Citizen Involvement in Emergency Reporting: A Study on Witnessing and Citizen Reporting

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Abstract

This article reports findings from two studies regarding the role citizen reporting plays in emergencies. Findings from first study, a content analysis of citizen reporting about the Haiti Earthquake, Gezi Park Protests (Istanbul), Xynthia Storm (Europe), and Boston Bombings, indicates that citizen reporters were predominantly engaging in reporting of straight news. Citizen reporters were more likely to report their own observations than reporting or summarizing information they gathered from mainstream news sources. Relatively, we found that citizen reporters were more likely to give voice to alternative sources of information, like bystanders or witnesses of incidents, than sources, such as government representatives. However, we also found that use of alternative sources does not necessarily translate to providing viewpoints that may contextualize the events. Namely, we found that episodic frames, rather than thematic frames, were likely to be utilized by citizen reporters. The second study, online interviews with citizen reporters whose coverage was content-analyzed in the first study, found that a sense of editorial independence and disenchantment with the mainstream media’s coverage of the incidents were the main sources of motivation for citizen reporters. Results also indicate that citizen reporters tend to adopt a ‘publish, then filter’ approach to reporting and fact-checking. Implications for information verification issues are discussed.

Keywords

Citizen journalism, Emergency, Crisis, Content analysis, Framing, Witnessing
Introduction

The emergence of new communication technologies has brought about important changes in how news is produced and consumed. An important change concerns the increasing role readers/audiences have in production of news (Fortunati et al. 2009). More specifically, interactive and mobile technologies are often cited as factors that help empower citizens by allowing them to publish their own account of incidents without intermediation (Waldman, 2011). For example, the concept of smart aggregation points to a new type of filtering and authentication process whereby internet-based sources offer quality content in the endless informational possibilities of the digital age.

Citizens’ active engagement in reporting of incidents may help challenge mainstream news institutions’ gatekeeping and sense making functions, prompting some commentators to name citizen journalism as the ‘fifth estate’ (Cooper 2006). Perceived shortcomings of mainstream news media, including biased coverage and lack of coverage (Murthy 2013; Amnesty International 2013) damage the ‘watchdog’ function of mainstream media while contributing to this perception of online media as the fifth estate. Murthy (2013 1177) argues that natural disasters and emergencies create a potential for what he calls ‘dehumanizing and exploitative journalism’ in which some aspects of the event or certain segments of the affected population are prioritized over others in coverage (e.g. ‘disproportionate coverage of white Western victims’ vis-à-vis ‘Asian victims’ who formed the majority in 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami). Similarly, self-censorship in mainstream news media during the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey has led to increased adoption and use of online media by activists, protestors and supporters to bypass official news sources (Amnesty International 2013). Bias in media coverage is commonly found in ‘the framing strategies’ (Zelizer and Allan 2010: 11) or in how reality is organized before it is presented to the public by news institutions. Therefore, journalistic practices of citizens utilizing new media and how they construct reality
come to the fore as an object of inquiry in the case of citizen journalism.

In this respect, the aim of this article is to examine the role that citizen journalists play in dissemination of information during emergencies and crises. We will first report results from a content analysis of reporting that citizens engaged in during four recent emergencies/crises: Boston Bombings (USA), Haiti Earthquake, Gezi Park Protests (Istanbul), and Xynthia Storm (Europe). Additionally, we will also summarize some of the main findings from a number of online interviews we conducted with citizens who produced the news/information that the content analysis focused on.

Citizen Journalism and Reporting During Emergencies

Citizen journalism refers to production of journalistic content by ordinary citizens such as ‘current affairs-based blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eyewitness commentary on current events’ (Goode 2009: 1288). According to Bowman and Willis, participatory journalism, a term which they seem to use interchangeably with citizen journalism, refers to ‘the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information’ with ‘little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic work-flow dictating the decisions of a staff’ (2003: 9). Glaser adds that citizen journalism involves activities of creating, augmenting or fact-checking media through online means by ‘people without professional journalism training’ (Glaser 2006, quoted in Dugan 2008: 804). However, these definitions do not go uncontested as we find different approaches which focus on different aspects of citizen-oriented journalism practices in the literature (Watson 2012). While some scholars focus on editorial control (e.g., Bowman and Willis 2003), others focus on ‘self-publication’ (e.g., Rosen 2009, cited in Watson 2012: 468) and make distinctions on the basis of whether citizens contribute to the news production by mainstream media or stay independent (Watson
For Allan (2012), on the other hand, citizen journalists are ‘accidental journalists’ who are involved in ‘spontaneous acts’ through which they assume the role of journalists.

