

# Seensay: The Citizen Mojo In Information Democratization

M. Sripriya, P.E. Thomas.

Fulltime Research Fellow, Department of Communication and Media Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India;  
Associate Professor & Head Incharge, Department of Communication and Media Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India.

Email: primegha@gmail.com, thomasmediastudies@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** The prevalence of mobile technology and its ubiquitous presence had resulted in that it is not only a communication tool, but also enabler of development. The permeation of the mobile technology in development is discerned to be faster than any other communication technology in history. And, it is playing a vital role in the developing world. With its falling prices and increasing functionality, however, it is virtually certain that not too far into the future, most of the world's citizens will have cell phones. This is reason enough for citizens to explore the possibility of making the cell phone an important tool in mobile journalism in the developing countries. This paper explores the possibility of citizen mobile journalism by the 'networked' citizens in terms of what we call SEENSAY i.e., what is seen as breaking news in one's locality, be divulged to the whole world. It considers versatility of the mobile as a convergence medium that can help realise the need for participatory information dissemination and analyses the possibility of the citizen turning into a social "Foot Soldier" that leads to Information Democratization.

**Key words:** Information dissemination, Mojo, SEENSAY, Social "Foot Soldier", Information Democratization.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*"Differing from the internet, mobile as the 7th mass media channel is similar to the five legacy mass media, economically viable with a stable business model from day one. Yet, differing from the legacy mass media, all of which are witnessing a decline in their audiences and revenues, mobile like the internet, is an interactive media enabling it to fully capitalize on social networking and digital communities".* Tomi Ahonen, a commentator and author on new and social media, has called the mobile phone the "7th Mass Media"[1]. He points out that the convergence of mobiles combining voice, text, video, audio, geo-location, and a host of applications, pose an "inherent threat to mass media channel. Today the mobile phone can replicate everything that all the other six mass media can do. However, the speed of the mobile phone adoption has outstripped that of other forms of communication technology so far, so that within the past decade "mobile telephony has moved from being the technology for a privileged few, to essentially a mainstream technology"[2]. This paper explores the power of mobile phones in information dissemination as citizen-produced media which discusses the potential of SEENSAY, and how citizens are turning into social "Foot Soldiers" in covering the uncovered issues which are neglected by the main-stream media resulting in the Information Democratization.

## 2 MOJO DEFINED

Mojo refers to Mobile Journalists, often abbreviated as Mojo. Mojo uses only a mobile phone to gather and distribute news. The news can consist of text, audio, stills or video, or sometimes a combination of these. Mojoes tend to work alone. News and stories are posted either in online magazines, blogs or online newspapers, on newspaper's websites or included in the print editions. The term "Mojo" was coined in 2005 by people with Gannett newspapers as a codename for a project at the News-Press at Fort Myers, Fla, which has now come into regular use within the community of journalists [3].

## 3 MOBILE NEWS PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Mobile technology creates new pathways for user-generated content creation and broadcasting. Mobile phones can be utilized to collect and broadcast written, audio, and video to the Internet and to other mobile devices [4].

### 3.1 SMS -TEXT MESSAGING

SMS news services exist around the world. Many larger media outfits like the BBC and CNN have been offering SMS news alerts in the last few years as well for urgent updates or topical news on specific subjects. Community organizations also use SMS as a way to deliver news to their constituents. Twitter is a popular 'micro-blogging' site. Users can text message news to Twitter or the dozens of local twitter clones around the world. Users who subscribe to a given user's Twitter account can immediately see the posts. Since many online services like Twitter also allow subscribers to get updates via SMS, people without Internet access can still receive the information they want.

### 3.2 VOICE AND AUDIO

There are a number of companies that provide applications for mobile phones to create instant podcasts. In Afghanistan, RFE/RL and Radio Azadi uses an interactive SMS service that allows listeners to access content and participate in the program via mobile phone. Megafone.net, is a platform which uses mobile phones, or 'digital megaphones', to create webcasts to amplify the voices of individuals and groups who are often overlooked or misrepresented in mainstream media. The concept is a communal one.

