones to livestream video and report in real-time, the media landscape is transforming. During the 2010-2011 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, many protesters turned to applications such as [Bambuser](#) and [Ustream](#), applications that allow the user to livestream their video, as well as makes the video available on-demand after the broadcast, to share information, bypass state-run media and get news to the public. As noted by Lynch, however, the 'transforming information environment alone did not cause these revolutions – there are far deeper legacies of authoritarian rule, economic mismanagement, and social frustration at their roots', and the creation of a new public sphere facilitated the uprisings. (2012). The development of communication technologies have been pressuring Middle Eastern states for over a decade and, while governments have tried to control development by taking measures such as enforcing censorship, it has not stopped citizen journalism from emerging and growing stronger (Seib, 2007). Through the mixing of journalism and activism in combination with the use of new media such as livestreaming, citizen journalists are able to not only influence their fellow citizens, but also have a great impact on the global audience. This *media convergence* (Jenkins, 2001) has proven crucial in order for traditional media to be able to cover the unrest that has been documented across many countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

This article, based on research done for my Master's thesis in [Communication for Development](#), investigates how new media, and livestreaming in particular, encourage civic engagement and promote social change. Special attention is given to the relationship between citizen media and traditional media in regards to the public sphere, and the role of the media as information keeper and provider, as well as being the responsible institution for the informing of citizens. The article seeks to determine if the convergence of citizen and

traditional media can be seen as playing an important role in promoting an active citizenry and, as a result, achieving social change. A number of qualitative, in-depth interviews were carried out with Egyptian and Syrian citizen journalists² and Bambuser, as well as traditional journalists. The majority of the research³ was conducted during June to August 2012 in Cairo, Egypt. The countries were chosen primarily because it was in those areas that livestreaming proved to be an especially successful method of news distribution during the recent uprisings, on both a domestic and international scale. It is important to note that these types of civic movements and uprisings are not a new development in the investigated countries, however, the timeframe focuses on events after the uprisings in late 2010 referred to as the 'Arab Spring' simply as the citizen journalists interviewed started their reporting during this period.

Civic cultures and citizen journalism

Although the state is still the main arena of power in society, it is increasingly being challenged by globalisation and the weakening of state boundaries. In countries with strong oppositional networks which are able to mobilise quickly, the efforts of a network can lead to the overthrow of a government (Coudry, 2012, p. 115), as was the case in Egypt in 2011. Civic engagement is based on the notion that citizen sees themselves as participants in the public sphere, that their voices are being heard, and that they are contributing to political discussion. They also need some form of motivation. For citizen journalists, this means producing and sharing information, often with the intention of accomplishing social change. In the making of citizen-produced media, civic cultures are created, which are in turn affecting others in the public sphere. For Dahlgren, civic culture is 'a framework intended to help analyse the conditions that are necessary for – that promote or hinder – civic engagement'. (2009, p. 103). These cultures can be learnt, inherited, or absorbed from other citizens, and are in fact a prerequisite for the citizens to be active in society. Furthermore, the media, traditional as well as new, plays an important role in shaping culture, and is a must for a well-functioning society. (ibid, p. 106). Dahlgren identifies six modes of civic cultures: knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices and identities.

Knowledge

Citizens must have access to information, reports, analyses, debates and discussions about what is happening in society – in short, access to knowledge. Traditionally, the media is responsible for informing citizens; a responsibility often problematic, as civic knowledge may come in various forms, speaking for a 'democratic plurality in regards to knowledge (and genres of journalism)'. (ibid, p. 108-110).

Values

Universal values such as liberty, equality, justice, openness, responsibility and accountability are the foundations of democracy, and a consensus amongst citizens to live by these values is needed for a society to work. As Dahlgren suggests, however, these values cannot simply be a rational choice for the individuals; there must be a will for them to be in place; they must involve 'an element of passion'. If citizens are excited and enthusiastic about these democratic values, they will also live by them. (ibid, p. 111-112).

Trust

Trust is a prerequisite for democracy – between the political elite and the citizens, the citizens and the media, the media and the political elite, and vice versa. For Dahlgren, the trust of interest is that between citizens themselves. (ibid, p. 112). Too much trust might lead to an abuse of power, whereas too little might cause friction in other ways, such as a constant mistrust of the government, towards fellow citizens etc.