Increasingly, with the growing prevalence of citizen journalism, a salient question that has frequently been raised concerns the affordances that new media create for citizen journalists (Fortunati et al. 2009; Waldman 2011). Accordingly, in contrast to mainstream media which is mainly considered to be ‘unidirectional’ and limited to a small number of sources (Siegl and Foot 2004), new media is perceived to be similar to a conversation in which the distinction between producers and consumers of news is—as the concept of ‘prosumer’ (Toffler 1981) suggests—blurred (Gillmor 2004). Through this conversation enabled by the new media, audiences emerge as ‘true actors’ or active audiences (Fortunati et al. 2009: 932) and they ‘potentially have become competitors for both editors and journalists’ (Fortunati et al. 2009: 935). In addition, the so-called democratic deficit within mainstream media, which is revealed in the tension between ‘mainstream media as the fourth estate’ (Newman, Dutton and Blank 2012) and ‘mainstream media that serve elite interests,’ (Liebes and Kampf 2010) is one of the themes that accompany the image of citizen journalism as a more democratic form of communication or as the fifth estate.

In addition to these affordances and opportunities, there are also challenges associated with new media and citizen journalism. One challenge concerns the reliability of information disseminated by citizen reports (Riaz and Pasha 2011) and the associated risk of ‘reporting rumor as fact’ (Jewitt 2009, quoted in Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 269). This challenge is largely due to the prevalent fact-checking logic in citizen reporting. Namely, the ‘publish, then filter’ fact-checking logic in citizen reporting contrasts starkly with the fact-checking conventions found in professional journalism (i.e., filter, then publish) (Bowman and Willis 2003; Beers 2006).

Commentators argue that increased collaboration between citizen reporters and
professional journalists may help alleviate this problem (Riaz and Pasha 2011). However, this poses another challenge: incorporation of content produced by ordinary citizens into mainstream media ‘as a supplement or complement to journalistic news reporting’ (Volkmer and Firdaus 2013: 106-7). In these instances, content produced by citizens are only incorporated when ‘‘professional’ journalistic news material is not available’. Furthermore, when citizen generate content are incorporated, they are structured by the norms and values of the mainstream media, which arguably diminishes the democratization aspect of new media and active audiences (Volkmer and Firdaus 2013: 109). This is accompanied by sceptic attitudes of professional journalists towards online content and its credibility, which leads to the reduction of online content to ‘unconfirmed sources’ when the credibility criteria of news media are not met (Volkmer and Firdaus 2013: 108). Convergence, in a way that challenges both professional and citizen journalists, is ‘both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process’ (Jenkins 2004: 37) and these correspond to two ‘conflicting logics of production’ (Hänska-Ahy and Shapour 2013: 31).

The opportunities and challenges described above become even more profound in the context of emergencies and crises (Liebes and Kampf 2010). On the one hand, thanks to the fast penetration of smart phones and self-publication, video sharing and photo sharing applications, citizens who are present in the scene of an incident start reporting about it before journalists arrive on the scene. Also, during political crises, particularly when authoritarian impulses try to censor media coverage, citizen reporting may help provide ‘unmediated and unfiltered flows of information, addressing public opinion and diversifying the message in accordance with their specific target’ (Della Porta and Mosca 2005: 184). On the other hand, situational anxiety created by a large-scale crisis, combined with the need for immediacy, may potentially increase the likelihood that false information will spread more quickly through social media. For example, in a recent study, Starbird and colleagues (2014) have reported
that a substantial number of rumors spread through social media in the aftermath of the Boston Bombings. Among these rumors was the rumor that misidentified Sunil Tripathi, a missing student, as one of the culprits of the bombings.

These considerations underline the need to further examine citizen reporting in the context of emergencies and crises. This investigation would greatly benefit from understanding citizen reporting within the context of different types of emergencies, including natural disasters, man-made disasters such as terrorist attacks, and political crises such as mass political protests (Papadimitriou et al. 2013, Watson et al. 2013). In addition, various functions of journalism—also relevant for citizen journalism—such as informing, sense-making, framing, witnessing, monitoring and criticizing (watchdog function) should be taken into consideration to analyze assumptions about the democratizing nature of the Internet (Waldman 2011).

