

Citizen Journalism – Competing Perspectives

Examine the extracts below from two articles that highlight how opinions may differ dramatically opinions may differ as to the future of Citizen Journalism.

Article 1: ‘Citizen Journalism’ Is a Catastrophe Right Now, and It’ll Only Get Worse

By Jesse Singal – The Intelligencer Magazine. 19th October, 2016.

In theory, crowdsourced “citizen journalism” is a good idea. After all, all it really takes to be a journalist is certain critical-thinking skills and/or access to information that other people don’t have. Gather a big enough crowd online and that is a lot of brainpower, a lot of access to information.

Of course, that isn’t how things seem to work these days at all. Rather, whatever potential the concept of crowdsourced citizen journalism has is getting squandered rather spectacularly.

Take the final weeks of this brutal presidential campaign, where there’s by now a well-established pattern: Every time WikiLeaks drops a new trove of Hillary Clinton or Democratic National Committee emails, a torrent of bullshit is uncorked. That’s because countless citizen journalists rush to pore over the documents, posting “j’accuse” screen-grabs ripped from context that are quickly retweeted through huge, hyperactive networks of anti-Clinton Twitter denizens.

Many of these accounts are small, but there are plenty of big accounts helping to tweet and retweet the hysteria. To any working — that is to say, professional — journalist, there’s nothing here. Not because we’re trying to cover up collusion, but because this is a perfectly conventional interaction between a writer and subject. If I find out something about a subject and plan on writing about it, then it’s my professional obligation to reach out and let them know that that story is in the pipeline, to give them a chance to comment (it’s also not unusual to just give them a courtesy heads-up, especially if it’s a source or subject you have a pre-existing relationship with and plan on working with more in the future).

...There are, of course, insights to be gleaned from the leaked emails, plenty of them damning for Clinton and/or the campaign and/or the DNC, and in a better world, they might be uncovered by citizen journalists. Instead, they’re being reported on by the mainstream media. In *The New Republic*, David Dayen explained that some of the leaks reveal important details about the question of whether future Democratic econ and finance policy will be driven by old-school, corporate-friendly wonks in the “Bob Rubin school,” or a more progressive wing of experts led by Elizabeth Warren. In the *New York Times*, Amy Chozick and Nicholas Confessore, two of that paper’s top political reporters, explained how the leaked Goldman Sachs transcripts likely would have hurt Clinton during her fight against Bernie Sanders’s populist insurgency. *Politico* published a helpful, regularly updated blog in which its reporters highlight and explain key bits from the leaks.

These are stories written by people with knowledge of what they are covering, who can explain the meaning of a given email and its broader context from a place that isn’t slick with spittle. And there’s no reason, necessarily, that citizen journalists couldn’t have done some of this work. Surely, there are other, far less famous people on Twitter who have important contributions to make to this discussion as well: retired bureaucrats and political-science professors and laid-off print journalists and anyone else with the relevant knowledge and something interesting or important to say.

And yet this sort of coverage and commentary — sane commentary, originating from a place of basic competence and knowledge and good faith — probably accounts for something like 5 percent of the total online content generated by the leaks. The rest is misunderstanding and innuendo and malicious misrepresentation, and it’s doing serious damage to democracy’s ability to function. There’s just no way to have any sort of actual conversation about anything when a very loud, very engaged minority of the population is reacting to bullshit.

I could see someone responding to these complaints with a shrug, with a This isn’t new! After all, media in the United States has been ideologically segmented for a long time. Fox News is no longer the new kid on the block. It was more than six years ago that the libertarian writer Julian Sanchez first coined the term “epistemic closure” to refer to online communities that seem to exist according to their own closed, parallel conception of reality, immune

to debunking. For a long time, the fact that a big chunk of America lives in a paranoid, fearful parallel news-universe has been a problem.

But there are good reasons to think that things are much worse today than they were in even the recent past, and that we could be approaching some sort of precipice. One is the total collapse of any sort of institutional authority whatsoever. Eight years after the election of Obama jarred something permanently loose in conservatives' collective consciousness and gave rise to the tea party, a movement that helped demonstrate the thriving American market for conspiracy-driven, racially tinged populist resentment, there is no dam to stop the flood of screaming online conservative paranoiacs. The mainstream GOP that might once have held its right wing in check is now the party of traitorous sellout cucks. Fox News — which only yesterday, it seems, was viewed by liberals as a worst-case scenario of conservative propaganda and misinformation, but which does exhibit some whiff of journalistic standards when it comes to the ethics of disseminating the gonzo-est of conspiracy theories — has been abandoned by the unhinged wing of the right for the crime of not being sufficiently enthusiastic about Making America Great Again.

