

Why Citizens Still Rarely Serve as News Sources: Validating a Tripartite Model of Circumstantial, Logistical, and Evaluative Barriers

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Despite being equipped to an unprecedented extent to become substantial news players, despite a growing need for their journalistic input, and despite the promise of user-generated content to give them voice, ordinary citizens remain a negligible news source. To explore why this is so, I propose a model that indicates journalists' reliance on citizens is hindered by three factors: *circumstantial* (situations calling for input from citizens arise ad hoc), *logistical* (using them requires greater journalistic effort), and *evaluative* (journalists appreciate their contributions less). A broad comparison of contacts with ordinary citizens against contacts with other source types ($N = 2,381$) in Israel strongly validates this model. To enhance their access, citizens may need not only a technological revolution but also a social, cultural, and epistemic revolution.

Keywords: citizens, news sources, news access, technology, participation, Israel

Introduction

Despite the potential impact of citizens' involvement in the news on key societal, cultural, and political issues such as participation, deliberation, democratization, diversification, and pluralization of the voices that get not only to be heard in the news but also to define social reality (Cottle, 2000; Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2013; Gillmor, 2006; Heinhonen, 2011; Örnebring, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002; Rosen, 2005; Singer et al., 2011; Westlund, 2013; Williams, Wardle, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011), scholars admit that "it is quite surprising how little attention has been paid to ordinary citizens as actors and sources in news coverage of politics" (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011, p. 57). "Only recently," according to Shoemaker and Reese (2014), "have we begun to take more seriously the non-institutional or citizen level" (p. 97) in the study of journalism and media.

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The intersection of citizens, new technology, and participation has in recent years aroused vivid and parallel discussions in the broader realm of technology and democracy (Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren, 2013; Papacharissi, 2002; Rheingold, 2008) and in the specific field of the sociology of journalism (De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; Heinhonen, 2011; Hopmann & Shehata, 2011; Örnebring, 2008; Van Leuven, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers 2014; Williams et al., 2011).

According to common wisdom, "ordinary citizens" (a somewhat vague and idealized concept that is discussed below) were expected to become prominent news actors because of new technologies that made them unprecedentedly traceable, accessible, and able to contribute immediate input on unfolding events (Heinhonen, 2011; Örnebring, 2008; Westlund, 2013). Other reasons that may broaden their contribution to the news are the growing capacities of laypeople to perform assignments that were once the exclusive domain of experts in fields such as astronomy, software coding, and composition of encyclopedia entries (Benkler, 2006; Fallis, 2011; Fox, Ward, & O'Rourke, 2005). Their contribution to the news can be pushed also by intramedia changes, such as the shrinking of the news workforce (Heinhonen, 2011; Westlund, 2013), the growing openness of news organizations toward user-generated content, and these organizations' wish to reestablish relationships with audiences (Bruns, 2005; Heinhonen, 2011; Singer et al., 2011, Gillmor, 2006; Örnebring, 2008; Rosen, 2005; Westlund, 2013), "in keeping with the mythology or ideology of journalism that has tended to celebrate the stand taken by reporters on behalf of the 'little people' of society" (McQuail, 2013, p. 65).

So far, however, despite some recent studies (e.g., De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009; Hopmann & Shehata, 2011; Williams et al., 2011), there is no conclusive evidence whether the above-mentioned changes were sufficient to reduce the traditional aversion of mainstream journalists to counting on laypeople, including their tendency to dismiss citizens and to treat them with indifference and even hostility (Gans, 1979; Williams et al., 2011). On the other hand, the sources that did receive privileged news access traditionally were those dubbed in the literature as authoritative, hegemonic, consensual, official, accredited, routine, senior, "effectors" of events, or "primary definers" of social reality (Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Dulcie, 1987; Cook, 1998; Cottle, 2000; Gans, 1979; Hall, Critcher, Clarke, & Robert, 1978; McManus, 1994; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Schlesinger, 1990; Sigal, 1973, 1986; Tuchman, 1978).

The purpose of this article is not only to detect the prominence of ordinary citizens as news sources across time and media compared to other types of human agents, but mainly to map the key factors potentially hindering the capacity of ordinary citizens to become prominent news actors and thereby indicate how their share in the news can be augmented.

At the outset, it is important to clarify what exactly we mean by "ordinary citizens." As Robert K. Merton shows, "each social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles" (1957, p. 110). Yet "ordinary citizens," as used in this article, refers to people who are interviewed as private people. This means that unlike more prominent sources such as senior officials and public-relations practitioners, ordinary citizens are interviewed despite their lack of organizational affiliation, or regardless of such affiliation. Furthermore, while "unknown" citizens can be interviewed in a specific capacity as neighbors, victims, eyewitnesses, or sports fans, according to the topic and the journalistic needs of the

respective news item, "known" citizens such as senior politicians or celebrities can be interviewed in multiple roles—for example, as office holders, family members, and people with a certain hobby.