In terms of framing, for example, the distinction that Iyengar (1991) made between thematic and episodic frames may be particularly relevant to the differences between citizen journalism and mainstream journalism. According to Iyengar, episodic frames refer to the isolated incident while thematic frames also include context of the event (1991). If, as is often assumed, episodic frames are more likely than thematic frames, to be in line with commercial mainstream journalism and its ‘just the facts’ approach to news making (Tiegreen and Newman 2008), then a question worth investigating concerns whether citizen reporting can offer an alternative way of sense-making by using thematic frames.

In addition, various affordances, challenges and functions which we discussed above also bring about questions about citizen reporters’ own interpretation about their role in news making and dissemination. What motivates citizens to engage in reporting? To what extent do they define their reporting activities as a form of journalism? How do they situate their reporting activities (and how they report) vis-à-vis functions that we associate with
Method

For the content analysis, first, a list of citizen reporters who either utilized their own blogs or citizen journalist portals, such as allvoices.com, digitaljournal.com, to report about Haiti Earthquake, Gezi Park Protests, Xynthia Storm (Europe), and Boston Bombings, was generated. Then, for each incident, four citizen reporters were randomly selected from the list and for each citizen reporter, depending on availability of articles, four or five entries were randomly selected. This resulted in 88 articles to be content analyzed. The unit of analysis for the content analysis was paragraphs, resulting in a total of 878 units to be analyzed.

The content analysis primarily focused on: 1) the balance between information vs. commentary, 2) information sources that were utilized by the reporters (e.g., wire services, citizens, political authorities); 3) use of visuals; 4) targets of criticism and who voices the criticism; 5) the extent to which episodic vs. thematic frames were used; and 6) reporting of emotions (Appendix 1). The minimum intercoder reliability for the variables reported in this article was $\alpha = 0.66$.

For the online interviews, citizen reporters, whose blog entries regarding Haiti Earthquake, Xynthia Storm, Gezi Park Protests, or Boston Bombings were content analyzed (summarized in the previous section), were contacted. Out of the citizen reporters who were contacted, seven completed an online interview. These seven respondents had previously reported about Gezi Park Protests or Haiti Earthquake.

Given the sensitivity of some of the issues covered (e.g., political crises), in order to protect the anonymity of the citizen reporters, with the exception of gender, no personally identifiable information was collected. Consequently, we will not engage in an analysis of the first-order linkages between the content of the citizen reporters’ coverage of the incidents and
their responses to the interview questions.

Data analysis of the interviews were conducted using a grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990) approach, which involves coding of the collected data in terms of the identified concepts, themes and events and analysis of the coded data in terms of the theoretical background provided in the literature review.

Results

Content Analysis

Straight News vs. Commentary: In terms of the balance between commentary and straight news provided by citizen reporters, results in Figure 1 show that although citizen journalists often produce commentaries during crises (34%), they predominantly tend to provide straight news about the incidents (66%). The only exception to this trend was the reporting on Gezi Park Protests in Turkey, in which commentaries (63%) were much more common than straight news (37%).

Figure 1: Straight News vs. Commentary, $\chi^2 (3, N = 877) = 196.112, p < .001$
**News Sources and Witnessing:** As discussed in the review of literature, an important potential benefit that citizen reporting may bring about concerns the diversity of information and perspectives that are available in the information environment during a crisis.

As shown in Figure 2, in citizen reporting, identified news sources (38%), such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations, citizens or experts, were the most commonly utilized sources of information by the citizen reporters. Yet, citizen reporters also frequently engaged in reportage of what they themselves witnessed during a crisis (30%). In addition to identified news sources and witnessing, citizen journalists continue to use mainstream media (8%) and wire services (8%) albeit to a limited extent.