Spaces

A platform for citizens to engage in discussion and debate, and to interact with each other, is as essential as the ability for citizens to communicate with the political elite in order to influence decision-making. The public sphere is thus a prerequisite for a public space to exist. (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 115). Media has shaped and developed the private and public spaces, and with the emergence of new information technologies, such as the internet, there is an expansion of public spaces not only within societies, but also globally, as the possibilities for civic engagement are enhanced (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 116).

Practices

To participate in practices such as elections and education enables individuals or groups to grow and empower themselves and their role in society (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 117), and this strengthens individuals' sense of belonging and the structure of the network. Over time, democratic practices become traditions, and society must make sure that these traditions do not leave out new practices and, in the process, hinder the development of democracy (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 118).

Identities

By identities, Dahlgren refers to the individual's view of their self and their role and place in society, which he sees as the foundation of civic cultures. Identities are seen in plural – a citizen has many identities, each corresponding to their place in different societal settings. They are also changeable, and develop through experience. According to Eriksen (in Servaes et al.), identities are constructed locally, (2009, p. 63), which does not, however, hinder the development of global identities. Dahlgren explores two other notions of civic identity; (1) acting as an empowered political agent and (2) membership of a political community. The former refers to individuals who actively seek to inform themselves, and in so doing become empowered participants of society. The latter refers to the advantages of belonging to a group; namely, that together it is easier to make a political impact. This political collectiveness is no longer bound by geography, but can be acted out on a global scale. (2009, p. 120-121) (Howard, 2010, p. 136).

Methodology

The research used qualitative interviews as the main approach complemented by textual analysis of a number of livestreams. An extensive literature review was conducted to provide theoretical depth. Although the focus of this research is on citizen journalists, interviews with traditional journalists as well as representatives from livestreaming company Bambuser were conducted for the purpose of aiding in the comparison between citizen produced media and

traditional media. The interviews were conducted in English as the interviewees were fluent in English, and my level of Arabic would rather hinder the conversation.

The textual analysis was approached from a post-structuralist perspective where traditional media news coverage was set as the norm. and, when viewing the livestreams, attempts were made to identify the differences between traditional and citizen media. The videos were not being judged or evaluated, as the post-structuralist approach does not pass any judgement on a text's accuracy, truthfulness or claim to identify a single reality, but rather aids in understanding how it differs from the norm. (McKee, 2003, p. 15-17). Using the International Federation of Journalists' "Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists" as a guideline for the role of the media and journalists in the public sphere, a framework was constructed. An attempt to identify the characteristics that separate traditional media from material produced by citizen journalists was made, and the analysis, along with the literature review, provided a good foundation in preparing for the interviews, in that it showed the area of focus of each citizen journalist network in their reporting.

Contact was made with one Egyptian livestreaming network – [Ana Mubasher](#), and one Syrian network – [ANA New Media Association](#) (ANA) during a field study in Cairo, Egypt from June to August 2012. Both networks use livestreaming in order to circulate their news. Interviews with journalists Lewis and Escobar were done prior to the field research, and those with Adler of Bambuser, as well as the freelance journalist referred to as 'F', were carried out on returning from Egypt. Great thought was given to the purpose of the research project, for whom it was being conducted, and who would benefit from it. The aim for this project is for the organisations that were interviewed to be able to use the research and hopefully gain something from the results. The assumption that the interviewees were sincere in their answers was made, as the research was not concerned with passing any judgement regarding their work or methods, there was no reason as to why they would be insincere or untruthful.

Analysis – The role of citizen journalists in shaping a new public sphere

As Dahlgren (2009) points out, the media is considered to be a prerequisite for a democracy in that it provides information to citizens (p. 2-3). By engaging in citizen journalism, the populace is taking initiative and civic action in the public sphere, and hence breaking the structure and purpose of traditional media. Although Egypt and Syria are not democracies *per se*, there are public spheres within these societies which are evolving and, as such, these countries can still be considered as valid subjects for an analysis of civic engagement in the public sphere. The six modes of civic cultures identified by Dahlgren (*ibid*) are used below to organise the analysis of research findings.

