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Digitalization and Community Participation in Citizen Journalism During the Bangladesh Uprising: A Qualitative Study

Greg Simons ^{1,*}, Abdul Kabil Khan ¹, Syeda Sadia Mehjabin ², Ananda Kumar Biswas ³, Aftab Hossain ¹ and Eeha Aubapty ¹

¹ Department of Journalism, Media & Communication, Daffodil International University, Dhaka 1216, Bangladesh; kabilkhan.jmc@diu.edu.bd (A.K.K.); headjmc@daffodilvarsity.edu.bd (A.H.); eeha.jmc0034.c@diu.edu.bd (E.A.)

² Department of Media Studies and Journalism, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh; sadia.mehjabin@ulab.edu.bd

³ Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand; ananda.ku.mds18@gmail.com

* Correspondence: gregmons@yahoo.com

Abstract

Citizen journalism is gaining increasing popularity as a means of distributing information using digital technology. As technology continues to improve, particularly in the realms of social media and mobile technology, direct involvement and creation of content are becoming more accessible to individual users. Digital media platforms promote and facilitate public engagement in processes of decision-making. They enhance the dissemination of information, promote transparency, and ensure accountability. The aim of this research is to elucidate the impact of digital technologies on user engagement in citizen journalism. This research also identifies pull factors that inspire individuals to engage in user-generated content creation and promotion. A qualitative approach was used to understand the motivation for citizens to practice journalism. Purposive sampling was used to select the samples. Young citizen journalists, media professionals, and citizen journalism platform coordinators were interviewed. KII (Key Informant Interviews) and IDI (In-Depth Interviews) were conducted using unstructured questionnaires to collect qualitative data, which were analyzed thematically. The results of this study show that the involvement of citizens in journalism has increased due to the emergence of the internet, digital platforms, and mobile technologies.

Keywords: journalism; citizen journalists; digital; social media; mobile technology; Bangladesh



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1. Introduction

Citizen journalism and social media are becoming increasingly popular, transforming the distribution of information and news production (Segun, 2024). As technology improves and citizens feel increasingly distant and mistrustful of mainstream politics and mass media, the desire to hold political and mass media powers accountable, the need for social justice, and the desire to record and disseminate key defining moments in history motivate and provide the personal and technical means to engage in citizen journalism (Kokenge, 2010). As technology has developed, it has become more widely available at a decreasing cost. As

a result, citizen journalism is not limited to the Global North and is increasingly present in the Global South.

Bangladesh faced momentous political, social, and economic upheaval in the summer of 2024, when an uprising led by the country's youth overthrew the long-term government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (Chowdhury, 2025; Azim & Zaman, 2024). This uprising was driven by Bangladeshi youth and students, who made extensive use of social media and mobile technologies to broadcast and spread the message of their cause and to coordinate their tactics against the authorities, priming and mobilizing people (flashmobs) to take to the streets in protest (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). Academic attention has focused mostly on the high-stakes political and social drama that unfolded during the revolution and the protestors' use of mobile technologies and social media (Ubong, 2024; Hushen, 2024). Research has been conducted on citizen journalism in Bangladesh, with a focus on areas such as legal aspects (Moniruzzaman, 2021), the practice of citizen journalism (Khan et al., 2022), and the role and influence of technology in facilitating citizen journalism (Rashid, 2018). However, there is a distinct research gap regarding the presence and involvement of citizens and citizen journalism in the political crisis of the July 2024 Uprising, which this research addresses.

In this research, we seek to understand and explore the motivations and incentives of the citizen journalists who became active participants in recording and disseminating information on this iconic event. The research objectives of this study are to (1) assess the impact of digital technologies in influencing citizen participation in journalism during political unrest and (2) identify other non-technological factors (economic, political, or social) influencing and motivating citizen engagement in journalism during the 2024 July Uprising in Bangladesh. This leads us to pose two distinct but interrelated research questions: (1) Has the involvement of citizens in journalism increased due to the development and emergence of new internet, digital platform, and mobile technologies? (2) What factors are responsible for citizens engaging in creating and communicating content as citizen journalists during the 2024 July Uprising in Bangladesh?

The first section of this article provides a review of the literature on citizen journalism, offering its academic definition and presenting it as a philosophical practice. This review is divided into two sub-sections, focusing on the national perspective of Bangladesh and then the regional perspective of South Asia. The second section introduces and justifies the theoretical framework of this study, which is linked to the theory of motivation for individuals. The research method is discussed in section three. In section four, there is a thematic analysis and discussion of the results of interviews conducted with citizen journalists who participated in the Bangladesh Uprising.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Citizen Journalism: Academic Definition and Philosophical Practice

Citizen journalism emerged with the promotion of journalism in the current digital era. Scholars provide numerous definitions of what constitutes journalism and identifies journalists. Citizen journalists have disrupted news media environments by testing the veracity and representativeness of information flowing from standard news media newsrooms. Scholars have shown interest in individuals' ability to participate more actively in news production following the rise of the Internet and new media. Using terms like interactive journalism, participatory journalism, citizen journalism, or user-generated content (UGC), scholars have examined the participation of common people in various phases of news creation. However, debate over the desirable level of citizen involvement in the news process predates the rise of citizen journalism. As early as the 1920s, the writer and political analyst Walter Lippman and the American savant John Dewey discussed the function of reporting

in majority rules government, including the degree to which the general population should participate in news–social event creation processes (Miller, 2019).

Definitions of citizen journalism generally stem from the description of 20th-century expert journalists, the content they create, and their role in information ecology. A vital part of the definition of citizen journalism is that “citizens” uphold the truth through their activities, distinguishing it from the work of professional journalists. The term “citizen” is risky, given that among all the members of a web-based data-sharing platform in a specific area, few users are citizens. The term “netizen,” coined by Michael Hauben in 1997 and used often in English-language media in China, may be more appropriate. Regardless, it is a standard term in a large part of the scholarship on this phenomenon (Roberts, 2019).