![Figure 2: Information Sources](image-url)

Further analysis of distribution of types of identified news sources indicates that government representatives were cited in 24% and quoted in 19% of the paragraphs containing an identified news source. This was followed by non-governmental organizations that were cited in 16% and quoted in 12% of the paragraphs containing an identified new source. Also important to note, citizens in various roles, such as victims, witnesses, activists, received considerable attention from citizen reporters. Overall, combined together these categories of citizen roles were cited in 27% and quoted in 20% of the paragraphs that
contained an identified news source (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Distribution of Sources for 'News Sources – Identified' Category](image)

Across the incidents that were analyzed, citizen reporters provided an account of what they themselves witnessed in 30% of the paragraphs analyzed. It should be noted that this tendency was much more common during the Gezi Park Protests, during which citizen reporters predominantly provided information based on what they witnessed (62%). For the other incidents, witnessing by the citizen reporters was much less common, ranging between 12% and 16% of the units analyzed.

Relatedly, use of audio visual proofs—which include audio visuals provided by other citizens, mainstream media, and visual proofs collected by the citizen reporter—is more prevalent in Gezi Park Protests (77%) which is followed by Xynthia Storm (42%), Haiti Earthquake (36%) and Boston Marathon Bombings (20%) (Figure 4). Although systematic categorization of the audio visual proofs utilized by citizen journalists were not conducted for this study, it was observed that in the case of citizen reporting of Gezi Park Protests audio visual content included photographs (e.g., victims, police officers pointing riot guns directly at protestors) which might be used to verify claims about the police violence occurred during
the event.

Figure 4: Use of Audio Visual Proofs by Event, $\chi^2(6, N = 259) = 53.906, p < .001$

_Sense Making, Emotions, and Framing by Citizen Reporters:_ As discussed in the previous sections, an important potential change that is brought about by social and mobile media pertains to the ability of individuals to challenge not only the gate keeping but also the sense making functions of mainstream media. As such, citizen reporting may become a key outlet for the dissemination of opinions, or more appropriately, alternative ways of framing events. Hence, in this section we will report some of the key findings regarding the potential components of such sense-making in citizen journalism: identification of institutions that criticism is directed to and sources of the criticism (i.e., who is criticizing), reporting of emotions and subjective reactions, and framing choices made by the citizen reporters.

Coding for the targets and sources of criticism was conducted only among paragraphs that contained some form of criticism. Among paragraphs that contained a form of criticism, 27% targeted government organizations, 7% targeted private media institutions, 5% targeted non-governmental organizations, 3% targeted citizens and 2% targeted businesses. The content analysis suggested that Gezi Park Protests stood out from among others in terms of the targets of criticism. Namely, in articles on Gezi Park Protests, 43% of all units included a
criticism towards government while 18% included a criticism towards media. Xynthia Storm followed Gezi Protests with 34% of paragraphs containing a criticism directed towards government organizations. Citizen reporters themselves were the most frequently occurring critic (21%). In addition, citizen reporters frequently cited criticisms made by politicians (19%). On the other hand, it seems that citizen journalists did not give much space to criticisms raised by private citizens (5%).

To measure the level of emotions communicated in citizen reportage, we coded each paragraph on a 7-item Likert scale ranging between 0 (not at all) and 6 (very much) in terms of various negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, and anger. Accordingly, overall, citizen reporters tended to avoid voicing emotions (M = 1.31; SD = 1.67). However, in this respect as well Gezi Park Protests stood out from among other incidents (M = 2.12; SD = 1.4) $F(3,864) = 43.817; p < .000$.

Lastly, we analyze how different news frames were utilized by citizen journalists. Following Iyengar’s distinction between thematic and episodic frames (1991), each unit was coded as either applying a thematic or an episodic frame (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Episodic vs. Thematic Frames by Event](image)

$\chi^2(3, N = 878) = 340.965, p < .001$
Accordingly, on average across all four incidents, 31% of units were coded as thematic. Yet this is mostly due to the citizen coverage of the Gezi Park Protests, within which thematic frames comprise 72% of all paragraphs analyzed.

**Interviews with Bloggers**

*‘Citizen Journalist’ as an Identity:* Several interviewees defined citizen journalism in terms of the ability/responsibility to act as an independent source that can help inform the public. For example, according to interviewee #1, ‘being a citizen journalist means keeping people informed on issues one finds to be important through communication channels which are either digital or not.’ Interviewee #4, in a similar fashion, emphasizes independence and lack of editorial constraints in his understanding of citizen journalism. Interviewee #6, who reported on Haiti earthquake, adds ‘citizen journalism is about calling politicians and elites to account, to get the public to focus on what is happening around them, to participate in democracy.’