Knowledge

In order to participate in political life and make informed decisions for themselves and their fellow citizens, citizen need access to *knowledge*, commonly through the media. In the case of Egypt and Syria, however, the media failed to provide citizens with information, due to either foreign reporters being banned from the country, or local journalistic establishments being puppets of the governments. Interviews with citizen journalists showed that they saw a lack of knowledge and access to information in society, and so they took it upon themselves to provide this. Citizen journalists have the ability to better contextualise political events as they

are, for the most part, reporting from their own country, environment and surroundings, and so have an understanding of the issues at large, which is difficult for institutions from the outside to obtain, and so, it can be argued that they are a more reliable source of information. Citizen media can allow access to events in societies undergoing conflict and, as long as reporters are open and honest, it should not matter if the information is 'biased'. New media technologies have given citizens better control of what kind of information they obtain, as well as when and how they receive it. (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 44). The citizen journalists interviewed said that they started to livestream because they felt that the information that the state-run media provided was biased and propagandistic.

Values

Critics of citizen journalism (such as e.g. White, 2011) say that, as these reporters are not trained in journalistic practices, they cannot provide accurate information and are not credible as sources. Yet, during the recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, citizen journalism has been extensively incorporated into traditional media, and Associated Press (AP) even entered into an agreement with Bambuser to access users' livestreams. They do not, however, acknowledge citizen journalists as news providers *per se*, but regards them as 'eye witnesses':

'It is one facet of the Syria story, and you have to be careful as a news organisation and understand that you are piecing together a jigsaw puzzle, and we have to present it for what it is, which is just one aspect of the story.' (AP on Beet.tv, 2012).

The Syrian network interviewed for this article, ANA, was founded as they wanted to exist as a media organisation, and 'not only to contribute to other media outlets, but also compete with them, being a more sophisticated source on getting real information, more detailed reports, more information.' (ANA, 2012). This suggests that these networks see something lacking in their society and within media production, and that they themselves can, through citizen journalism, contribute to a change in society. Egyptian network Ana Mubasher founded their organisation as they 'saw so many brutalities, especially against protesters, and we wanted to do something about it.' (Ana Mubasher, 2012). Both networks appear to have good conceptions about what type of material they want to produce and, even though they are not professional journalists, they have a code that they follow in their livestreaming, which is strikingly similar to the *Code of Conduct* for journalists. ANA strive to be as objective as humanly possible, but also realise that 'neutralism is impossible, and we know that it is impossible' (2012). Ana Mubasher realised that they lacked experience and knowledge, so they sought contact with the founder of ANA:

'None of us had any experience. 'B' is an engineer; I am working in project management, so it was new to us. We came in contact with Alexander Page, one of the most prominent livestreaming activists. He set us in contact with Ustream, and helped us set up our own super-channel for Egypt.' (Ana Mubasher, 2012).

This shows an understanding of having knowledge and a sober view on the importance of providing information, and the responsibility towards fellow citizens. In the current media paradigm, traditional media is often seen as an impartial information provider,

something which is very rarely the case –as a result of continued media concentration as well as state and elite ownership of media organisations. (Deane, 2005, p. 177). New media, however, is in itself self-regulatory due to its interactive character, in that people can comment on and correct untruthfulness or biased news about events.

Livestreaming can, of course, still be manipulated, but essentially it is more raw and untouched than most edited material coming from traditional media in news segments and broadcasts. An important aspect of citizen journalism is how the networks and/or individuals are funded. As the members of ANA and Ana Mubasher are paying for their activities out of their own pocket, one could argue that their material will be influenced by their own opinions. However, neither of the networks interviewed claimed to be independent of their opinions, and were in fact open when asked about this. Neither network allows funding from neither political nor other interest groups, and in one interview, it transpired that one of the networks had in fact been approached by high profile politicians wanting to fund their work, who were turned down. Notably, by paying for their own activities, these livestreamers show that they are motivated not by commercial considerations, but by non-financial motives. They say that ‘there is a risk that citizen journalism will be destroyed if people can make money from livestreaming, that some people might do it because of that, instead of having a cause behind it.’ (Ana Mubasher, 2012).