Several researchers have endeavored to define citizen journalism, but a single definition has never been settled upon (Allan, 2009; Frohlich et al., 2012). Without a doubt, an article may include one term (“participatory”) in its title while listing “citizen journalism” as a keyword (e.g., Frohlich et al., 2012). For these reasons, analysts, such as Mortensen (2011, p. 65), find a “lack of clarity and conceptualization” in the term. Others, like Cottle (2014), contend that selected terms frequently fail to capture nuance; for instance, the common term user-generated content (UGC) is often utilized by far-reaching, powerful news media outlets to project an image of citizen journalism that is free of its “stunted and proprietorial view” and values (x). In this article, citizen journalism is defined as news content (text, video, sound, interactives, and so forth) delivered by non-experts, i.e., individuals not formally engaged in the structures and practice of professional mass media and journalism. A citizen journalist is an independent and autonomous producer and disseminator of content that is often critical of the incumbent hegemonic system and spread via alternative digital means as social media. Citizen journalism may capture a specific moment (e.g., witnessing a program), be discontinuous (e.g., a Twitter feed), or be delivered consistently, like the delivery of content by hyper-local news operators (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21670811.2014.1002513>; accessed on 10 May 2025).

To distinguish citizen journalism from participatory journalism, several researchers (Holt & Karlsson, 2015; Karlsson & Holt, 2014; Kperogi, 2011) cited Nip’s (2006) definition of the former: “Where the people are responsible for gathering content, visioning, producing and publishing the news product, I call citizen journalism.” Professionals are not involved in this framework in any way (unless they are citizens acting in lieu of being paid workers). Similarly, Örnebring (2013) stated that “the term [citizen journalism] has a commonly shared core: it refers to news produced by amateurs as opposed to professionals” (Örnebring, 2013). In short, participatory journalism involves citizen contributions to mainstream media content, a hybrid model of journalism in which editorial control remains firmly with professional journalists.

Although many researchers have offered a clear definition of the term “citizen journalism,” some have linked it to untrained, regular citizens rather than professional journalists (Blaagaard, 2013; Compton & Benedetti, 2010; Larsson, 2014; Semati & Brookey, 2014; Simons, 2016). The types of citizen journalism that have received the most research attention include social media posts, websites, and blogs. The absence of participation from professional journalists has, therefore, been the primary differentiation for researchers studying citizen journalism.

2.2. In Context: Citizen Journalism in South Asia

The act of everyday people reporting news and disseminating information, or “citizen journalism,” has become increasingly popular worldwide, especially in areas where established media outlets are censored or do not adequately cover a range of perspectives.

With its diverse political landscape, South Asia offers a captivating framework for comprehending the development, challenges, and significance of citizen journalism. The largest democracy in the world, India (according to Indian branding efforts), offers a challenging environment for citizen journalism. Despite a rapidly expanding media ecosystem that includes hundreds of newspapers published in many languages and over 400 television channels, there have been many obstacles to global awareness of citizen journalism. The dominance of mainstream media, which eclipses efforts by grassroots reporters, is a key cause. Furthermore, until relatively recently, the expansion of citizen journalism was hampered by the availability of high-speed internet. Owing to the availability of reasonably priced 4G mobile connections, 511 million Indians had internet access in November 2018, a considerable increase from 236 million just two years prior ([Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2019](#)). With the rapid development of digital technology, more Indians are now able to engage in online communities, creating a favorable environment for the growth of citizen journalism.

Citizen journalism in India emerged in the mid-2000s with the establishment of digital platforms that encouraged news contributions from individuals regardless of professional training. The launch of Merinews in 2006 marked the country's first citizen journalism platform, signaling a growing demand for online news as internet and mobile phone penetration expanded ([Doron & Jeffrey, 2013](#)). Alongside this technological shift, increasing corporatization and political bias in mainstream media motivated ordinary citizens to take on the role of news reporters. Over the years, several citizen-driven news portals, such as [theviewspaper.net](#), [thisismyindia.com](#), [Cj.IBNLive](#), [GroundReport](#), and [CGNet](#), emerged. Among these, [CGNet Swara](#), a voice-based platform, played a crucial role in covering tribal issues in Chhattisgarh, offering an alternative to mainstream narratives ([Mudliar & Donner, 2015](#); [Saha, 2012](#)). There are clear and consistent socio-political reasons driving the popularity and adoption of digital communication and citizen journalism in India, including the motivation to cover local or marginalized issues not addressed in the mainstream media ([Jena, 2024](#)), consumer preferences for specific services and content ([Kumar et al., 2023](#)), and the need for alternative sources of news and information in a context of low public trust in government and traditional public institutions ([Zuckerman, 2017](#)).

In India, citizen journalism has played a significant role in crisis reporting, exposing political corruption, human rights advocacy, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities ([Sonwalkar, 2009](#)). However, challenges remain regarding its impact and accessibility. Studies indicate that although citizen journalism platforms highlight grassroots concerns, they often rely on professional journalists for wider visibility ([Agrawal, 2013](#); [Chadha & Steiner, 2015](#)). Additionally, socio-economic factors such as class, caste, and language proficiency influence participation in citizen journalism, limiting its democratizing potential ([Thomas, 2012](#)). The digital divide in India continues to shape engagement with citizen journalism, reinforcing disparities between rural and urban populations and between different socio-economic groups ([Pathak-Shelat & DeShano, 2014](#)).

In India, several noteworthy projects have been launched with the aim of providing a voice to marginalized populations, sharing opinions and views that are blocked from mainstream information channels for not aligning with the opinion corridor in an increasingly politically mobilized information environment. For instance, since its founding in 2002, Video Volunteers has concentrated on creating and disseminating short videos that reflect the hardships and everyday lives of individuals in marginalized communities. Two hundred forty-nine journalists working for their news service, India Unheard, have produced more than 6000 video stories ([Video Volunteers, 2019](#)). Other efforts with considerable impact include [CGNet Swara](#), a mobile-based audio news service for tribal communities, and [MeriNews](#), the first website devoted to citizen journalism, which was created in 2006.

These platforms frequently avoid mainstream media, which tends to segregate and under-value citizen-generated material, have addressed complaints, enhanced access to services, combated corruption, and preserved fundamental rights (Paul, 2015).