The reason for this shift, in part, is that Establishment outlets and political parties can no longer control the frame of discussion: The internet and social media have given Alex Jones and Paul Joseph Watson and Breitbart and a whole host of others direct access to a huge market of the most credulous consumers imaginable, allowing them to peddle globalist progressive Syrian ACORN whatever conspiracy — a sales pitch that explicitly undermines the authority of their larger, institutional competitors (“Why won’t the mainstream media report on this?!?”). Online, the riled-up conservative masses meet (granted, in much smaller numbers) the Monsanto paranoiacs and Jill Stein voters of the left, who are similarly unwilling to accede to Establishment notions like, you know, truth and facticity. And all of these people and outlets are happy to retweet and publish articles about every new “revelation” churned up by the dogged citizen journalists convinced we are one leaked email away from ironclad proof that the Democratic nominee is a deranged serial killer.

Which brings us to the other reason to feel hopeless: Things are so much faster than they have ever been.

Misinformation spreads within seconds of being posted and can't be stuffed back whence it came. I've now seen several people post screen-grabs of some sensational false claim made on Twitter about the WikiLeaks dumps, and then a follow-up tweet correction saying, “Whoops, I misunderstood.” Inevitably, the correction gains a tiny fraction of the attention as the false claim, which ricochets around for days. Plus, when new revelations are unearthed, everyone wants to be the first to draw attention to them. There's zero incentive to fact-check, because slip-ups are forgotten so quickly, and because the members of the community spreading these falsehoods so forcefully reject — or are unfamiliar with — the values of skepticism and fact-checking, since they already know that Hillary Clinton poses an existential threat to the American life, since they already know that she has committed treason and should maybe be executed. This is a credulous, angry, hair-trigger crowd.

There might really be no way out from this. Social scientists have had a very tough time figuring out any reliable way to effectively debunk conspiracy theories, and one brutal feature of the current tire fire is that the people who are in the best position to sift myth from fact — that is, journalists and wonks with expertise — are exactly the people who are not to be trusted, because they are part of a giant conspiracy theory to undermine the people. It could all be leading us to a very dark place: What happens when the size of the population who believes in this stuff hits a critical mass? What happens when these people break off completely even from Fox News and the broader world of mainstream conservative thought?

We're all engaging in a big, messy experiment in how human beings produce, consume, and disseminate knowledge, and in how they form ideological and identity-based alliances with one another. There's never before been anything like it, and it's not going well so far.

Article 2: Citizen journalism counters police propaganda

Paul Lewis retraces the events surrounding the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 protests in London

Paul Lewis –The Guardian Tue 4 Aug 2009



Ian Tomlinson is helped to his feet at the G20 protests in London. Photograph: Guardian

Five days after [Ian Tomlinson lay dying](#) on a noisy London street, blood seeping into his stomach, the police officer who attacked him amid the chaos of the G20 demonstrations had still not come forward.

The 47-year-old newspaper vendor died, so his family were led to believe, of natural causes on his way home from work. A postmortem appeared to show he succumbed to a sudden heart attack.

Had the last 30 minutes of Tomlinson's life not been recorded on dozens of digital cameras and mobile phones, his story might have ended there.

Instead, his assailant – a van driver from the Metropolitan police's Territorial Support Group (TSG) – could potentially face a jail sentence if he is charged with manslaughter for an attack that has already been watched by millions of people across the world, and has transformed the face of British policing.

Footage of him striking Tomlinson on 1 April, filmed by a New York hedge fund manager and released by the Guardian six days after the death, has now been submitted in a file to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). It was part of a [file submitted to prosecutors](#) by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which announced today it had completed what has been one of its largest ever criminal investigations.