Self-funding does not necessarily mean that the reporting will be biased, no more so than as regards the news being broadcast by professional, privately owned media (Lynch, 2012). Despite many similarities in the reporting, such as the protection of sources and the use of fair methods to obtain news, there are also differences. For example, in the videos analysed, the citizen journalist was continuously commenting on events as they unfolded; professional reporters working in areas of conflict are often asked by the studio to describe what they see, and yet the commentary provided by the citizen journalists can, at times, be politically charged. In the material analysed, the reporter would often make negative comments about the military-backed government and the state of Egypt. On discussing this matter with Escobar, journalist and co-owner of Asia Times, he stated that the media is being run differently today than during ‘the glory-days of objective reporting’. According to him, the professional reporters of today need to appeal to people’s emotions:

‘You launch an emotion grenade and everyone is hit at the same time, and that is why language is so dangerous. It all comes back to manipulation of words and images. For the average media consumer this is a nightmare. How are you able to tell facts from fiction?’ (2012).

The textual analyses of the livestreams showed that the main and defining difference from traditional journalism is that citizen journalists are participants rather than observers in society and the political arena, and that they are using livestreaming as a means of changing society, rather than having the primary purpose of sharing information. On the matter of objectivity within traditional journalism, Escobar said that ‘every single thing that you write is more or less biased according to your history, your ideology, the language you use, the choices you make’, and added that ‘what every journalist should do, is to stick to the facts’ (2012). Escobar sees a problem when traditional media starts to manipulate citizen media, but does see it as a valid source of information. During the interview, he suggested that if the content is run through an editor, this, or at least the image from the responsible media, could still be

balanced. (2012). Lewis, special projects editor for The Guardian, shared Escobar's opinion in that citizen journalists have become an important part of the media, but added that trained editors should process the content. However, he also questions the over-belief in trained and professional journalism (2011), as being a professional journalist does not guarantee that the end product or the means of getting there will be fair and justified.

Trust

Trust is an essential component in the media, and with the responsibility of providing information to the public comes a certain level of trust, placed by the former in the latter. 'The camera never lies' is a well-used phrase that might have been true half a century ago; images, and video are often seen as simple recordings of an event. Hall (1997) takes the notion of the social and human aspects of image-making, and says that documentary images are always influenced by the photographer and so the result is a mixture of emotion and information. (p. 83). Sontag argues that images have an obvious advantage in that they have two sides, one objective and one subjective; differing from Hall's argument, however, Sontag does not believe that they are opposites, but that they work together in symbiosis (2003, p. 23), describing it as a 'record of the real [the camera] and witness of the real [the photographer]'. In any case, video is a more powerful media than print, as it both illustrates and narrates events. A consensus among the citizen journalists interviewed was clear in that they saw a need for a trusting relationship with their audiences: A member of ANA emphasised the issue of trust throughout the interview, from starting out as an anonymous activist picking up a mobile phone and recording, to becoming a reliable source for most major media outlets, even while retaining his anonymity:

'Journalists would ask; were 50 people killed, and I would say no that is exaggerated. We built a relationship, if I told them that this person is credible, they would say okay, if you tell me he is credible, he is credible.' (ANA, 2012).

Neither of the networks has restrictions regarding who can become a member. ANA created their Ustream super channel by incorporating any livestream that was tagged with Syria or similar tags automatically, and Ana Mubasher used a similar process for livestreaming in Egypt. However, they did raise concerns regarding the videos connected to them and said that they would 'disconnect' any videos and users that proved unreliable. Whether or not this has ever been done is currently not confirmed.

Spaces

In many countries where traditional media is repressed, citizen-produced videos have become a crucial medium through which the outside world is able to learn about events and violations of civil rights in conflict, and act as a valuable source of information for citizens (Sasseen, 2012). During the uprisings in the region, citizen journalists used the internet to spread their videos within their networks and eventually to an international audience. Through this process, news about political events and unrest reached farther than it would without access to new media. What would previously have taken days – via traditional media, telephone or word of mouth – was instantaneously broadcast live for the whole world to see. Discussion of political matters has expanded from local to global proportions, engaging participants and encouraging them to discuss and share

their opinions online. (Seib, 2007, p. 7). as livestreaming platforms have provided a space for citizens to come together to spread and share information. Particularly in countries where governments have tried to suppress political opposition, new media such as livestreaming can prove to be valuable in pressuring the state for change. (ibid) It can, possibly, act as a deterrent to tyrannical behaviour for, if there is an audience, it is harder for the government to capture and abuse oppositional individuals or groups. When the governments respond by shutting down access to these technologies, citizens react and finding ways to circumvent the governments' control. However, one should not forget about citizens' offline actions on the ground, and ANA and Ana Mubasher both provide training offline and meet face-to-face. Human interaction is important when it comes to civic engagement, and the interviews gave many examples of this. One interviewee spoke about an event in November 2011 where he was broadcasting live from Tahrir Square in Cairo:

'There was a sniper on the Mogamma that killed about six people. We were filming it, speaking to the audience; people were writing to us, we answered. People found out that people were killed, so they came down, Tahrir was filled, and it became an international thing the next day. We got as many as 100,000 live views, and it was more powerful than it being on al Jazeera or CNN.' (ANA, 2012).

Although the initial report from the event was made online, it did in part lead to citizens taking action and joining the people already in the square. ANA believes that they are doing the same work as any traditional news organisation, but that the difference is that they are working in countries such as Syria, where traditional journalists and media organisations are not willing to endanger themselves (2012).

While new media technologies do provide a space for people to meet and interact online, they do not automatically provide a public sphere. The fact that someone has greater access to information does not mean that they will make political use of it, and access to political information does not mean that individuals will use it in the public sphere. Papacharissi (2009, p. 9) claims that what normally separates blogs by untrained, non-professionals from articles or broadcasts is that they are subjective in form and tendencies and based on personal evaluation. While the issue of subjectivity is true, it is not much different from the current structure of news for, although media ideally would be objective and impartial, today's media climate and reporting is far from it. With the increasing concentration of media corporations in the West⁴, in combination with advert-driven companies owning the majority of media outlets, news content has become market driven and, in the process, subjective; the media informs on issues that are of interest for consumers, rather than fair and balanced reporting.

Practices

There are certain practices that traditional journalists follow in their professional lives, including the protection of sources and keeping reporting fair and balanced. In addition, they are, for the most part, trained through journalism schools or apprenticeships. The lack of formal training is often a source of criticism of citizen journalists, and yet the internet is changing the way in which news is being produced, and so the line that separates journalism from non-professional journalism is becoming increasingly blurred. Sasseen suggests that

'journalism organisations should work with journalism schools, human rights organisations, and other groups that foster and distribute citizen journalism to ensure the benefits of crowd-sourced video while minimising the risks to those who shoot or appear in such footage.' (2012). This raises some issues, for if citizen journalists are to be professionally trained, who will train them? And if they are trained, should they not then be paid as professional journalists? Further would they then still be citizen journalists, or would they have to transfer to traditional media? When Mubarak's government tried to keep media from getting in and out from Egypt by shutting down mobile phone coverage and internet access, as well as by limiting the access for foreign journalists, Egyptian citizens took it on themselves to report. (Sasseen, 2012). This does not mean however, that these citizens were untrained and just chanced to be in the vicinity; Ana Mubasher and ANA offer training sessions for the people in their networks, and the latter describe their methodology as more of a trial and error approach where the members learn from their mistakes or by observing others:

“You can learn how to livestream in two hours, it is very simple, you will make mistakes, but also learn from them, and learn from other livestreamers. [...] Because from the stories you hear you learn how to deal with the things that might happen to you when you are in the field.’ (Ana Mubasher, 2012).

They argued that there is a need to have training and information regarding how to protect and keep themselves safe, as there is always a risk of endangering oneself or someone being caught on camera, and, because of that, the networks have a number of security measures which they teach to new members. None of the founders of Ana Mubasher have had any formal training, but actively sought out other activists who had the experience that they themselves were lacking. The networks provide training in internet security, as well as how to avoid government tracking online, access the internet using satellites and the like. An interesting difference from traditional media is that, while broadcasting, these networks focus on number of people to show what is going on in terms of demonstrators, security forces and so on. Both networks claim that one of the weaknesses of traditional media is that they often focus on the victims of abuses, rather than the perpetrators; conversely, the two citizen journalism networks attempt to direct attention to the latter, in order to reveal the identities of the perpetrators and show the abuse.