Although citizen journalism has been somewhat integrated into mainstream Indian media, their relationship is still tense. Since citizen reporters are activists with goals that might compromise journalistic integrity, professional journalists frequently approach them with skepticism (Chadha & Steiner, 2015). However, there are indications of change, as an increasing number of news outlets realize that citizen journalism may improve news reporting. Owing to audience demand and the low cost of citizen-generated content, the traditional media landscape may change gradually as more citizen-generated content is included.

Pakistan has a vibrant media landscape, which is predominantly controlled by a few private individuals (i.e., business tycoons). Issues of censorship, corruption, and sensationalism affect the quality and tone of Pakistani news content. It is also undergoing a digital transformation, which is changing the dynamics of journalistic practice and consumption, where the government has a greater presence (Yousaf, 2023). In Pakistan, interactive voice response (IVR) technology has been leveraged to enable citizen journalism in underserved communities. One such initiative, Mehfil, allows individuals to report social issues and share grievances using basic mobile phones. This platform provides a voice to marginalized populations, allowing them to discuss the denial of their rights and express concerns without requiring digital literacy or internet access (Ejaz et al., 2018). Mehfil was integrated into Polly, an IVR-based entertainment and information service, which organically expanded to 165,000 users by 2013. This integration enabled users to report local issues and news simply by placing a missed call, which triggered a callback to record their message. Mobile-based citizen journalism initiatives like Mehfil align with broader trends in digital activism and participatory news production. IVR technology has proven effective in enhancing transparency, increasing public engagement, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities (Ejaz et al., 2018). It is connected to the idealized notion that social media has a democratizing effect of holding politicians and the system accountable by creating transparency (Saboor et al., 2022). This initiative is a mechanism of encouraging the public to actively engage in reporting and exposing corruption, which is a significant issue across South Asia.

2.3. In Context: Citizen Journalism in Bangladesh

With technological advancement, more people around the world are producing and consuming visual content on their mobile devices. Young adults in Bangladesh are actively producing content for mobile devices and regularly post their videos to social media. Teenagers are drawn to a new generation of digital influencers that have emerged thanks to platforms like YouTube. YouTube and Facebook have seen a dramatic increase in viewership since 4G services were introduced in 2018, giving content producers the chance to create Bengali-language content specifically for these platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, internet data usage in Bangladesh increased by more than 50%, with many users watching local-language videos on social media, according to [Bdnews24.com](https://www.bdnews24.com) (2020). Younger audiences are now leveraging mobile technology not only for communication but also as a creative tool for generating highly interactive multimedia content.

In recent years, the transition from traditional to digital journalism has accelerated. Newsrooms, especially local ones, now rely heavily on online and mobile technologies to collect and distribute information (Chadwick, 2014). By providing real-time updates, and often trying to escape the gatekeeping and censorship embedded in mainstream analog mass media organizational structures and mentality, citizen journalists play a vital role

in this shift. Because they engage with digital platforms, citizen journalists are not only consumers but producers of content. They avoid the obstructive institutional and cognitive structures that support gatekeeping and censorship in a society built on a strict social and political hierarchy by directly accessing means of publishing and disseminating their material online. With this trend, mobile devices have transformed newsroom operations, allowing journalists to interact directly with their audience and work more productively with colleagues in the field (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019). This change highlights how mobile-based reporting and content production are becoming increasingly important in Bangladesh's changing media environment, which has seen rapid development and application of new information communication technologies, and changing the operational practices of both professional and non-professional journalists.

With the expansion of digital media, citizen journalism in Bangladesh has changed dramatically, as mainstream news outlets have begun incorporating user-generated content into their stories. Prothom Alo, one of the most significant newspapers in the nation, has been leading this change by launching platforms for citizen journalism. To give readers a structured platform through which to contribute news stories, Prothom Alo launched Prothomalo.com in 2006, followed by Nagorik Shangbad (Citizen News) in May 2019 (Khan et al., 2022). In the beginning, citizen journalism was restricted to a weekly supplement called Durporobash. In 2012, it moved online, allowing expatriates to share their stories. This shift reflects the growing importance of participatory journalism in Bangladesh, where audiences play an active role in shaping the news agenda.

Despite its potential, citizen journalism in Bangladesh faces several obstacles. The integration of user-generated content into mainstream news is often constrained by limited editorial resources. At Prothom Alo, for instance, a single moderator manages the Nagorik Shangbad desk, which facilitates the publication of only five to six stories daily, highlighting the need for increased manpower to enhance engagement (Khan et al., 2022). Similarly, Bdnews24.com, the first online-based news organization in Bangladesh, has embraced citizen journalism but faced challenges in distinguishing it from blogging. Many early contributors misunderstood citizen journalism as personal storytelling rather than a structured news medium (Khan et al., 2022).

A key advantage of citizen journalism in Bangladesh is its ability to provide real-time, on-the-ground reporting. News outlets increasingly rely on user-generated live streams and firsthand eyewitness accounts, especially during breaking news events. Although the immediate availability of such content enhances the depth of reporting, it also raises concerns regarding credibility and verification (Khan et al., 2022). As citizen journalism continues to evolve, traditional media must find ways to balance professional reporting with audience contributions while maintaining journalistic integrity.

3. Theoretical Framework

Locke (1997) understood human motivation as determined by goal-directedness, volition or free will, and perceived needs and desires, sustaining the actions of individuals in relation to themselves and their environment. This perspective is echoed by other researchers. Maehr and Braskamp (1986) note that an individual's personal interests and their national concerns require significant consideration when examining motivation, particularly as it relates to the work, achievement, and productivity of the person in question. Motivation requires making sense of success or failure in their environment and the psychological will necessary to achieve the desired goals. When applied to the philosophy of citizen journalists and citizen journalism, human motivation is a significant factor driving individuals to action, especially when they are confronted with what they perceive as injustices committed against society. This is a factor that appeared in the

participant interviews conducted this study: where the sanctity of free will is cherished, outrage occurs when free will is perceived to be violated.

McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory divides individual motivation into several different categories. McClelland's acquired needs theory states that an individual acquires specific needs over time according to their life experiences. Consequently, he describes three separate types of motivational need: (1) achievement motivation, (2) authority/power motivation, and (3) affiliation motivation (Ball, 2012, p. 6). There are different understandings of motivation taking place at the individual or collective level. A noticeable trend is taking shape with respect to this evolution in understanding what drives motivation.