In total, investigators sifted through 1,200 hours of footage obtained from CCTV systems, digital cameras and mobile phones. Experts in computerised scene reconstruction and video enhancement were drafted in to analyse images. "Much of the video evidence we have passed to the CPS was collected by members of the public on cameras or mobile phones," said Deborah Glass, the IPCC commissioner who ran the inquiry. The watchdog said that 40 investigators, many drafted in from regional offices, helped interview almost 200 members of the public. The IPCC was criticised, however, for taking six days to launch a criminal inquiry.

Tomlinson arrived at Royal Exchange Buildings, a pedestrianised street near the Bank of England, at about 7:15pm. He was forced to take a detour from his normal route home after being prevented from passing controversial police cordons used to contain, or "kettle" protesters. The [video](#), taken minutes later, showed a line of riot police, some with dogs, corralling protesters out of the passage. Tomlinson was obeying orders, walking away from police with his hands in his pockets when the TSG officer approached him from behind. The officer's badge number was covered and he was wearing a balaclava. He lunged forward, struck Tomlinson with a baton and pushed him forcefully to the ground.

A second video, shot by a protester standing nearby, showed how – unable to break his fall – [Tomlinson slammed against the pavement](#). No police officer went to his aid, and it was left to a bystander to lift him to his feet. Dazed, unable to walk properly and clutching his side in visible pain, he stumbled 50m down the road and collapsed.

Contrary to initial reports that Tomlinson died of a heart attack, severe internal bleeding is now believed to have caused his death. Investigators believe his injuries could have resulted from the assault by the officer – a TSG van

driver who, 10 minutes before attacking Tomlinson, had become isolated from his unit during an unrelated altercation with a protester who sprayed graffiti on a police van.

Several bystanders with cameras also captured that incident. Their images show how the officer grabbed the male protester by the scruff of the neck and appeared to strike his head against a van door before dragging him into the crowd.

A manslaughter trial would be the worst outcome for the Met commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson, and could mean his commanders are called to the witness stand to explain their tactics at the [G20](#) protests. They have already been interrogated by two parliamentary inquiries and government's official police inspectorate. Releasing his interim findings three weeks ago, the chief inspector of constabulary, Denis O'Connor, said the shocking scenes captured on video at the G20 threatened "a sad erosion of the faith in British policing". Nothing less than a national overhaul in the way demonstrations are policed is now required, he said, adding: "On that day during the G20 all of these issues crystallised together. For better or worse, we have taken a view today that it's time to change and move on."

The IPCC has received 277 complaints about the G20 demonstrations. Many allege injuries caused by unjustified aggression by police, and in private senior officers concede an unwelcome spotlight has focused on the TSG. A third of all 720 TSG officers had complaints lodged against them in the year preceding the protests. The commission said it had also asked the CPS to consider charges against a suspended TSG sergeant who is accused of assaulting two women in the space of 24 hours. The sergeant was caught on film striking one of the women, Nicola Fisher, at a memorial vigil for Tomlinson. His badge number was also concealed.

Controversy

When Tomlinson left his newspaper stand outside Monument tube station to walk home, he could never have imagined the subject of the next edition's frontpage. The following morning the Evening Standard, which he had sold to commuters in for years, reported his death under the headline: "Police pelted with bricks as they help dying man".

For Tomlinson's widow, Julia, and nine children, it was the only detail they had about the nature of his death. It was also untrue, and the handling of information in the aftermath of his death is the subject of an separate IPCC investigation into what the Met, City of [London](#) and IPCC press officers told journalists about the case. The Met released its first press statement four hours after Tomlinson's death. It stated that officers had gone to his aid and called an ambulance, and were attempting to save his life with CPR when they were impeded by protesters who attacked them with "a number of missiles – believed to be bottles".

Independent witnesses said Tomlinson's treatment was not impeded when two, probably plastic bottles landed near where he was lying. Instead the crowd reacted furiously, and the missiles stopped. An early explanation given to Tomlinson's family was that he died unexpectedly as he was "caught up" in a fracas prompted when anarchist demonstrators attacked police. No explanation was given as to what might have triggered his death. Instead police told the his grieving family that, according to witnesses who saw his collapse, he had simply "run out of batteries". At that stage his family members themselves had suspicions, and were researching his death on the internet.

From the outset, police strongly and repeatedly advised them not to talk to the media. When articles and photographs appeared suggesting officers had attacked Tomlinson, police discouraged the family from talking to the reporters and questioned the veracity of the reports.