### 3.3 PHOTOS

Mobile phones that have cameras can use MMS (Multi Media Messaging Services), email, or bluetooth to send images to other phones. Many popular photo sharing websites allow users to send and publish mobile photos on their sites. Flickr, the popular Yahoo owned photo and video repository and community, gives every account a mobile email address to send photos to and from a mobile device. There are many other, often

grassroots, citizen media efforts that encourage mobile blogging via email, SMS, and MMS. For example, MoBlog Ukraine is a grassroots site that encourages Ukrainian citizens to report their own stories to a web blog by sending a photo, video, or text message to a specified email address. Moblog is website which allows anybody to post their picture who use camera phones.

### 3.4 VIDEOS

Mobile video can also be one of the most effective ways to share important information and current events not covered by conventional media. Individuals can record and send short videos to popular video sharing sites such as YouTube. Videos can also be posted directly to web blogs. Mobile broadcast news is an online affinity group of independent journalist. It offers spaces for creating one's own blog where one can create video press releases. Netherland based Africa news has been a pioneer in mobile journalism in Africa with its website "VoicesofAfrica" where reporters are posting their video stories.

### 3.5 BLUETOOTH AND WIFI

Videos on mobile phones are also shared routinely via Bluetooth from mobile phone to mobile phone. The project, the Community Platform, developed by a group of MIT students, creates a local interactive workspace that can be used to collect and distribute information locally through bluetooth and wifi. Data, images, and video footage can be automatically duplicated to those within certain proximity. By using physical proximity, information can be shared quickly. Because the system is off-grid, it can be accessed in remote areas without connectivity.

### 3.6 LOCATION-BASED SERVICES AND MAPPING

Some NGOs and community-based organizations are using mobile phones and GPS devices to engage communities in social mapping activities for advocacy as well as local reporting linked to locations. The best-known is Ushahidi, a platform used during the Kenyan election to crowd source and map incidences of violence. During the flooding in New Orleans after Katrina, people who were stranded in homes were sending text messages from their cell phones to friends to tell them where they were. Those messages were posted to a blog at the Times-Picayune newspaper's website, which then was read by emergency crews who went out and saved the people.

### 3.7 THE MOBILE WEB

The Mobile Web refers to the access to the World Wide Web using a mobile device connected to a public network. Opera Mobile and Opera Mini, web-browser software for mobile phones, show rapid growth in mobile-web browsing in developing countries. The fastest growth is in developing countries including Russia, Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia, India and South Africa. These trends have implications for media outlets and NGOs alike. Already all major news outlets have mobile sites viewable from a mobile browser. There are dozens of free commercial services that turn almost any website or blog into a mobile site. Viewing websites on mobile phones is only an option for people who have Internet-ready mobile phones, of course. However, for those who do not there are products such as Podlinez that can turn Internet-based audio and blogs into a dial-in number that can be heard on a mobile phone. The Huffington Post is a mobile website which provides mobile

publishing and advertising. The technological convergence of mobile had provided an opportunity to document, communicate and share issues with the outside world even by the less privileged men.