Hence, the scholarly interest in ordinary citizens as news sources is twofold. Positively speaking, they embody a type of source in and of itself that represents the unaffiliated atoms of society. However, negatively speaking, they embody the cases in which journalists stop their regular reliance on the usual mix of elite sources. This doesn't mean, of course, that the associations between reliance on citizens and democratization are simple or direct.

Data in this study are based on a series of face-to-face reconstruction interviews, a research procedure developed to overcome the hurdles of traditional methods in a changing media ecosystem. A group of 108 reporters reconstructed how they obtained a sample of 859 items from 2,381 news sources. The randomly selected items were published by 10 leading national Israeli news organizations representing a mix of new and traditional media.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Though agreed upon by most scholars (cf. Dahlgren, 2013, Dahlberg, 2001; Rheingold, 2008; Singer et al., 2011; Van Leuven et al., 2014), giving greater voice to ordinary citizens is neither an obvious nor a consensual ideal in democracy and public sphere theory. According to Ferree, Gamson, William, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002), not only do theorists such as "representative liberals" object to the idea, but even those who endorse it—such as "participatory liberals," "discursive theorists," and "constructionists"—tend to disagree about its role, rationale, preferred modes and circumstances, and expected advantage. The systematic analysis of Ferree et al. (2002) suggests that support of citizens' participation in the news is associated with broader theoretical key issues such as the nature of the public sphere as a bourgeois versus a plebian space, a continuous one versus a network of numerous "sphericules" (Gitlin, 1998); citizens' willingness, capacities, and informative and deliberative skills to engage themselves in decisions that affect their lives, especially when involving conflicting and normative issues (a more "disillusioned" and pessimistic perspective expects them only to choose the representatives who will do so in their name); the nature and power relations behind public debate; the need to empower and mobilize grassroots actors in order to counterbalance the efforts of elite power holders to marginalize them; and the theoretical emphasis on expertise versus diversity of voices, elitism versus populism.

This section maps two major camps of scholars who disagree about whether reliance on citizens is indeed growing over the years and suggests a tripartite model according to which broader reliance on citizens is hindered by three major clusters of variables: *circumstantial*, *logistical*, and *evaluative*.

Exploring the role of citizens as news sources is consequential "not only from a marketplace of ideas perspective, but also from a journalistic as well as a media effects perspective" (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011, p. 665). Here we emphasize three major and interrelated reasons:

- *Political.* Citizens' share of news coverage can indicate whether journalism is still "an elite amongst elites" (De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012, p. 826; see also Schudson, 2000) focusing exclusively on informing "citizens about society," or also "society about citizens" (Svith, 2007, cited in Hopmann & Shehata, 2011, p. 662). More broadly, reliance on citizens can help detect whether journalism promotes "elite-oriented conceptions of democracy" or a more diverse and pluralist endeavor (Beam & Di Cicco, 2010; Berkowitz, 2008; Correa & Harp, 2011; Cottle, 2000).
- *Epistemic.* Sources who receive regular news access are strategically positioned as "primary definers" (Hall et al., 1978; see also Berkowitz, 2008; Cottle, 2000; Tuchman, 1978) of social and epistemic reality, which in turn reflects on their public image as "legitimate bearers of facts" (Berkowitz, 2008, p. 110) bestowing a "patina of truth" to their points of view (Koch, 1991, p. 316. See also Tuchman, 1978).
- *Socio-technological.* Reliance on citizens can indicate whether innovations such as user-generated content and Web 2.0 have had a real impact on the core of news work, as expected by certain scholars (Bruns, 2005; Gillmor, 2006; Heinonen, 2011; Rosen, 2005) or have been limited to peripheral, dedicated spaces for citizens such as blogs and comment (Domingo et al., 2008; Örnebring, 2008; Singer et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2011).

Growing Reliance?

Longitudinal studies tracing the reliance on citizens are not only sparse but also inconclusive. A Belgian study found a clear rise in reliance on citizens but noted that this growth was a "shift in the margins" (De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012, p. 832). Another study, focusing on political coverage of Danish elections, found no clear trend over the years (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011). According to Belo, Godo, De Swert, and Sendin (2013), who summarize a comparative study of television news across 17 countries, citizens capture, on average, 15% to 16% of the source pool, ranging between 11% and 27% in domestic news and between 2% and 26% in foreign news. In single-shot studies, citizens constituted between 3% and 30% of the entire source pool (most of the time closer to the lower margin), depending on topic, country, time period, circumstances, story prominence, and media format (Belo et al., 2013; Berkowitz & Beach, 1993; Carpenter, 2008; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009; Gans, 1979; Hallin, Manhoff, & Weddle, 1993; Hopmann & Shehata, 2011).