On the other hand, others who engaged in reporting during the emergencies we focused on prefer a narrower definition mainly emphasizing the notion that citizen journalism is about on-site reporting. Interviewee #3, who reported during Gezi Park protests, does not accept the label of citizen journalist since she did not engage in on-site reporting. Likewise, interviewee #5 expressed that his reporting reflected a theoretical approach on journalism itself rather than creating citizen journalistic content to inform public (this is despite the fact that the interviewee in question actually did on-site reporting about Gezi Protests).

In addition, interviewees #2 and #4 stated that their coverage of events as citizen journalists mostly consisted of perspectives (analysis and critique) and emotions rather than on-site reporting or writing news stories about incidents. This understanding of citizen
journalism differs from other views since it emphasizes production of commentaries on an issue rather than news coverage.

*What Motivates Citizen Reporting?* In terms of their motivations to engage in production and dissemination of information during the emergencies, respondents generally allude to the need to disseminate information under circumstances, such as emergencies or political crises, during which conventional channels of information may be unavailable or may be presenting a biased coverage of issues. For example, for interviewee #1, who reported during Gezi Park protests, the main motivating factor to engage in citizen reporting in the first place was to share his political opinions because ‘all the news in the Internet were same in terms of both style and content’ and ‘a lot events were not covered, for example political protests I attended were not even mentioned anywhere.’ Similarly, interviewee #4 says that he began to write his comments first on music and cinema and his writings evolved into comments on current events, including, the Gezi Protests, as he realized the need to fill a vacuum in mainstream media’s coverage of current issues.

Concerned about the lack of coverage in mainstream media, citizen journalists linked their activities to the need to raise public awareness about the issues and expose abuse by government institutions. For example, interviewee #1 indicates that his aim during Gezi Park protests was to ‘…reveal the police violence and to provide informational flow in order to prevent disinformation.’ Similarly, interviewee #6 stated that he continued to cover stories about the impact of Haiti earthquake one year after the event because he thought that the earthquake ‘had slipped off the radar of public consciousness.’ Interviewee #7 also added that one of his sources of motivation to engage in citizen journalism was to raise awareness by presenting what is not covered through conventional media channels. Lastly, interviewee #2 adds ‘difficulty to reach quality content in the Internet’ as a motivation to engage in citizen journalism, which suggests a need to filter online content as well.
Citizen vs. ‘Professional’ Journalism: In this section, we will discuss citizen journalists’ perceptions about the ways in which their reporting activities differ from professional journalism.

A strong theme shared by the respondents is the ability of citizen journalists to work independently from constraints imposed by institutions or an editorial body. To the interviewees, citizen reporting constituted a form of reporting which was ‘untrained and unconstrained’ (Interviewee #5) and which was not as susceptible to censorship (Interviewee #2). For interviewee #4, the benefit of this freedom is related to what topics he chooses to cover: ‘I determine the topics, I do not try to make anyone happy.’ For interviewee #6 the primary benefit of lack of editorial (and other) constraints was the control he had over sense-making: ‘if I do add comment, then I can do so from the heart, reflecting what I believe, rather than reflect the policy of a newspaper proprietor.’ Interviewee #7 states that bloggers are independent in that ‘they don’t have any agenda like most of’ mainstream media.

Interviewees also frequently alluded to how their reportage style was different from journalists working in mainstream media. For example, interviewee #1 indicated that he does not utilize ‘the inverted pyramid rule which is adhered by classical journalism’ and prefer ‘chronological news narratives’ and ‘differ from the production in the media sector through content building tools such as Storify.’

Immediacy, another difference mentioned, is perceived by citizen journalists more as an advantage instead of a problem. This perception contradicts the more common assumption that the drive for immediacy may lead to inadequate fact-checking. Interviewee #1 indicates that he can share information without engaging in a long process of fact-checking; he checks user profiles, time and location of shared content and provide links to user profiles and original content so that readers can check the information by themselves. Interviewee #6 also points out that he uses multiple sources for fact-checking through use of multiple tabs and an
RSS reader. Interviewee #2 states that he published his own photos and spoke with protestors in the photos if they were identifiable. These points suggest that respondents are aware of credibility issues and employ some forms of fact-checking in their writing process.

Some of the respondents, on the other hand, emphasized that immediacy is not much of a concern due to the nature of their postings, while they are still engaged in fact-checking processes when they need confirmation. For instance, both interviewee #2 and #4 indicate that their articles mostly contained commentaries rather than information, which rendered immediacy and/or fact checking irrelevant most of the time.