## 4 SEENSAY & INFORMATION DEMOCRATISATION

The scenario in the media has been relatively bleak in its information oriented communication rather most of the time its aim is to make profit and increase its circulation by providing sensational news. India has only a few prominent media houses that not only influence the news but are also monitored by either big corporate houses or political parties or even by religious groups. Many a time, these mainstream media due to their vested interests, do not address some of the critical or socially relevant issues. Sometimes, they do not cover the regional issues extensively and mention them only in tickers. They also do not address the issues of women, minority groups and even developmental news. Under the pressure from higher authorities, occasionally, stories are also stopped at the press at the very last moment. All this prevents the people from experiencing their right to know. In order to bridge this gap between the media and the readers, a new concept of participatory journalism is emerging very fast across the globe. Citizen journalism, also known as public or participatory journalism, is an evolving form of journalism through user-generated content, where any common man in his capacity as a citizen of a nation takes up the initiative to report things or express his views about happenings around him. To report the incidents one is in need of a digital camera, video camera and other reporting accessories. Mobile due to its nature of convergence of different media into one, paves way for talking, recording audio and video, broadcasting and connecting to net. This simple tool consists of all the potential in reporting news -worthy happenings. Both in developed as well as developing countries there is always much space for sensational news and people are not provided with what they feel important as news. What the newspapers cover become news and it is not possible to cover the unexpected hard news as there are only limited reporters assigned with their regular assignments. But at the same time any common man with a mobile phone is capable of covering the sudden news which he witnesses. The power of Mojo was obvious during Tsunami in India, Katrina hurricane in China, the earth quake of Japan and other incidents of any hard news of the world. The ubiquitous nature of the mobile is most effective in reporting things all around the clock. The ubiquitous mobile phone not only makes possible the information dissemination immediate but also enhances the immediate production of news, to millions of people. Mobile phone's recent advances to facilitate citizen journalism are embedded in most hand sets and applications allow for immediate uploading of photos to web sites, social networking platforms and photo-sharing sites. This promising nature of the technology had given rise to Mojo. In a way this emerging form of Mojo is capable of breaking free from media bias as well as taking local news onto a global platform. This paper proposes the coinage of the term SEENSAY which can be acknowledged as "what the citizen "sees" and discerns as worthy of dissemination is "said" to the world by being a link in the form of a "Mojo". Moreover most of the time people's interest is not a cynosure of media houses. It is the advertiser, Editor and the owner of the media who decide on everyday publication and the media sets its own agenda for the day. There are at times the media do not give much atten-

tion to some of the important issues of the minority groups. Racial discrimination as well as women's suppression are the common phenomena across the world but are occasionally covered. Though somebody wanted to convey his or her message writing to the editor, even then it would have to undergo the process of gatekeeping. And only if the organisation permits, it gets its chance for publication. This results in inequality in the information dissemination. But when it comes to the citizen journalism, using a cost effective technology one can become a great journalist, conveying the news to the whole world leading to **Information Democratization**. Mojo gives the democracy in sharing the information as well as knowing the information without any gatekeeping and other impedances. Here he himself is becoming a reporter, gatekeeper, editor and the publisher. Sometimes the locally neglected news will have a huge impact globally. Thus this article also results in the coinage of another term "**Information Democratization**".

### 5 SOCIAL "FOOT SOLDIER"

A 16-year-old pupil at John Ogilvie High School in Hamilton, near Glasgow, used her mobile phone to take a video of her fellow pupils misbehaving in class. The Hamilton Advertiser, a local paper, not only ran the story in print but also uploaded the video on to its website. Two other papers, The Scottish Sun and the Scottish Daily Mirror, also used images from the video to illustrate stories concerning lax school discipline [5]. Here the mobile is actively playing a role in bringing out the truth from any location and tries to conform to the existing social norms. The power of cell phone was much evident in the case of the Iranian crisis. In reporting that incident, Twitter was in the spotlight as an organizational tool showcasing how the online world could be used to communicate and unite people, despite government censorship. Armed with cell phones, Iranians were able to text, tweet, and send pictures and videos to the world community, focusing the spotlight on this world-altering event. Their efforts were not in vain; the international community rose in uproar to defend the democratic principles of Iran, forcing political and religious leaders to publicly discuss the issues. The universal access and power afforded by digital tool is breeding a new kind of world citizen and establishing this type of "citizen journalism" as a crucial supplement to traditional media. The increasing prevalence of mobile phones makes possible that, from protests to war, anyone with a cell phone can become a responsible journalist and can inform to the whole world. Here the reporter doesn't have to carry costly still and video cameras instead the small portable cell phone is most useful. The fundamental right is the right to information but the common man does not receive all the essential information what he is in need of. In that case this Mojo is an opportunity to document and express to his community and to the other parts of the world, depending upon its importance. He has his own media the mobile to disseminate the information even if the main stream media neglects it. Mojo is seen as our opportunity for all the responsible citizens to cover the important incidents and to reveal them to the whole world. This possibility paves way for all the citizens to become a social "**Foot Soldier**" by filling the void left behind by the main-stream media which in turn results in **Information Democratization**.