Hence, the question of whether citizens' roles as news sources are indeed broadening is disputed between two main positions. The more revolutionary position claims a substantial growth in reliance on ordinary citizens (Bruns, 2005; Gillmor, 2006; Papacharissi, 2002; Rosen, 2005). The more conservative camp, on the other hand, expects at most a marginal growth in reliance on laypeople (e.g., De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; Örnebring, 2008; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008) due to the resistance of media organizations to change (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012; Örnebring, 2008; Ryfe, 2012; Singer et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2011) and journalists' tendency to assign citizens lower credibility, authority, and illuminating power. If the president of the United States holds a beacon, to use the metaphor of Leon V.

Sigal (1973, p. 189), and other sources hold a spotlight, ordinary citizens can offer nothing more than their candles (see also Berkowitz, 2008; Gans, 1979; Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1989).

The Tripartite Model

Though distilled from previous scholarly work, the suggested tripartite explanation can be seen as a model amounting to a logically consistent explanation of a social phenomenon using relatively trivial components (compared to a full-blown theory). In that sense, these components are familiar and expected, yet they bear an explanatory and even predictive value regarding the minimization of reliance on citizens as news sources. Serving as motive to *not* rely on or to minimize reliance on citizens, one may assume synergetic relationships between the three factors; for example, a certain citizen and the respective item he or she is involved in may be singled out during the gatekeeping and news reporting process because interviewing that citizen demands too much effort *relative to* the circumstances of the event and the newsworthiness of the designated item.

According to the proposed model, broader reliance on citizens is hindered by three major clusters of variables:

- *Circumstantial*. Ordinary citizens cannot become substantial news players since they are granted voice mainly during infrequent and ritualized circumstances such as unscheduled events (Berkowitz & Beach, 1993; Cook, 1998, Gans, 1979; Molotch & Lester, 1974) in online news, due to its participatory nature, and television, thanks to its demand for “experiential interviews” with ordinary people to personify and explicate general, abstract, and remote issues (Cremer, Keirstead, & Yoakam, 1996; Montgomery, 2007). Citizens tend to appear in domestic affairs rather than political and financial news (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011) and in stories by female and minority journalists (Beam & Di Cicco, 2010; Correa & Harp, 2011).
- *Logistical*. Journalists have no incentive to rely on ordinary citizens because of their higher costs in terms of journalistic energy and their lack of a series of assets that make a routine source: physical and symbolic resources, communicative knowhow, and PR services that allow more regular sources to schedule events, issue handouts, initiate and maintain contacts, establish rapport, and make themselves constantly and instantly available when journalists need them (Cook, 1998; Cottle, 2000; Ericson et al., 1989; Gans, 1979; Hallin et al., 1993; Reich, 2009).
- *Evaluative*. Ordinary citizens cannot become substantial news players because journalists have lower esteem not only for them personally but also for the newsworthiness of the information they can provide. Citizens are considered less credible, informative, and authoritative than regular sources (Becker, 1970; Hopmann & Shehata, 2011; McShane, 1995; Reich, 2009) and more socially distant from journalists, who do not share their “cognitive worlds” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 270).

How representative is the Israeli case concerning reliance on citizens? Israeli television news was found the most open for citizens' voices across 17 countries (comprising 27% of the sources in local news, compared to 16% on average [Belo et al., 2013]). In terms of political participation, Israel scores especially high, between New Zealand and Switzerland (Hermann, Heller, Atmor, & Lebel, 2013). Israeli websites were early and enthusiastic adopters of participatory channels such as user comments and news alerts (Singer et al., 2011), and their media audiences are generally technologically updated compared to other OECD countries.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To map the factors that hinder citizens' way to a more significant role in the news, this article applies two major research questions.

RQ1: How often are citizen relied on as news sources, and does this reliance grow across the years studied?

RQ2: To what extent is reliance on citizens associated with circumstantial, logistical, and evaluative factors that potentially hinder their way to becoming more substantial news players?

The second question is accompanied by three hypotheses underlying the tripartite model, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. The Tripartite Model: Forces That Inhibit Reliance on Citizens.

| Category | <i>Circumstantial (H₁)</i> | <i>Logistical (H₂)</i> | <i>Evaluative (H₃)</i> |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Implication | Interviewed under infrequent, ritualized circumstances | Require higher journalistic energy than regular sources | Less appreciated than regular sources |
| Specific variables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During unscheduled events. • In television and online news. • In domestic affairs (rather than politics and business news). • When a female reporter is involved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-time sources. • More reporter initiative. • Accompanied by more sources. • More physical copresence (less technology-mediated contact). • Longer production time. • Reporters with lower production quotas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower source credibility. • More cross-checked. • Delayed news gathering. • Less source anonymity. • Evaluated as less informational. • Stories evaluated as less important and interesting and more sensitive. |

H1: Reliance on citizens occurs mainly in specific but infrequent circumstances.