In particular, there has been a noticeable shift away from individual-cognitive perspectives (e.g., motivational beliefs, goals, attributions) towards dynamic perspectives on motivation emergent through the complex interactions of internal, social and contextual processes. (Ushioda, 2011, p. 221)

Psychological needs are linked to cultural values and evolutionary processes. For example, a personal goal and the motivation to achieve it can be "seen as a route to personal growth and as a way to create active and democratic citizens and a good society" (Ahl, 2008, p. 171). This theory is highly relevant to the personal motivation experienced by the citizen journalists who participated in the July 2024 Uprising, which ranged from a sense of need and outrage and injustice on a personal level to a wider community obligation in terms of personal needs or a sense of duty to the community. This aligns with the theory that an individual seeks to satisfy their higher-order psychological needs (a movement or an idea, for example) to gain a sense of belonging, create something better, or achieve self-actualization.

Social contexts and individual differences that support satisfaction of the basic needs facilitate natural growth processes including intrinsically motivated behavior and integration of extrinsic motivations, whereas those that forestall autonomy, competence, or relatedness are associated with poorer motivation, performance, and well-being. (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 227)

Therefore, an individual's motivations are numerous and complex, and they consist of both internal and external aspects. These aspects are rooted in cultural, political, cognitive, psychological, and many other factors driven by emotional and/or rational sense to achieve something individually or participate in something bigger and leave an indelible impact upon society. As we shall discuss later in this article, citizen journalists are motivated by these complex combinations of internal and external factors and desires. These motivational factors are to be examined in more detail with the interviewees' responses.

4. Methods

This study is based on a philosophical concept developed as a means of understanding individual experiences and the perceptions that they create. Phenomenology is useful for helping us understand, with minimal observer bias, the internal cognitive processes that drive and motivate interviewees; it is defined as follows: "phenomenology, a philosophical movement originating in the 20th century, the primary objective of which is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions" (Biemel & Spiegelberg, 2024). In other words, it is a philosophical concept and method that focuses on the structures of human experience and consciousness in terms of how they are lived and perceived from a first-person perspective, with the aim of defining the essence of that experience without depending on prior theories or assumptions.

This is crucial, given the potential value to be found in the firsthand experiences of the interviewed citizen journalists who experienced the events of the July 2024 Uprising, which was captured in the interview process.

Our research is exploratory and uses a qualitative approach to understand the motivation compelling citizens to practice journalism. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample. The researchers identified key participants based on their existing knowledge, by conducting a literature review, and by consulting with experts in the field of citizen journalism to create a list of individuals who are highly active in creating user-generated content. A set of prepared questions were posed, which can be found in Appendix A. The researchers initially reached out to 50 citizen journalists and finally selected 20 citizen journalists who met the specified selection criteria. This process included an element of snowballing, in which further contacts were solicited from among the pool of key informants to supplement the purposive sampling. The researchers noted who actively participated in citizen journalism during the July Uprising (who created and published content) and have been regularly practicing citizen journalism for at least the previous year. Young citizen journalists who have been active for a minimum of one year (aged 18 to 30) and citizen journalism platform coordinators were interviewed for this study. The interviews were conducted in Bangladesh (the city location has been removed to ensure the anonymity of the participants), online and in person, for no more than 60 min. The interviewees were required to be active observers of in the July 2024 Uprising and potentially participants. KIIs (Key Informant Interviews) and IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) were conducted using unstructured questionnaires to collect qualitative data and analyze it thematically. The resulting interview transcripts were used as the basis for identifying commonly occurring themes in the text. These themes included (1) Digital Access, Affordability, and the MOJO Revolution, (2) July Uprising as a Catalyst for Participation, (3) Truth-Seeking, Social Justice, and Mistrust in Media, (4) Legal, Ethical, and Institutional Barriers, and (5) Collective Action and Vision for New Independent Media. The interviews were recorded, and the interviewees were shown the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, and ethical board approval was obtained from the relevant authority.

The details and demographics of the sample are described in Table 1, which shows the data of 20 respondents, of whom 70% were men (14 respondents) and 30% were women (6 respondents). By profession, the respondents were predominantly students (11 respondents, 55%), followed by professionals working in media, healthcare, business, accountancy, and content creation. Specifically, the sample comprised 2 content producers, 1 physician, 1 entrepreneur, 1 private sector employee, 1 media officer, and 1 chartered accountant. By location, Dhaka (80%) has the highest representation with 16 respondents, followed by Chittagong (17%) with 3 respondents and Cox's Bazar (5%) with 1 respondent. The location of only one respondent remained unspecified. This classification of respondents by demographics yielded diversified insights into online participation in and consumption of media among the urban youth and practicing professionals of Bangladesh. The interviewees were active participants in the July 2024 Uprising, which means they were present to both protest against the government and act as citizen journalists reporting events as they transpired. In terms of professional journalistic ethics, this situation constitutes a conflict of interest; however, the motivation to participate lies not in ethical constructs but in higher-order psychological needs.

Table 1. List of respondents.

SN	Respondents	Gender	Designation/	Location
1	CTJ-1	Male	Student, Local Blogger	Chittagong
2	CTJ-2	Female	Media Communication Officer (NGOs)	Dhaka
3	CTJ-3	Male	Content Creator	Dhaka
4	CTJ-4	Female	Doctor, (Private Hospital)	Dhaka
5	CTJ-5	Male	Entrepreneur and Human Rights Activist	Dhaka
6	CTJ-6	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
7	CTJ-7	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
8	CTJ-8	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
9	CTJ-9	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
10	CTJ-10	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
11	CTJ-11	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
12	CTJ-12	Male	Private Employee	Dhaka
13	CTJ-13	Male	Business (Self-Employed)	Dhaka
14	CTJ-14	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
15	CTJ-15	Male	Chartered Accountant	Dhaka
16	CTJ-16	Female	Not mentioned ()	Dhaka
17	CTJ-17	Male	Student (University-Level)	Dhaka
18	CTJ-18	Female	Student (PolyTechnic Institute)	Chittagong
19	CTJ-19	Male	Travel Content Creator and Digital Marketing Specialist	Chittagong
20	CTJ-20	Female	Student (University-Level)	Cox's Bazar

5. Results

This section outlines this study's focus and objectives, incorporating a thematic analysis of empirical data collected in the field. The field data indicate that the emergence and availability of digital technologies have positively impacted citizens' participation in journalism. People from different socioeconomic and geographical backgrounds are can engage in citizen journalism because they work independently, without any barriers. During the July Uprising in Bangladesh, citizen journalists played a crucial role in presenting accurate information promptly and effectively, in contrast to traditional media platforms.