### 6 REFLECTIONS

Minutes after the London's bombing in 2005, the photos and videos were used by the media. The BBC received 50 images within an hour [6]. Any common man is a potential reporter now because this low cost technology is an advantage. He has all his chances to document happenings around him. Rachel Sterne, founder of citizen journalism site GroundReport, in mobileactive.org says about the integration of citizen journalism and mobile devices, "Mobile devices are the perfect tool for on-the-ground reporting: they enable event documentation that is instant, rich and location-based. Tools like TwitPic, a photo publishing Twitter application, the iPhone's new YouTube video publishing feature, and the Nokia N97's video streaming ability, empower people to report wherever they are with multimedia capabilities" [7]. Mojo is a perfect tool for instant news gathering when it is related with any hard news. The ubiquitous nature, mobility as well as the technological convergence afforded by the media is paramount. This makes possible the immediate dissemination of information to the whole world. Unlike the other media for example the Radio and Television it is not delayed in its delivery. Though the internet is rapid it depends on the other technology like video or the audio to be uploaded to inform to the other. But mobile is also a good production tool as such and it is the best Independent media. For example one can send sms alerts, capture video, audio and can upload to web within seconds. The emerging trend of Mojo had resulted in a hyper local journalism on the global platform. This facilitates anywhere, anytime, anybody to document and report news. Mojo seeds microsites, gathering super granular real life. For example "voiceofafrica" was a website where it consists of all real-time neighborhood events. For example, a news report shows the video how an individual prevents the public from using the toilet built out of government funds and stopping others from using it [8]. Reflecting the nascent professionalization of mobile journalism, consideration of the potential uses of mobile media remains at an early stage among journalism educators. Missouri School of Journalism recommends the use of MacBook Pro in its curriculum for practising journalism from 2004 onwards [9]. The introduction in 2004 was a great success [9]. Geek Squad co-founder Robert Stephens has used his iPhone 4 and iPad 2 to record and edit a live report from the scene of a gas explosion. The video was shot on his iPhone 4 before he used Apple's USB Camera Connection Kit to load the raw video on his iPad 2. He then used Apple's new iMovie app for iPad 2 to edit the clip with transitions and add a map, subtitles and a voiceover to complete his citizen news report [10]. The newsroom scenario is changing. Any newspaper organization consists of various departments. But Mojo seems to challenge the structure of the organization, as the single person when acts as a reporter, editor and also the publisher at times. The concept of career for a period of years has gone and short term contracts and free lance portfolios are the preference of the day. Even journalism houses found calling their viewers asking to be freelance journalists. So, there are likely chances that the career of the journalists being affected. An increasing number of newspapers employ mobile journalists to quickly file stories for the Web. *The News-Press* in Fort Myers has been at the forefront of mobile journalism. The newspapers, with a circulation of about 70,000 copies, plans to outfit all 44 news staffers with mobile packs that include laptops, digital cameras and audio recorders by the end of spring 2008 [11]. The management at the Gannet chain had responded with enthusiasm for Mojo,

Ahrens (2006), in Martyn [12] wrote, budgeting for 50 mojos on staff from 10 in 2006 – although it had been reported that Gannet management ordered her to cut three staffers in order to meet the chain's budget for the *News-Press* and it would be offering buyouts to older staff; the paper was not unionized.