As mentioned in the literature review, one may expect reliance on citizens especially during unscheduled events, in television and Internet news, and in domestic affairs news.

H2: Reliance on citizens requires greater journalistic energy, time, attention, initiative, etc. than other news sources.

Citizens are typically interviewed for the first time in the respective items, requiring greater initiative and physical presence of reporters, longer production time, and more sources per item.

H3: Citizens and the information they supply are less appreciated by journalists than other sources, as is directly and indirectly evident in their news practices.

Citizen sources are evaluated as less informational and credible, requiring more cross-checking and less anonymity. Items that involve citizens are evaluated as less important and interesting and more sensitive, and their production tends to be more delayed by the journalist compared to other sources.

Methodology

The study used the face-to-face reconstruction interview method, asking a sample of reporters from parallel news beats in different media to detail how—and from what types of news sources—they obtained a random sample of their recently published items. This method tries to overcome three types of hurdles that increasingly constrain broad, systematic, and quantitative studies of news processes across media:

- *Physical:* The exchanges of information between journalists and different types of human and technical sources are becoming increasingly evasive, unobservable, and fragmented over a growing variety of platforms employed inside and outside newsrooms.
- *Ethical:* Reporters need to protect source confidentiality from intrusive researchers.
- *Methodological:* Traditional research methods are losing much of their effectiveness for studying news processes because of mounting pressures in the news ecosystem.

Observations may miss many information exchanges and show their incompetence in measuring frequencies of phenomena. Content analysis is speculative, trying to infer from news products to news processes. In contrast, reconstruction interviews, which are increasingly used worldwide (Albæk, 2011; Brueggemann, 2013; McManus, 1994; Reich, 2009; Shapiro, Brin, Bédard-Brûlé, & Mychjłowycz, 2013), show their viability in exploring multiple facets of news processes.

The following description focuses on the most recent wave, the 2011 study, covering all four media. The 2001 study covered only print, and the 2006 study also covered radio and online media. The

first wave of the study covered 448 items, the second 841, and the third 859 items. All three studies were conducted using the same method and the same research tool.

The reconstruction interviews implemented here contained four steps:

1. *The choice of news organizations.* News outlets were chosen according to three criteria: first, their national outreach; second, their market share as major suppliers of news; and third, as employers of dedicated staffs of newsbeat reporters whose work is comparable across media. The final choice included 11 news organizations, whose descriptions below reflect the situation at the time of data collection: *Television*: one public service organization (*Channel 1*, 38 reporters, exposure 3.5%) and two commercial ones (*Channel 2*, 34 reporters, exposure 18.7% and *Channel 10*, 26 reporters, exposure 9.9%). The public channel aired at the time of the study a daily 45-minute bulletin, free of commercials, and the two privately owned stations each aired a full-hour bulletin, including commercials. *Newspapers*: three paid dailies (one "elite" broadsheet *Haaretz*, privately owned, 92 reporters, exposure 7.4% and two "serious-popular" tabloids: *Yedioth Ahronoth*, private, 63 reporters, exposure 35% and *Maariv*, private, 50 reporters, exposure 35%). *Radio*: two public radio stations (*Kol Israel*, 31 reporters, exposure 25.4% and *Galey Zahal*, 27 reporters, exposure 24.1%). All other radio stations are local or regional and privately owned. *Online*: three privately owned Internet-only news sites (*Ynet*, 39 reporters, exposure 72.9%; *Walla*, 16 reporters, exposure 74.4% and *Mahlaka Rishona*, 10 reporters, exposure not monitored). During the data analysis, we decided that *Mahlaka Rishona*, which used mainly secondhand reporting, must be dropped from the study, reducing the number of online items from 243 to only 181. Exposure rates are based on periodic surveys of *TNS Telesker* and *TIM*, except for television in which viewership was measured based on *Peoplemeter* sample by the *Israel Audience Research Board*, representing percentage of households. Internet data included users who are at least 13 years old, compared to 18 years in other media.
2. *Random selection of beats and reporters:* A full list of reporters and newsbeats at the chosen organizations was prepared from two months of byline monitoring. In order to cover parallel newsbeats, the study focused on three beat clusters that displayed distinct patterns of news production (Reich, 2012).
3. *Identification of all published items:* The sampling period extended over four weeks—long enough to supply a rich mix of stories but not long enough to tax participants' memories.
4. *Random sampling of news items:* To limit interview duration to 60–75 minutes, the sample included 8–11 items per reporter. The exact number varied according to the size of the organization and medium type.