All data are presented according to the five thematic areas that represent the research objectives.

5.1. Theme 1: Digital Access, Affordability, and the MOJO Revolution

The rise of digital technology, particularly smartphones and affordable internet access, has significantly enhanced citizen journalism in Bangladesh. This was especially evident during the July 2024 Uprising. The respondents universally acknowledged that digital access, affordability, and the Mobile Journalism (MOJO) revolution fundamentally reshaped their capacity to engage in journalistic activities. The popularity of citizen journalism has increased due to government restrictions (previous regimes) on mainstream media during the July Uprising. Now, digital platforms such as social media have created an opportunity to promote citizen journalism over traditional journalism.

Citizen journalists reported that the ease of access to mobile phones and low-cost internet services has removed traditional barriers, enabling the rapid dissemination of content.

According to respondent CTJ-3,

“I can do anything with my smartphone. It’s accessible and affordable. Mobile journalism (MOJO) is no longer out of reach for everyone; it’s now a trend for our generation.”

This statement summarizes how technology democratizes content creation, allowing citizens who were previously excluded due to financial or logistical constraints to participate actively. It eliminates the gatekeeping and censorship that typically exist when mainstream mass media have a monopoly on the communication and dissemination of information. New information communication technologies enable prosumers to bypass these institutions and mechanisms, allowing them to access their audiences without an intermediary. Therefore, technology has enabled human motivation to be realized by presenting an opportunity to engage directly as both an observer and a participant. This aligns with the results and findings of previous studies on citizen journalism in South Asia (Saha, 2012; Doron & Jeffrey, 2013; Mudliar & Donner, 2015; Simons, 2016; Yousaf, 2023).

Further supporting that view, respondent CTJ-1 also underlined the importance of the speed facilitated by online platforms:

“Previously, it took days to distribute a piece of news; nowadays, they go viral within five minutes. I have experienced the July uprising in my locality.”

With the possibility to share news instantaneously through social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, mass communication has been revolutionized. The immediacy of the news cycle of citizen journalism is compared to the longer and slower news cycle of professional mass media outlets. The remark about the potential of viral content also hints at fame and popularity as motivation for citizen journalists. In the comments presented above and below, the interviewees support the findings of scientific works on the effects of technological convenience and personal gratification regarding the ease and speed of access and the communication of information (Chadwick, 2014; Khan et al., 2022). Interviewee CTJ-6 also commented on the issue of access:

“Social media is easy and accessible. It would be difficult for normal people to survive a day without smartphones and the internet actively.”

Thus, what most regard as mere convenience is an evolutionary step, as technology enables accessible and instant reporting for the general populace. Technologies offer scope for people, mostly young people, to participate in citizen journalism and report authentic news during crises, when mainstream media are censored or have limited access. Mobile Journalism (MOJO) is a revolutionary step in the Bangladeshi media landscape for any sort of crisis like the July Uprising. People can easily participate in citizen journalism by using their mobile phone.

5.2. Theme 2: July Uprising as a Catalyst for Participation

The July 2024 Uprising was, without a doubt, an event that inspired the public to actively participate in journalism. Most of the collected responses describe firsthand encounters in protests and the immense sense of outrage sparked by these experiences of injustice. Citizen journalists repeatedly highlighted these events as landmark moments, where their passive consumption of media content evolved into active creation and sharing.

Interviewee CTJ-1, who described his own experience, stated,

“My first reporting of protests was on 2 July 2024, around Chittagong College. One of the students has been abruptly arrested; I filmed and published that scene, and that has been shared thousands of times immediately. This moment made me realize the potential power of citizen journalism, and that encouraged me to do more.”

Such intense personal involvement shows that experiencing injustice directly motivates an interest in social responsibility among citizen journalists. This sense of injustice, together with a sense of being able to take meaningful action to address the injustice, motivated this interviewee. This finding aligns with the propositions by [Locke \(1997\)](#), [Maehr and Braskamp \(1986\)](#), and [Ushioda \(2011\)](#). According to [Ball \(2012, p. 6\)](#), the interviewee was stimulated and motivated by a sense of achievement and a sense of affiliation (with the arrested students).

Similarly, respondent CTJ-5 described the uprising as transformational, directly affecting their own decision to become even more active in journalistic work:

“It changed the way that I thought. Having seen suppression and injustice, I also learned the value of reporting and documentation of facts. It changed from just seeing but becoming an agent of change for society.”

The uprising was more than an isolated event; the respondents portrayed it as a collective awakening of social consciousness and accountability. This further confirms the motivations of the citizen journalist to become not only a witness to injustice but also a mechanism for bringing about transparency to enable the restoration of a just society. These are clear personal motivations ([Ahl, 2008](#)) that have been reported in other studies conducted in South Asian ([Sonwalkar, 2009](#); [Paul, 2015](#); [Ejaz et al., 2018](#)). According to respondent CTJ-11,

“With the protests that happened in July, our eyes were opened. All of us instantly became reporters because there was an absolute need to report and report things as they were being given to us live.”

The respondents focused on the revolution’s transformative potential, feeling a widespread sense of civic duty and viewing the event as an inevitable milestone in citizen journalism. They acted as catalysts during the period of the July uprising. They experienced a desire to grow and participate in something much larger and more meaningful than an individual, feeling a sense of belonging and purpose within a larger community and ideology. As such, this expression of higher-order psychological needs fits with the findings of existing research ([Deci & Ryan, 2000](#)). The above quote is supported by other research in the South Asian context ([Chadha & Steiner, 2015](#); [Jena, 2024](#)), expressing engagement in the mission of journalism that the fourth estate was neglecting at this point in time.