Identities

Dahlgren (2009) writes that the media has the power to appeal to and mobilise a number of identities which, in turn, can engage the citizens of a society. The citizen journalists interviewed discussed the value of networks and finding like-minded individuals outside their own network. They spoke of relationships with activists in other countries that inspired them in their reporting, as they were facing the same struggles. However, it is worth noting that even though the internet does in fact facilitate the opening of borders, this does not mean that individuals or groups from different backgrounds and cultures will automatically understand each other and join forces; in the case of the interviewees, however, this proved to be true.

To disregard citizen journalism as amateurish, irrelevant and a non-competitor to traditional media is to underestimate the power that citizen journalism can have. The term *citizen journalist* can provide a sense of familiarity with the audience, it being one of the citizens

producing media, rather than simply an anonymous journalist on a piece of paper or on a screen. To appeal to peoples' sense of belonging and togetherness, can be a powerful tool.

Conclusions

The arguments made above show that citizen journalism can act as a catalyst for an active citizenry. By bringing people onto the streets in order to stand up to the repressive system, citizens are becoming active in the public sphere and the media-making process, rather than a passive, spectator audience. One of the benefits of media convergence is that it transforms citizens from passive receivers to responsive actors who play an active part in society (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). Along these lines, Dahlgren (2009) states that 'sometimes the media can facilitate not just engagement, but even participation, as when the internet is used by citizens for political purposes', and this is especially true for citizen-produced media. As citizen journalists film events and interact with the audience in real time, it can be much more powerful than if the traditional media was to broadcast a news-segment. Livestreaming is more emotive, and appeals directly and in a more visceral fashion to the viewer than that of a distant and emotionally detached television news anchor. One interviewee said that he believed the biggest difference livestreaming made was within Egypt, rather than internationally, as it brought news to citizens in a way that traditional media was unable to. Citizen journalists in Egypt and Syria successfully use livestreaming applications to promote social change in their societies, taking it upon themselves to inform their fellow citizens at a time when information flow is hindered by state control and censorship. Although new media cannot overthrow governments or create democracy on its own, media convergence can certainly facilitate democratic transitions in the sense that it encourages civic engagement and, as has been established in this article, an active citizenry is a prerequisite in order for social and political change to be achieved. Governments across the region appear to have learnt that it is no longer enough to intimidate the press or raid media organisations to prevent information and news from reaching an audience. By interfering with mobile reception and internet speeds, governments can hinder citizen journalists from reporting, however, citizen journalists and activist will continue their work to find a way to spread news regardless.

As far as new media is concerned, livestreaming sets itself apart from other forms. Researchers (such as Lynch, 2005) praised the emergence of satellite television broadcasters such as al Jazeera and al Arabiya which, during the 1990s and early 2000s, were considered a contributing factor for the emergence of a public sphere in the Middle East and North Africa. It was said to help promote an Arab identity, and to offer news from an 'Arab perspective' rather than that of the Western media organisations, which in turn would benefit the growth of a healthy public sphere and, in the long run, facilitate a transition to democracy. This, however, turned out to be a premature assessment, as the ownership model of the aforementioned broadcasters has arguably had a possible negative influence on the public sphere, in the sense that they have at times failed to report on events, as in the case of the 2011 Bahraini protests. Livestreaming, on the other hand, is for the most part an act of the citizens themselves, in which action is taken as a result of failures of the state. Granted, this approach is still in its infancy, and what the long-term influence on the Middle Eastern and North African public sphere will be impossible to predict. What can be said, however, is that, in comparison to other approaches, it has proven to be a valuable asset, both locally and globally.

During the interviews, it became clear that the driving force behind these citizen journalist networks was change. The citizen journalists aspire to help construct an open society where their fellow citizens can access the information they want and need in order to make informed decisions. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, they believe that their work is much more powerful and has more influence on the Egyptian citizens than that of traditional media, both in terms of providing news, but also in the sense that they are documenting events from the inside. During the protests in Egypt, citizen journalists were present in Tahrir Square before the international media arrived. Livestreaming also proved important in regard to mobilising people, as when citizens saw what was happening at that instant, they joined the demonstrations.