Special seating arrangements were used to avoid infringement of source confidentiality. For print, online, and radio items, the reporter (with a pile of sampled stories or item printouts) and interviewer (with a pile of questionnaires) sat on opposite sides of a table with a screen placed between them to give the reporter privacy each time he or she was asked to choose another item and detail how it was obtained. Television reporters were given a laptop with video clips of their sampled items. Interviews were guided by a standard closed questionnaire. Reconstructions lasted between 6 and 10 minutes per item, being somewhat slower in the earlier items and quicker in the later ones, according to the learning curve of the reporter and the interviewer.

Measurements

The independent variables were defined as follows:

- *News source*: Every human, technological, or organizational factor that contributed a layer of information to the item, including story leads, responses, and confirmations or refutations of others' information.
- *Citizen sources*: Unaffiliated individuals or affiliated ones interviewed in their capacity as private people.
- *Other human source*: Every human actor excluding citizen sources: senior and nonsenior officials, PR practitioners, professionals, and experts.

Dependent variables that are not self-evident are described here briefly:

Circumstantial

- *Event type*: Unscheduled events, such as accidents or terrorist attacks, that surprise both the journalists and the authorities. Scheduled events, proceedings, and reporter-initiated stories were coded "other."
- *Beat cluster*. Politics (e.g., diplomatic, political, and parliamentary affairs), domestic affairs (e.g., regional and police reporters and thematic beats, such as environment and education), and business affairs (e.g., banking, treasury, finance, and real estate).

Logistical

- *Reporter-initiated contacts*: Determined according to technology. Reporter-initiated contacts included outgoing telephone calls, outgoing e-mails, and so on, arranged in three categories: limited initiative (up to 33% of the contacts with a particular source), medium (44%–65%), and high (66% and above).
- *Communication channels*. Collapsed into three clusters: nonmediated (face-to-face interviews and news scene attendance), oral channels (landline, mobile, and Skype calls), and textual (e-mail, SMS, fax, documents, and social networks).

- *Contact intensity*. Three categories: the source first contacted for the specific item, occasional reliance (neither new nor regular contact), and regular reliance (contacted monthly/weekly/daily).
- *Production time*: Number of hours from start of work on an item until submission for publication—as estimated by the reporter for each item.
- *Reporter's productivity*: Number of items produced by the reporter during the sampling month, as registered daily by the sampling team.

Evaluative

- *Source credibility*: Level of credibility the reporters assign to a specific source: high credibility ("credible" and "highly credible") and lower credibility ("somewhat credible" through "not credible at all").
- *Production delay*: Number of hours from the reporter's initial awareness of the potential item and the time he or she started news gathering.
- *Source identification*: The extent to which the source was clearly identified in the final item; the source could be veiled or insinuated.
- *Source's contribution*: Percentage of an item's information contributed by a specific news source, as estimated by the reporter.
- *Item evaluation*. The extent to which the item was evaluated by the reporter as important, interesting, and sensitive (requiring cautious journalistic treatment) when submitted for publication according to the prevailing criteria of the news beat. Measured on a six-point scale from not at all (interesting/important/sensitive) to exceptionally so.

All *Ns* in the tables refer to the number of items, except in Table 5, where they refer to the number of contacts with sources. Significance of the findings was tested using MANOVA for repeated measures, Pearson correlation and Spearman's rho (two-tailed), chi-square and *t*-tests.

Findings

For the first time, findings show whether citizen sources have indeed become a significant news player in the age of Web 2.0 and user-generated content and show the variables that hinder them from becoming prominent news actors.

To test the first research question, of the prevalence of citizens as news sources across recent years, Table 2 presents the results of the current study side by side with two previous studies that—as described in the Methodology section—were conducted 5 and 10 years before the current study. All three studies explored the reliance on different types of news sources in different media using the same method and the same research tool.

Table 2. Percentage of Reliance on Citizens Across Time and Media.

| Medium | News phase | Time period | | | Sig. years ¹ | Sig. interaction ¹ |
|--------|------------|-------------|------|------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | 2001 | 2006 | 2011 | | |
| Print | <i>N</i> | 448 | 279 | 277 | <i>ns</i> | ** |
| | Discovery | 4% | 3% | 4% | | |
| | Gathering | 2% | 7% | 8% | | |
| Radio | <i>N</i> | | 284 | 170 | <i>ns</i> | <i>Ns</i> |
| | Discovery | - | 3% | 5% | | |
| | Gathering | - | 3% | 5% | | |
| Online | <i>N</i> | | 278 | 181 | ** | <i>Ns</i> |
| | Discovery | - | 2% | 8% | | |
| | Gathering | - | 3% | 7% | | |
| TV | <i>N</i> | | | 231 | | |
| | Discovery | - | - | 8% | | |
| | Gathering | - | - | 14% | | |

****** $p \leq 0.01$

Empty cells represent media that were not studied in the respective period.