**Challenges:** The challenges experienced by citizen journalists who report on-site differ from challenges from those who report on distant emergencies. Interviewee #6 stated that he often had to rely on official press releases because he was reporting a distant emergency, the Haiti Earthquake: ‘inevitably, since I am not 'on site' for many international reports, I have to rely on press releases, news services, and other news outlets - nor do I have the resources of a Reuters, AFP or BBC at my disposal.’

On the other hand, according to the majority of the interviewees, the main challenge citizen journalists face during emergencies and political crises, especially when they engage in on-site reporting, is lack of protection (and accreditation which would give them access as reporters). For example, interviewee #4, who reported during Gezi Park protests, stated that ‘Since I am also a photographer, it was hard to take photos freely without the press card’ and ‘The fact that security forces asked press card all the time prevented us recording some of the witnessing on-site.’ At the same time, Interviewee #1 points out that not being recognized as a journalist (and lack of accreditation) not only has safety implications but also poses challenges about legitimacy of their reporting activities, even limiting their access to information sources. According to him, information sources do not want to spend their time with citizen journalists because they think the platforms of citizen journalists, in this case a
blog, are not well recognized and secure enough to disclose sensitive information.

**Discussion**

In this article, citizen reporting in the context of emergencies and crises has been investigated using a content analysis of citizen reporting published in blogs and citizen journalism platforms and online interviews with a subsample of citizen reporters whose coverage we content analyzed.

Our content analysis showed that citizen journalists frequently report what they witness rather than merely relying on mainstream media reports and wire services. This finding is indicative of the potential of citizen journalism as an activity that can help democratization of information production and dissemination. However, it should be noted that the extent to which citizens can rely on their own accounts of incidents and supporting audio-visuals may depend on the type of emergency. For example, witnessing was the dominant form of information source only in citizen reportage about Gezi Park Protests. Likewise, use of audio-visuals as part of reporting was higher in citizen reporting of the Gezi Park Protests (a crisis that builds up slowly and may potentially last long, creating an opportunity for predictable patterns of recordable incidents and reportable spectacles) and Xynthia Storm (an emergency that is predictable) than in the reporting of the aftermath of the Boston Bombing and the Haiti Earthquake.

Our content analysis also indicates that citizen reporters often utilized other citizens (bystanders, witnesses) as a source of information. This finding underlines the potential of online media as a venue that may give more voice to citizens than mainstream media, which is an important relation between new media and giving voice to citizens.

As discussed above, citizen reporting may offer important opportunities for challenging the monopoly that mainstream media have on sense-making. In this respect, we
had predicted that citizen reporting would be more likely to utilize what Iyengar (1991) has named as thematic frames. However, our findings indicate that citizen journalists predominantly use episodic frames rather than thematic frames. An exception to this trend was the dominant use of thematic frames in citizen reporting of Gezi Park Protests.

As can be noted, our findings suggest that citizen reportage of Gezi Park Protests was markedly different from the reportage of other crises in terms of utilization of witnessing as a form of reporting, use of audio-visual evidence, and use of thematic frames. While our findings compare only four emergencies/crises, we believe that the differences we observed may partly be due to the nature of the emergencies we focused on. Namely, while most natural disasters and man-made disasters such as industrial accidents or terrorist attacks can be considered as ‘flash crises’ in the sense that their occurrence is often unpredictable in terms of time and location and that they occur suddenly within a short period of time; mass political protests, such as Gezi Park Protests, are characterized by continuous gatherings, conflict and clashes often in a symbolically significant space such as Taksim Square in İstanbul (Watson et al. 2013). Hence, this fundamental difference between Gezi Park Protests and other crisis situations we have covered here may explain the prevalence of witnessing as well as commentaries in this specific type of crisis. Also, the fact that Gezi Park Protests, was characterized by political polarization and disenchantment with the bias in mainstream media coverage (Papadimitriou 2013) may explain the differences in terms of the balance between provision of commentaries vis-à-vis straight news as well as dominant utilization of witnessing and thematic frames.