5.3. Theme-3: Truth-Seeking, Social Justice, and Mistrust in Media

Values of truth-seeking, social justice, and general mistrust in traditional media became the main motivational drivers for the active engagement of civilians in journalism. The respondents repeatedly expressed their lack of confidence in traditional media outlets, referring to them as biased, politically driven, and prone to falsifying reality.

Respondent CTJ-8 articulated clearly how perceived bias in the mainstream media shaped his motivation:

“Mainstream media tends to hide or distort facts to accommodate certain influential interests. Citizen journalists like us have no such restrictions; we report the raw truth and strongly advocate for social justice.”

Together, the perception that the fourth estate failed to live up to its philosophical role as a watchdog against abuses of power and the notion that someone should step up to shoulder this responsibility result in very strong motivation. This motivation appears in other studies, such as those of [Simons \(2016\)](#) and the [Video Volunteers \(2019\)](#). This is an example, according to [Ball's \(2012, p. 6\)](#) categorization of motivations to join the spectrum of authority/power, of the perception that the socially responsible power and authority of the fourth estate is absent and must be restored via a personal ideological mission to correct social injustices. Such a mission to rectify perceived misinformation or biases resonated strongly with respondent CTJ-9, who noted an expanding institutional confidence in citizen reports ahead of official accounts:

“People these days believe social media reports more than conventional channels, mostly because mainstream media is dominated by political forces. It is the credibility of reports of citizen journalists that is the reason audiences are going to us.”

Social media and citizen journalism are perceived to deliver a mission of social justice to people in need of reliable information during a crisis, such as the July 2024 Uprising. The mainstream media are seen as corrupt and serving the same forces that undermine the interests of the people. Respondent CTJ-14 brought an additional, essential element by linking truth-seeking to the wider ethical issues of misinformation:

“There is already so much misinformation being spread through conventional media, deliberately designed to manipulate the sentiment of the people. As citizen journalists, our first duty is to uphold transparency, authenticity, and social justice by sharing true accounts.”

The prevalent perception of the mainstream media as unreliable underscores a significant civic responsibility for citizen journalists to provide truthful and unbiased reporting. It also embodies a comprehensive ideological drive: social justice, transparency, and equity in journalism. There is a clear awareness of one's pivotal responsibility in ensuring public access to accurate information, particularly in politically turbulent circumstances. These interviewee statements align with prior research on citizen journalism in the South Asian context ([Saboor et al., 2022](#)).

5.4. Theme 4: Legal, Ethical, and Institutional Barriers

Citizen journalists vividly depicted core legal, ethical, and institutional challenges that characterized their practice amidst the July 2024 Uprising. This section reflects on the riskiness and complexity of citizen journalism where there is political unrest. All participants mentioned an environment of fear and intimidation that was propagated by limiting laws, institutional monitoring, censorship, and ethical concerns, characterizing their engagement and the quality of journalistic practice. Respondent CTJ-4 also openly implied an ever-present fear of potential legal sanctions:

“Whenever am posting critical content, there is natural fear of being held. Media regulatory laws are typically misused as weapons of censoring voices and threatening citizen journalists. This is what affects significantly our confidence to write openly about things.”

A sense of moral and ethical duty in the absence of these qualities during a crisis, such as the July 2024 Uprising, sparks a strong psychological desire to fight the perceived imbalance and restore a more just and righteous environment. [Locke \(1997\)](#) captures this psychological motivation well, describing how an individual can develop motivations and goals when they witness a violation of key values or principles as part of the human need for free will and expression. Similar legal concerns were repeated by many other

respondents, who have been victims of either direct threats or intimidating treatment by the authorities. Respondent CTJ-15 documented open episodes of institutional censorship:

“Censorship by the government is pervasive and relentless. My social media sites were censored regularly; officials would regularly erase criticism of officials’ actions without justification. This deliberate restriction of information severely impinges upon our freedoms of journalism.”

The weaponization of the law and the legal system to uphold a system that is seen as being corrupt and self-serving motivates citizen journalists, compelled by civic duty, to undertake a mission to support the repressed, who are being marginalized and violated (physically and psychologically) by the hegemonic system of power. These reports illuminate the collective nature of institutional efforts to suppress independent reporting, wherein censorship is framed as an intentional obstacle and not an unintentional hindrance. Institutional roadblocks are not only limited to censorship or threats of legal action but also extended into ethical challenges, further hindering citizen journalists’ reporting.

Respondent CTJ-17 reported the ethical issues typically encountered:

“We are confronted all the time by thorny ethical questions to report or not to report potentially inflammatory content that could induce more violence, endanger people who appear in the content, or ignite existing enmities. Reporting or not reporting appropriately has to be thought about extremely carefully against its potential unintended consequences.”

Ethical dilemmas and moral contradictions provide opportunities to develop strong cognitive and psychological motivations to act in individuals that possess a strong sense of community belonging and feel a moral duty toward their community when they perceive it to be repressed and under attack by the political system. This thinking reflects an increased sense of responsibility among citizen journalists regarding the extensive influence of their reporting activities, exemplifying an ethical sense of responsibility and journalistic responsibility.

Further, respondent CTJ-19 summarized complaints about the vagueness and discriminatory enforcement of current media laws:

“Media laws are frequently unclear and indiscriminate, and citizen journalism is thereby an unsafe venture. Irregular use puts us at risk, encourages self-censorship, and greatly impedes our abilities to give free expression and tell.”

This long-standing legal vagueness and riskiness caused the interviewees to feel vulnerable, exemplifying how institutional arrangements restrain rather than enable transparent and honest communication. The blunt and obvious weaponization of the law and legal system against the victims of injustice generates a sense of outrage. This outrage can evolve into a sense of motivation and action toward restoring justice by exposing the source of the outrage and those who commit or commission the outrageous acts.

5.5. Theme 5: Collective Action and Vision for New Independent Media

The citizen journalists had a clear and optimistic vision of the future of the media, in which it is grounded in mutual action, cooperation, and autonomy from established institutional authority. This section of the article captures their shared assumption that the sustainability and effectiveness of citizen journalism rely heavily upon the establishment of united, community-based platforms that facilitate honest reporting and the defense of freedom of expression.