¹ Differences between years and interaction between news phase and year were tested using ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey.

Although they do not cover all media all the time, the data are sufficient and consistent enough to suggest that citizens have played and continue to play a minor role as news sources. Whenever there is a significant change in reliance on citizens, it indicates growth; however, the growth is not consistent across time, media, and news phase. In print, the main point of growth is between 2001 and 2006, confined to the news-gathering stage; on the Internet, this occurs between 2006 and 2011, also covering the news-discovery phase. A similar trend was detected in a recent study of the Flemish press covering the same period (De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012). Both studies indicate that scholars were not entirely wrong in envisioning that citizens are going to play a more significant news role, although most probably expected this role to be much more substantial. Television scored somewhat lower here than in another study (Belo et al., 2013), probably because their content analysis could not detect off-screen and anonymous sources.

These results highlight the importance of the second research question, seeking to map the potential factors that hinder citizens' role as news sources. To allow a clear and meaningful presentation while preserving the findings' statistical coherence, tables are organized according to variable types and statistical procedure; however, findings are discussed in clusters of circumstantial, logistical, and evaluative variables (indicating in parentheses the applicable table number).

Circumstantial Variables

In line with H1, reliance on citizens is confined to specific ritualized circumstances that are infrequent.

As the literature suggests, citizens are interviewed significantly more often during unscheduled events (Table 3); on television, mainly during the news-gathering stage (Tables 2, 3), where their presence is required as representatives of vox populi and as bearers of "experiential testimony." In the news-discovery stage, during which citizens serve as "sensors and scouts" (Heinonen, 2011, p. 37), their presence is equally significant online, probably thanks to the openness of this medium to user contributions.

Findings also support the scholarly observation that citizens are interviewed much less on political and business affairs and significantly more on domestic affairs, especially during the news-gathering phase (Table 3), probably since these topics are more "intrusive" (Hopmann & Shehata, 2011, p. 663) to their everyday life, involving local issues, health, and education. However, contrary to the literature, citizens were not interviewed significantly more often when female reporters were involved (Table 3).

Beyond the restricted circumstances, reliance on citizens is hindered by the following bottlenecks.

Table 3. Average Percentage of Reliance on Citizens According to News Phase.

| Categories | Averages | | Sig. Between groups ¹ | Significant Pairs | Sig. interaction ¹ | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|----|
| | Discovery phase (N = 859) % | Gathering Phase (N = 859) % | | | | |
| News medium | Print news | 4 | 8 | * | PT, RT ² | * |
| | Radio news | 5 | 5 | | | |
| | Television news | 8 | 14 | | | |
| | Online news | 8 | 7 | | | |
| News beat cluster | Political beats | 4 | 3 | ** | PD, BD ³ | ** |
| | Domestic affairs | 8 | 15 | | | |
| | Business beats | 5 | 5 | | | |
| Reporter's gender | Male | 6 | 9 | ns | - | ns |
| | Female | 6 | 8 | | | |
| Type of event | Scheduled | 5 | 8 | ** | - | ns |
| | Unscheduled | 13 | 14 | | | |
| Cross checking | Not cross-checked | 3 | 7 | ** | - | ns |
| | Cross-checked | 9 | 10 | | | |

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

¹ Differences between categories and interaction between news phase and independent variables were tested using ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey.

² T = television, P = print, R = radio

³ P = political beats, D = domestic-affairs beats, B = business-affairs beats.

Logistical Variables

As hypothesized, reliance on ordinary citizens consumes significantly higher levels of journalistic resources. Compared to other sources, which are mostly (73%) contacted regularly (at least once a month), citizens are typically encountered for the first time for the respective item (63% of the contacts) (Table 5). It is no wonder that reliance on first timers requires significantly more initiative just to locate them (Table 5). In more than half of the cases, contacting citizens was associated with copresence of the reporter at the same physical venue, while other types of sources are contacted most often via communication technology (78%), involving mainly oral but also textual communication (Table 5). Since this study is correlative, we cannot establish whether reporters go to news scenes to find citizen sources, or, conversely, whether those who go to a news scene are more likely to encounter ordinary citizens.

Reliance on citizens is associated with significantly more sources per item (Table 4) and substantially longer hours of production (Table 4). In accordance, reliance on citizens is typical of reporters who produce fewer items per month (Table 4). Hence, it is possible that while citizens have become more accessible, available, capable, and equipped to serve as news sources, reliance on them is becoming less affordable due to mounting deficits in journalists' time and resources.