On a global scale, livestreaming has been acknowledged as an important contributor to broadcasting news in high-conflict areas such as Syria. As the state has banned most international media from the entering the country, the work of citizen journalists has become crucial for many major media organisations. It has, to some extent, grown to be considered a valid and credible source of information, although it is not yet regarded to be equal to that of traditional journalism. In Egypt, it proved to be a valued means by which the public could access news at a time where state-run media was failing its audience. Although the applications did indeed turn out to be a useful tool in Egypt and Syria, in essence, it is the engagement and will of the people that made the uprisings possible. New technologies cannot change societies on their own, but when the populace use them in order to facilitate mobilisation and to spread and share information, social change can indeed be accomplished. Online media such as livestreaming can serve as a much-needed boost to the public sphere, and fill the shoes of traditional media. It is impossible to say what the future holds for Egypt and Syria; what is certain is that oppressed citizens will never stop fighting for their voices to be heard and, in today's world, technologies such as livestreaming, provide them with a tool which they can use to speak and have their view of events broadcast outside of the country. By taking on the role of investigating the state, will they perhaps aid the emergence of democracy and the increased transparency of state business? There might be an opportunity for citizen journalism to function as a new watchdog, as traditional media is no longer serving its original purpose of providing its citizens with information which helps in the formation of their opinion. In an age where public service is fading and the journalistic paradigm is shifting, citizen journalism may yet take its place.

References

- Bambuser (2013), www.bambuser.com
- Beet.tv (2012) the Future of Real-News Is Unfolding in Syria, the Aps International Video Director, <http://www.beet.tv/2012/07/ap-homs-bambuser.html>
- Beet.tv (2012) The Associated Press in Pact with Bambuser for Live Video News, <http://www.beet.tv/2012/04/bambuserap.html>
- Bengtsson, R. (2013) *Even if it is not your fault, it is still your responsibility. Livestreaming as means of civic engagement: A case study of citizen journalism in Egypt and Syria.*
- Dahlgren, P. (2009) *Media and Political Engagement. Citizens, Communication, and Democracy.* New York: Cambridge University Press
- Deane, J. (2005). *Media, democracy and the public sphere.* In Hemer, O. and Tufte, T. (Eds.) (2005). *Media and Global Change – Rethinking Communication for Development.* (pp. 271-284). Buenos Aires, CLASCO.
- Hall, S. (1997) *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* London: SAGE publications Ltd.
- Howard, P. (2010). *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy; Information Technology and Political Islam.* Oxford Scholarship Online
- International Federation for Journalists (2013) Status of Journalists and journalism ethics: IFJ principles, <http://www.ifj.org/en/articles/status-of-journalists-and-journalism-ethics-ifj-principles/>
- Jenkins, H. (2001). *Convergence? I Diverge.* Digital Renaissance, Technology Review.
- Lynch, M. (2005). *Assessing the Democratizing Power of Satellite TV.* Transnational Broadcasting Studies
- Lynch, M. (2012). *Political Science and the New Arab Public Sphere.* Foreign Policy
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide.* London: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2009). *The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and beyond.* In Chadwick, A and Howard, P.N. *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics.* London: Routledge.
- Sasseen, J. (2012) *The Video Revolution. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance.* <http://cima.ned.org/publications/video-revolution>
- Servaes, J, and Lie, R. (2008). *Media Globalization through Localization.* In Servaes, J (2008) *Communication for Development and Social Change* Paris: UNESCO
- Seib, P. Ed. (2007). *New Media and the New Middle East.* Gordonsville: Palgrave Macmillan
- Sontag, S. (2003). *Regarding the Pain of Others.* London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Ustream (2012), www.ustream.tv
- Webster, F. (2006). *Theories of the Information Society* 3rd ed. New York: Routledge
- White, A (2011). *Panel debate at the European Youth Media Days, and interview.* Brussels.

¹ Rebecca Bengtsson, MA graduate in Communication for Development, is a professional journalist (photojournalism, print, radio and video) who has worked in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. She is also a regular trainer on practical media, media ethics and responsibility, targeting young journalists and activists. This article is based on her thesis in partial fulfillment of her MA in ComDev at Malmö University (MAH), Sweden. She is currently working at MAH with the ComDev programme. E-mail: sandrarebeccabengtsson@gmail.com

² Some citizen journalists are anonymous, out of concern for their wellbeing.

³ The research in Egypt was funded by Sida through a Minor Field Study grant, awarded to students conducting research.

⁴ 90 percent of international news in the world comes from four Western news agencies. (Webster, 2006, p. 133).