City of London police failed to tell Tomlinson's family that, less than 24 hours after his death, its officers were aware he may have been attacked by police. This is established in a confidential City of London police memo, marked "restricted investigation" and produced at 5.02pm on 2 April. It referred to a "series of photos" which showed Tomlinson at the feet of riot police. Although police had not yet obtained the images, they were aware that they constituted potential evidence of the aftermath of an attack by officers. This crucial information was not communicated to Tomlinson's family or, it seems, to the IPCC. It was however known to the City of London police family liaison officer.

It was not until the following day, 48 hours after Tomlinson's death, that the IPCC was initially told that he may have had contact with police prior to his death. However, it was decided to leave the investigation in the hands of the City

of London police. That evening the delayed first post-mortem was conducted by forensic pathologist Dr Freddy Patel, who found Tomlinson died of coronary heart disease.

City of London police quickly began drafting a press release, stating that Tomlinson "died of natural causes" and "suffered a sudden heart attack while on his way home from work". The statement did not mention the large amounts of blood found Tomlinson's abdomen, or injuries including lacerations to the skin and a suspected dog bite on his leg which, given speculation over the nature of his death, were crucial details.

Patel's findings were anyhow undermined when a second post-mortem, conducted by one the UK's leading experts, Dr Nat Cary, [said the cause of death had been an abdominal haemorrhage](#), or internal bleeding. A [third postmortem](#) on Tomlinson has not been released.

The reason Patel was chosen to conduct the first postmortem remains a mystery. At the time of the postmortem, he appeared to be listed on a Home Office register of accredited forensic pathologists, but did not hold a contract with either the City of London police or the Met. He was however known to the Met, which in 2004 alerted the Home Office to concerns about his performance in four suspicious death cases. Last month Patel, once reprimanded by the General Medical Council, was [suspended from the government register](#) pending two investigations into his professional conduct.

The crucial footage

In New York on the morning of Monday 6 April, a hedge fund manager was reading online reports about Tomlinson's "heart attack" on his office computer. Five days had passed since his business trip to London, during which he had attended the G20 demonstrations out of curiosity with a small digital camera. The IPCC was still allowing the City of London police to run the investigation, apparently assured there was nothing overly suspicious about his death. "There was nothing except some witnesses speaking to the Guardian saying they saw him being beaten," the hedge fund manager said later. "But it was their statements versus the police. You needed something incontrovertible. In this case it was the video."

The following day the Guardian broadcast the 15-second video and handed the IPCC a dossier of evidence, including 15 witness statements, that contradicted the police's official version of events. Within three hours an IPCC investigator and senior officer from City of London visited the newspaper's offices. At least one City of London officer was told the IPCC would "seize" the video. In fact, they had no power to do so, and instead asked for the video to be removed from the website because it was "jeopardising" the inquiry.

The video remained on the site, and was viewed by Scotland Yard, where a crisis meeting had been convened. The clip was played the following morning at Bishopsgate police station, during an emergency meeting with Tomlinson's family. After watching the video, one senior City of London police investigator floated the theory that the attacker in the film [was a member of the public "dressed in police uniform"](#).

He then accepted the assailant was probably an officer, but said he could "not rule out" the possibility a bystander had stolen a uniform from the back of a police van. Tomlinson's family believed the comment underlined how inappropriate it was for the police to be running the inquiry. At that meeting, the IPCC finally took over the investigation, and announced a criminal inquiry into Tomlinson's death.

The theory that Tomlinson's assailant was an imposter was short-lived. Within 24 hours of the broadcast, the TSG van driver gave himself up. When he watched footage of his attack on Tomlinson on the evening news on 7 April, he had collapsed in front of his partner. The same TV bulletins were being watched in Derbyshire by Alan Edwards, the 34-year-old man seen in the video helping Tomlinson to his feet.

Edwards came forward to recount Tomlinson's last conversation. "I didn't talk to him straight away. I was more concerned the police wouldn't get at him. They'd already pushed him over," he said, adding he was particularly wary of the officer who struck him. "I tried to eyeball him to see if I would remember who he was but he was balaclavaed up. All you could see was his hands and his eyes." When the officer walked off, Edwards lifted Tomlinson from the ground. "I said: 'You OK, mate?' He said: 'No, I live down there – that's where I live. I can't get there any other way. I'm trying to get home.'"