Surprisingly, despite their potential to increase source diversity (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014) and minimize the logistical costs of detecting and relying on citizen sources, social networks have played a negligible role in reliance on all types of sources (Reich, 2013). Hence, further research is needed to establish whether social media are playing a growing role in journalists' reliance on citizens (compared to other types of sources) or that reliance on them remains a logistically costly practice.

Reliance on citizens is also restricted by the third element in the tripartite model.

Table 4. Correlations Between Reliance on Citizens and News Work Characteristics.

| | <i>News phase</i> | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Discovery phase (<i>N</i> = 859) | Gathering phase (<i>N</i> = 859) |
| <i>Pearson Correlations</i> | | |
| Number of sources per item | .061 | .138** |
| Monthly productivity per reporter | -.083* | -.195** |
| <i>Spearman's rho</i> | | |
| Delayed start of news work per item | .121** | .151** |
| Length of news work per item | .122** | .216** |
| Estimated importance of the item | .072* | .012 |
| Estimated interest of the item | .059 | .063 |
| Estimated sensitivity of the item | .095** | .114** |

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.0$ (two-tailed)

Evaluative Variables

As suggested by H3, reliance on citizens is associated with lower appreciation. Not only are citizen sources perceived as significantly less credible than other sources (Table 5), but the items they are involved in also undergo significantly more cross-checking (Table 3).

Journalists tend to regard citizen contributions as slightly but significantly less informative, estimating their contribution to the studied item as 34% of the information on average, compared to 39% where other sources are concerned (Table 5).

Contrary to our hypothesis, reporters evaluated the items citizens are involved in as neither significantly less important nor interesting than items involving other types of sources (except for their tip-offs, which were evaluated as significantly more important, with a very low correlation). Yet, reporters rated these items as significantly more sensitive (i.e., requiring more cautious treatment), in accordance with the greater logistical efforts they required (Table 4).

A more indirect yet significant indicator of their evaluation as news sources or the information they provide can be seen in the broader time lag between the moment reporters receive tip-offs from citizens and the time they start working on the items (Table 4). This lag may indicate that beyond citizens' greater involvement in unscheduled events, journalists perceive items that involve citizens as significantly "softer," with less risk of becoming "stale" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 51) if somewhat postponed.

Another indicative variable regarding the evaluation of citizens as sources is the extent to which citizens are clearly identified in the final news item. While regular sources are clearly identified in only 37% of the cases, citizens are clearly attributed in no less than 59% (Table 5). However, their higher attribution does not necessarily reflect lower status. Citizens may have less interest than other sources to remain anonymous and less awareness and bargaining power to negotiate it, and journalists may have greater incentive to specify their identity. Unlike senior officials, whose identity can bestow more legitimacy and authority on story (Becker, 1970; McShane, 1995), a citizen's identity gives a story more authenticity and a human face.

Hence, we have seen that the bottlenecks that narrow reliance on citizens do not only corroborate the tripartite model but also show consistencies between the different parts of the model.

Table 5. Reliance on Citizens vs. Other Sources: Individual Contact–Level Variables.

| | | Source type | | Sig. | Eta |
|--------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|------|-----|
| | | Human sources ¹ (N = 2124) | Citizen sources (N = 257) | | |
| | | % | % | | |
| Source regularity | New source | 12 | 63 | ** | .41 |
| | Occasional | 16 | 14 | | |
| | Regular | 73 | 23 | | |
| Level of reporter's initiative | Limited | 31 | 17 | ** | .11 |
| | Medium | 17 | 13 | | |
| | High | 53 | 70 | | |
| Channel of communication | Text | 14 | 4 | ** | .22 |
| | Telephone | 64 | 40 | | |
| | Copresence | 23 | 56 | | |
| Source credibility | Highly credible source | 79 | 69 | ** | .07 |
| | Less credible source | 21 | 31 | | |
| Source identification | Clearly identified sources | 37 | 59 | ** | .14 |
| | Unidentified and hinted-at sources | 63 | 41 | | |
| | | <i>Average percentage</i> | | | |
| Contribution | % of item's information contributed by the source | 39 | 34 | * | – |

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

Differences between categories were tested using χ^2 , except for average percentages, which were tested using t -tests.

¹ Excluding citizen sources.

Discussion

Despite being technologically equipped to become substantial news players, despite the growing need for their complementary information services when press corps are dwindling, despite the promise of user-generated content and contrary to the common wisdom in the literature (e.g., De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; Singer et al., 2011, Gillmore, 2006), ordinary citizens remain a minor news source, although reliance on them grew substantially during the studied decade.