Respondent CTJ-7 noted the significance of collective networks:

“We need to develop independent media networks where citizen journalists can collaborate without impediments. Together, our voices will become stronger, and censorship and harassment can more unambiguously”.

This conclusion signifies that the interviewees view joint action as not just strategy but as a condition of powerful, sustainable journalism beyond the grasp of repressive institutions. This statement has a clear mission and purpose, which espouses the motivation to participate in something new and better in relation to a sense of duty and responsibility to the people, to require transparency from the system, and to hold those in power accountable. This represents a desire to fulfil a higher-order psychological need to institutionalize new socially responsive and responsible institutions for future generations. Respondent CTJ-18 reported a similar desire:

“Our vision is to unify all of the citizen journalists under one independent umbrella, free of either business or governmental intervention. Only thus can we provide steady, unbiased, and honest reporting.”

A desire to escape the grips of political and commercial powers remained an omnipresent refrain, once again emphasizing the need for journalistic integrity. This builds upon the first quote in this category; these are strong, human-centered motivations to build something better and more just for a better future for the community as a whole.

Respondent CTJ-20 also highlighted the power of solidarity:

“Our future is built on collective action. Building strong alliances can safeguard our free reporting and assist us resist institutional repression.”

That is, group arrangements allow for proper protection of individuals. This ideational movement transcends the individual level in terms of solidarity and sense of purpose; everyone is part of a bigger movement in co-creation, which is an observation also made by Ushioda (2011, p. 221), Ahl (2008, p. 171) and Deci and Ryan (2000, p. 227). However, these efforts could risk severe danger. Respondent CTJ-13 noted the significance of community efforts:

“Independent media development needs an active citizen journalist community that is engaged”

The emphasis on openness, responsibility, and democratic values reflects that support for journalism independently requires support for shared values and ethics, as opposed to organizational or technical infrastructure. Finally, respondent CTJ-12 shared a vision for an alternative media sector:

“I envision an independent, self-reliant, and thriving media environment of citizen journalism owned, produced, and distributed by, of, and for the people, free of politicians or business corporations’ influence.”

Together, these responses describe a collective intention to transform citizen journalism from individual, personal undertakings into networked, long-distance, and ethical media collectives. This vision recognizes the importance of shared purpose, self-rule, and collaboration to actual reporting and facilitating democratic conversation in the media landscape of Bangladesh.

6. Discussion

This qualitative analysis examined the impact of digitalization on citizen involvement in community journalism during the July 2024 Bangladesh Uprising, focusing on how emerging web technologies and social-political functionalities influenced citizen participation. These results strongly align with the literature that emphasizes the transformational

power of online media in democratizing journalism (Chadwick, 2014; Zeng et al., 2019) and highlights the unique contextual variables specific to Bangladesh.

Corresponding to the first research question, this study confirms that citizen participation in journalism has increased significantly with the advancement of digital technology, particularly smartphones and social media. The respondents outlined how inexpensive internet access and mobile phones eliminated typical gatekeeping, allowing news to be produced and shared immediately.

This finding confirms universal trends in which MOJO (Mobile Journalism) has enabled rapid sharing and broadened journalistic inclusivity (Biemel & Spiegelberg, 2024; Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019). The “MOJO revolution” reported in the section on Theme 1 marked the enhanced ability of lay people to create and share news instantly, as they did during the July Uprising.

Nonetheless, access alone is insufficient to explain the origin of citizen journalism; social and political impetuses also have an indispensable role. Human-centric cognitive and psychological needs and motivations, which are realized through the development and evolution of technology, also have a clear impact. The uprising itself became an impetus (Theme 2), fostering a sense of civic responsibility and willingness to report among the people.

These findings are supported by earlier research that highlighted political unrest as an impetus for participatory journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Goode, 2009). The July uprising encouraged people to transition from passive media use to active documentation and sharing, supporting the conclusion that crisis environments trigger citizen journalism.

Themes 3 and 4 expose the underlying non-technological drivers and deterrents. Diffuse suspicion of mainstream media as being biased or compromised for partisan gain encouraged citizen journalists to proclaim their mission as one of searching for truth and promoting social justice. This parallels studies recounting citizen journalism’s role in challenging official narratives and generating alternative narratives (Blaagaard, 2013; Roberts, 2019). Ethical imperatives of transparency and promoting justice serve as powerful drivers even under immense legal and institutional deterrents, such as fear of arrest or censorship—deterrents that have been reported for other Southeast Asian media contexts (Quackenbush et al., 2018). These deterrents frame the way citizen journalists manage risk and practice cautious agency, exemplifying the contentious nature of information flow under conditions of intense political sensitivity.

The most prominent theme is the identification of a collective vision among participants of independently operated media sites (Theme 5). Aspirations to create collectively integrated, distributed networks that are free of commercial or governmental intervention resonate with growing participative, distributed media sites (Karlsson & Holt, 2014; Zeng et al., 2019). Focuses on community and solidarity-authored sites, which are sustainable citizen journalism sites, resonate with worldwide discussions on media democratization and self-rule (Chadha & Steiner, 2015). This multidisciplinary study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating the means by which digital technology, coupled with the socio-political environment and collective mobilization, influences Bangladesh citizen journalism. It also emphasizes the importance of a sophisticated digital freedom policy, media literacy, and legal protection to support this growing sector.

One strength, potential, and appeal of citizen journalism and citizen journalists is the ability to challenge the “official truth” during times of political tension and crisis (Atton, 2009). This was certainly a significant motivating factor noted by many of the interviewees in this study, who felt the truth was being withheld by government authorities and the professional mainstream media. However, various limitations and weaknesses exist that

require identification and acknowledgment. The root of some of the problems can be traced to exaggerated expectations and vested interests.

Citizen journalism around the world seems buffeted, and not to its benefit, by extreme, unsubstantiated assessments. Professional journalists claim, without systematic evidence, that citizen journalism is subjective, amateurish, and haphazard in quality. Conversely, advocates celebrate citizen journalism by exaggerating unusual one-time cases, usually disasters. (Chadha & Steiner, 2015, p. 715)

Certainly, the “official truth” broadcast by government officials and the mainstream media did not align with the reality on the ground at a time when information on a critical political event was needed. Notably, the motivation of citizen journalists was ideologically aligned with the opposition against the government of Sheikh Hassina, but this created the temptation and potential for card-stacking practices of information bias. There was clear bias demonstrated in the participants’ answers. This could call into question the reliability of information when it is needed most—not to mention the potential effects of this information on the consumers of the content.