Interviews with citizen reporters revealed that an important factor that drives citizen reporting is disenchantment with mainstream media and a need to challenge its agenda-setting function. More specifically, citizen journalists who were interviewed were primarily motivated by: 1) wish to share one’s opinions and raise public awareness, 2) lack of coverage
by the mainstream media during emergencies/crises, 3) uniformity of the mainstream media regarding style and content, 4) need to filter user-generated content to uncover quality content.

While most respondents agree that editorial independence is an important characteristic of citizen journalism, boundaries of citizen journalism are not clear for the citizen journalists we interviewed. Our findings point to three types of categorization of citizen reporting: 1) user-generated content based on witnessing and on-site reporting, 2) official sources and press releases, and 3) lastly opinions based on perspectives or emotions.

In interviews, citizen journalists stated that they avoid news writing styles associated with mainstream media, such as the inverted pyramid. Alternatively, they utilize an emerging chronological news writing style through online tools like Storify. Also, citizen journalists claimed that the ‘publish-then-filter’ approach to news reporting provides them with an advantage in terms timeliness and immediacy of reporting. Interestingly, some interviewees argued that reliability of information is not a concern for them since they mostly report perspectives and emotions (thereby not being concerned about the facts but rather the overall picture).

Lastly, while interviewees frequently made references to the editorial freedom they enjoy in terms of the issues and the perspectives they cover, they also discussed key challenges they faced. Most importantly, interviewees indicated that citizen journalists who engage in on-site reporting find lack of protection as their main problem because it restricts their ability to document important incidents during emergencies and may put them in dangerous situations, particularly while covering political crises. Relatedly, negative perceptions about the legitimacy of citizen reporters and their platforms presents an important obstacle for citizen reporters in terms of reaching important information sources.

Many commentators have noted the transformative potential of citizen participation,
via new communication technologies, in production and dissemination of information/news. Citizen reporting promises democratization of news making by shifting power in the media landscape from conventional sources to citizens. On the other hand, the realization of this potential is contingent on addressing important challenges, such as the implications of the increasingly blurred lines between user-generated content and mainstream media and questions related to the credibility of citizen-generated content.

These opportunities and challenges intensify under emergency conditions in which immediate and accurate information flows are crucial. As such, the aim of this article was to summarize findings from two studies (content analysis and interviews) investigating citizen reporting during emergencies. Our findings suggest that there is considerable overlap between interview data about citizen reporters’ motivations and content analysis data about these reporters’ coverage of the incidents. Namely, citizen journalists that we interviewed have frequently indicated that one of main the reasons why they engaged in reporting activities was their disenchantment with the coverage of the emergencies in commercial media and that they valued being independent from sources of influence that bias mainstream news media. In line with these claims, we observed that citizen reporters not only provided reporting based on what they themselves witnessed but were also more likely to give more voice to other citizen witnesses (and not just citizens as victims). On the other hand, in terms of framing devices utilized, we did not see the expected use of thematic frames that can provide readers more detailed contextual information. Also, fact-checking continues to be an important problem, since verification methods tend to be limited to the provision of time and location information so that content can be filtered by the audiences, an approach known as the ‘publish, then filter’ approach to fact-checking. Hence, further studies may focus on issues related to information verification as well as framing choices of citizen reporters during and in the aftermath of various kinds of emergencies.
Acknowledgements

This article is based on research emanating from the European Commission-funded Contribution of Social Media in Crisis management (COSMIC) project, under grant agreement no. 312737. The views in this article are those of the authors alone and are in no way intended to reflect those of the European Commission.
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Appendix – Content Analysis Coding Protocol

Section 1. Document Record Information
(please repeat this procedure for each paragraph you are coding)

1.1. Coder ID
1.2. Write the address of the webpage from which the article is coming from
1.3. Write the name of the DOC file containing the entry
1.4. Title of the article
1.5. If available, name of the citizen journalist (author of the article)
1.6. If country information (of the journalist or the site) is available, please enter country name. If not available, please write N/A
1.7. Publication Date yyyy/mm/dd
1.8. Copy the unit (paragraph) to excel sheet

Section 2. Entry Characteristics

2.1 Category that best describes the type of emergency/disaster/crisis unit is discussing

1  Flood
2  Extreme Temperature
3  Storm
4  Wildfire
5  Earthquake
6  Man-Made Disaster (intentional act of terrorism-violence or threat of violence)
7  Man-Made Disaster (Other)
8  Social/Political Protest
9  Other