To detect the forces that potentially hinder broadening citizens' role as sources, the study proposed and validates the tripartite model, according to which the journalistic aversion to relying on citizens is anchored in three major clusters of variables: circumstantial (citizens are interviewed mainly under ritualized, infrequent situations), logistical (relying on citizens requires greater journalistic energy), and evaluative (citizens and their information are less appreciated).

Not only were the majority of variables in each cluster found to be significant, but the composite of the three clusters also delineates a largely coherent picture of the restricted reliance on them. According to this picture, citizens are relied on in limited circumstances, mainly during unscheduled events, and especially on television and in online news and for domestic affairs. Unlike conventional sources, most of whom are regulars contacted via technology, citizens are typically interviewed for the first time, usually in face-to-face encounters. As first timers, citizens are perceived by journalists as less credible, less informative, and in need of more cross-checking.

One cannot rule out that the total aversion to reliance on citizens might be greater than the sum of its parts because of the negative synergy between circumstantial, logistical, and evaluative factors. Furthermore, this aversion is probably intensifying: Journalists must swim much more vigorously against increasingly powerful tides in order to ignore not only citizens' unprecedented vantage point and technological affordances as contributors of news but also news organizations' self-interest in receiving unpaid content from audiences that are scattered wherever news is taking place.

From a political perspective, growing reliance on citizens indeed indicates a shift toward greater diversity and democracy in the production of news; however, at present, this shift is too slow and insignificant to destabilize the traditional hegemony of elite, official, senior, and male sources (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2012; Beam & Di Cicco, 2010; Berkowitz, 2008; Brown et al, 1987; Correa & Harp, 2011; Cottle, 2000; De Keyser & Raeymaeckers, 2012; Gitlin, 1980; Hopmann & Shehata, 2011; Schudson, 2000). The scope and pace of reliance on citizen sources are especially disappointing considering the unprecedented combination of technological, cultural, and social forces that nourished skyrocketing expectations for the rise of citizens' hour in the news. This means that user-generated content has been most successful in the peripheral areas of news production: comments, tips, blogs, or visual raw materials (Domingo et al., 2008; Singer et al., 2011) and much less so at the core of news reporting, which journalists still manage to preserve as their exclusive jurisdiction.

From the perspective of the sociology of news, findings suggest that not every human agent who opens his or her mouth and contributes a sound bite is treated by journalists as a full-fledged news source. To paraphrase Sigal (1986), news is not simply "what someone says has happened" but is what someone with minimal authority, status, institutional affiliation, expertise, and regular contact says. In other words, journalists are still not in the business of information but in the business of institutionally certified information. Therefore, equipped and motivated as they may be, citizen sources don't count as full-blown news sources. While regular sources represent ongoing relationships (Blumler & Gurevich, 1981), citizens represent one-time transactions of information, lacking not only mutual rapport with journalists but also a track record of reliability. This has severe epistemic ramifications because the more regular sources receive not only privileged access to news coverage but also the status of "primary definers" (Hall et al., 1978) of social reality.

Findings may inspire practical reforms that promote citizens' role as news sources, using, for example, training, coordination, and new platforms to help them enhance their availability and informational contributions in more frequent and less ritualistic news circumstances; to reduce the

logistical costs of locating and interviewing them; and to improve their credibility, using e-trust systems that keep track of their trustworthiness from one event to another.

No research method, the current one included, is bias-free, especially when human agents are the source of the research data. Yet, reliance on citizen sources is one variable that is probably the least prone to social desirability. Compared to ethically sensitive practices such as reliance on PR subsidies or the avoidance of cross-checking, reliance on laypeople bears limited, if any, normative baggage from the vantage point of the interviewed journalists. Furthermore, that reporters' replies were anchored in a specific sample of items and that interviewers were trained to detect inconsistencies at different levels of the described news process might further limit potential biases.

There are potential limitations to the Israeli case. Though, as mentioned, there are political, technological, and media-oriented indications for high openness of Israeli media and Israeli politics to citizens' voices, comparative replications of the current study are required to establish that openness and to test the current findings in other political and cultural contexts.

Future studies should seek a deeper understanding of journalist-citizen encounters, negotiations, exchanges, and co-orientation using methods such as in-depth interviews and observations. Gatekeeping and "trash bin" studies that focus not only on published stories but also on dismissed stories involving citizen sources can complement the picture drawn here. Studies should also try to replicate this research in other social and national settings with different levels of diversity, elitism, and participation. Replication will be needed because one cannot rule out that in the coming years, the relatively slow rise in reliance on citizens will reach a tipping point, especially if technological, social, and cultural barriers to their news access continue to diminish; the need for their informational services continues to rise; and new devices and techniques are developed to detect, process, and represent citizen-generated input with minimal labor for institutionalized journalists.

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