These contradictions and dilemmas have been highlighted by other scholars of citizen journalism in other Global South crisis and emergency contexts.

The reliance on untrained reporters with limited or no understanding of journalistic standards has become increasingly widespread particularly in less democratic environments and these practices have impacted news gathering and reporting. There however has been some debate about the conceivability, capacity, reliability and acceptability of citizen journalists due to the lack of the professional standards associated with the profession. (Mutsvairo & Salgado, 2022, p. 354)

This psychological situation—the heat of the moment and the fleeting pursuit of a citizen journalists under unusual circumstances, such as disasters or crises, where they are emotionally primed and mobilized by personal factors and not necessarily rational, professional factors—has an impact on the quality and consistency of the content produced. Ultimately, citizen journalists are not neutral observers but active participants who are, to varying degrees, emotionally and ideologically aligned with a particular political stance during the crisis.

7. Future Research Directions

Future studies must quantitatively measure the influence of citizen journalism on political accountability and public sentiment. Panel studies can longitudinally study its persistence after an event. Comparative research within South Asia would improve our knowledge of provincial-level dynamics and collective challenges. Gender gaps among those who take part in citizen journalism also require study. Finally, examining tech-based solutions, such as AI-augmented content corroboration, could boost the credibility and reach of citizen media.

Mutsvairo and Salgado (2022, p. 354) observed that “our analysis suggests that a reconceptualization of citizen journalism is imperative thanks to several factors, including improved access to the Internet and changing attitudes toward political dissent and participation, citizen journalism in Africa is taking new directions”. It is indeed imperative for academics to engage with this observation, as the practical and ideological aspects of citizen journalism have outgrown the academic conceptualizations of the phenomenon.

8. Conclusions

This study establishes that digitalization significantly expanded citizen journalism during the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh. Affordably priced smartphones and internet

access allowed for quick, broad mobilization, allowing individuals to videorecord and transmit events in real time without traditional media constraints. Nevertheless, technology alone cannot provide an adequate explanation for this explosion of citizen journalism. The political unrest itself acted as an enormous catalyst, motivating people through first-hand encounters of injustice and a societal awakening. Endemic mistrust of mainstream media inspired citizen journalists' commitment to truth and social justice. Even institutional and legal restraints, like censorship and fear of repression, failed to deter citizen journalists, who envisaged the development of collaborative, autonomous media sites in the future.

Citizen journalism is a relatively new and rapidly growing and changing global phenomenon, in part due to decreasing trust in and credibility of mainstream mass media and journalism, which are perceived to support a corrupt, hegemonic system of political power. This shift is occurring worldwide, but in South Asia, it is happening in a more concentrated form owing to the prevalence of social, political and economic inequalities in society. Citizen journalism combats attempts to create an information vacuum to deflate the pent-up tensions that exist in society regarding publicly resonating issues such as corruption, lack of official transparency, and underrepresented or marginalized groups.

There are some clear limitations of citizen journalism as an academic concept and as a practical form of information sharing and knowledge production. The initial optimistic, hyperbolic image of citizen journalism as a means of promoting democracy and freedoms is challenged by the constraints of pragmatic realities and vested interests. There is a tendency for hopeful and perhaps even naïve expectations to be ideologically overblown; for example, the initial optimism surrounding the democratic and freedom-promoting qualities of the Internet were initially challenged by few, with [Morozov \(2011\)](#) being one of the few early observers to call for caution. In the context of an already intense and volatile politicized event, crisis can be exaggerated by good intentions based on idealized emotions and perceptions of justice and injustice. There is a need for citizen journalism, but there also needs to be an appreciation of the limitations and constraints of citizen journalists and the practice of citizen journalism.

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Appendix A. Interview Questions

Appendix A.1. Digital Technologies and Practice of Citizen Journalism

1. How often do you use the internet, digital platforms, or mobile devices to create and share news stories?
2. In what ways has the internet, smartphone or social media made it easier for you to participate in citizen journalism?

3. Have digital tools like smartphones or social media influenced your decision to become a citizen journalist? If yes, how?
4. How do you contribute newsworthy content to news sites or social media in general? In other words, what kinds of interactive features do you use? Letters to the editor? News tips? Uploading photos? Going live?

Appendix A.2. Factors Influencing Citizen Engagement in Journalism

5. What personally motivates you to create and share newsworthy stories as a citizen journalist? Is there any sort of greater goal or achievement in mind?
6. Do you feel that smartphones and social media platforms encourage and give you a sense of confidence to report on events or issues? If so, why?
7. What challenges do you face when creating or sharing content as a citizen journalist?
8. Do you think that different media-centric laws in Bangladesh also create barriers in practicing citizen journalism?
9. Have you ever received any professional journalism training (MOJO for example) or do you know any are you familiar with industry ethics in practicing journalism?

Appendix A.3. Assess the Impact of Digital Technologies

10. How do you think your role as a citizen journalist has evolved significantly, before and during the July 2024 uprising.
11. Did you notice any changes that occurred in your citizen journalism in the July 2024 uprising with the rise of digital platforms?
12. How important are mobile technologies—(smartphones, different mobile apps) in your ability to report or share protest events like the July 2024 uprising?

Appendix A.4. Identify Other Influencing Factors

13. Besides digital technologies, what other factors influenced your engagement in citizen journalism during the July uprising 2024 (e.g., personal interest, community needs, social issues, economic, political or social reasons)?
14. Do you think that the level and authenticity of coverage (quality) by traditional media on the July uprising 2024 influenced your decision to create and share your own content on social media? If yes, please explain how and why?
15. Do you believe that the inadequate coverage (quantity) of TV media sources on the July 2024 uprising, fosters you to independently record and share videos on July uprising protests?
16. Do you think the rise of citizen journalism especially during the July 2024 uprising could foster the launch of new independent media platforms in Bangladesh? Please elaborate further.

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