2.2 Info-Commentary prominence in unit.

1  Straight news/information (coverage/updates about the with little or no personal/subjective statements or opinions)
2  Commentary/opinion is prominent
2.3. Does the unit contain information sourced from the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mainstream news source: Newspaper, Television (or its website, social media site)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Mainstream news source: Wire service (or its website)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3</td>
<td>Other Citizen Journalists: Tweets or social media entries of journalists not affiliated with a mainstream source</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4</td>
<td>News Source – Identified (an individual, an expert, an organization that is quoted or cited; the identity of the source can be indicated in the current unit or somewhere else in the entry).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.5</td>
<td>News Source - Unidentified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.6</td>
<td>Primary information (by personal observation, reporting from point of crisis)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4. (If 2.3.3 = 1 Other Citizen Journalist = Yes) Please record the URL of the sourced citizen journalist.

__________________________

2.5. (If 2.3.6. = 1 Primary information = Yes) Does the unit contain visuals, videos, sound clips that can be used to verify the primary information that the citizen journalist has collected?

1 Yes, Photo
2 Yes, Video and Audio Recording
3 Yes, Only Audio Recording
0 No

2.6. (If 2.3.4 = 1 News Source – Identified) Which of the following sources were quoted (using a quotation mark or a block quotation)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Industry, Business Organizations</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2</td>
<td>Government agency representatives or political authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.3</td>
<td>Representatives of NGOs, Emergency Response Organizations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4</td>
<td>Representatives of a group claimed to be responsible for terrorism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.5</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as aid workers, rescue volunteers, doctors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.6</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as protestors, organizers of protests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.7</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as victims</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.8</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as observers/witnesses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.9</td>
<td>A person who is identified as an expert regarding the issue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.7. (If 2.3.4 = 1 News Source – Identified) Which of the following sources were cited?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7.1</td>
<td>Industry, Business Organizations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.2</td>
<td>International or national government agency representatives or political authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.3</td>
<td>Representatives of NGOs, Emergency Response Organizations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.4</td>
<td>Representatives of a group claimed to be responsible for terrorism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.5</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as aid workers, rescue volunteers, doctors</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.6</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as protestors, organizers of protests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.7</td>
<td>Private citizens identified as victims</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.8</td>
<td>Private citizens as observers/witnesses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.9</td>
<td>A person who is identified as an expert regarding the issue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.8. Does the unit contain a criticism targeting the following?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.8.1</td>
<td>Industry, Business Organizations – Non-media business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.2</td>
<td>Media Companies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.3</td>
<td>International or national government agency representatives or political authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.4</td>
<td>NGOs, Emergency Response Organizations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.5</td>
<td>Private citizens (e.g., for not being calm, not being informed, for acting violently in a protest etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.9. Does the unit contain a criticism voiced…

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.9.1</td>
<td>Directly by the author of the article without citing a source</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.2</td>
<td>By an expert that the author cites/quotes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.3</td>
<td>By a representative of a government/political authority that the author cites/quotes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.4</td>
<td>By an NGO, Emergency Response organization that the author cites/quotes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.5</td>
<td>By private citizens or by the general public</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.10. Does the unit make a reference to/discuss undue pressure (such as censorship, financial pressure, surveillance) that may impede on civil liberties (freedom of speech, privacy, freedom of association)?

1  Yes
2  No
2.11. To what extent does the unit express negative emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, disappointment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.12. (Code If 2.11 > 0) Which of the following best describes the expression of negative emotion?

1. Reporting emotion through quotes (attributing emotions to specific others)
2. Indirect description of emotion (references to collective emotions)
3. Authorial emotions (entry author expressing his/her emotions)

2.13. To what extent does the unit express or implicitly reveal non-negative emotions such as happiness, hope, or excitement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.14. (Code If 2.13 > 0) Which of the following best describes the expression of positive emotion?

1. Reporting emotion through quotes (attributing emotions to specific others)
2. Indirect description of emotion (references to collective emotions)
3. Authorial emotions (entry author expressing his/her emotions)

2.15. Does the unit apply a thematic frame that focuses on broader social trends related to and implications of the incident or an episodic frame that focuses on the isolated incident?

1. Thematic Frame (incident and social causes/implications/trends)
2. Episodic Frame (isolated incident)
Contributors details

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E-mail: lbaruh@ku.edu.tr