## 7 ITS CHALLENGES

The possibility of the citizen becoming a journalist is high and analysts and professional journalists remain skeptical about news redefined as hyper-local being able to maintain Habermas' public sphere journalism. For example "Voicesofafrica" contained a piece of video reporting, where it shows the video of a man who assaults his wife at their house. When news is more towards local is it not that it is towards the invasion of privacy? The more the Mojo becomes a common practice; definitely the lesser will become the public space. Tomorrow this inclusion of privacy may happen to any common man when the Mojo comes across and may result in everybody in the inclusion for the local news. Habermas (2007) in Martyn[12], describes the inherent dichotomy of profit-making media organizations performing a public service as satisfying the demand for information and education while securing adequate profits" and noted that journalistic expertise doesn't come cheap". The traditional news scenario is facing the changes. The traditional media always had different hierarchy and in its each stage gate-keeping is possible and it has its own editorial to say its opinion. As the Mojo is rapid there is a possibility that gate-keeping is pared out. Tomorrow it may become rare to find a place and a desk for the reporters and editors to have rooms in organization. Here mojo paves opportunity for everybody to become a gate-keeper and possibilities are that it results in selectivity. Ahrens (2006) in Martyn described "Mojos are posting stories directly to the web without editing – a breach of newspaper editing protocol". So here the Mojos do not think about the aftermath effect of their reporting. The sense of ubiquity underlies several major issues. The presence of anytime anywhere technology is a major threat to the individual privacy and it gives a feeling of continuous monitoring. For eg, though ubiquity might be assumed, new technologies and the resources to use them are not distributed evenly or fairly, as evidenced by the flurry of research and news coverage about the "digital divide" in the late 1990's. Mojo with its pervasive reach prompts questions about the control of the system with the power and cultural influence it affords those who are in control; Mojo is not an exception. There is need to study the relationship among media messages, public opinion and political participation. It may present new arenas for discourse that challenge the definition and understanding of the public sphere and what constitutes political action. There is an utmost need that new philosophies must be arrived to fit in what we call citizen journalism. The quality of journalism will be a question when it falls into the hands of untrained professionals. There is plenty of criticism around treating citizen journalism as news, and it has some legitimate grounds. The most prominent ones are the lack of verified sourcing, the often limited analytical skills found in many articles, and devaluation of the professional reporting. Another consequence of the Mojo is the sense of interactivity that they convey to users. Switching is the pivotal part of new media systems; they afford users more selectivity in their choices of information sources and interactions with other people. The mass media audiences attend to perceive and retain information selectively. Yet new media also gives users the means to

generate, seek and share content selectively, and to interact with other individuals and groups, on a scale that was impractical with traditional mass media. This selectivity account for much of the sense of interactivity or social presence associated with new media, as well as their "demassified", or individualized, targeted quality. In turn, the sheer proliferation and diversity of content and sources now available have raised concerns about the quality of the content (for example, its authenticity or reliability), as well as questions about nature of online experience and interaction (for example, about anonymity or identity of participants in online interaction). The convergence of technology has led to the technological determinism and it has its own profound effect on the society. Marshall McLuhan (1964), observed that older media often become the content of newer media [13]. Today, this has become an ongoing process of remediation in which older media are appropriated, refashioned or absorbed by the new, therefore simultaneously shaping the new and reshaping the familiar. Each of these technologies not only expands the range of information and communication possibilities, affording new or different forms of social relationships and experiences, but it also "mediates" (rather than replacing or displacing) older forms such as diary writing, voice telephony, taking photos, video capturing, SMS, MMS, audio recording or video games. There are reservations about the moral and ethical labor practice as it is spontaneous and unplanned. If it is with the erroneous hands it will result in nonprofessional production culture. Though the high-speed technologies make it possible to deliver information in record time, they reduce the time available for the working journalist to think, reflect, evaluate, shape, craft and contextualize the news rather than merely transmitting what happens to be in front of his or her video camera. Also there are likely chances for misgivings and biased news.

## 8 CONCLUSION

As a communication device, mobile phones have been associated with significant social transformation: as a media device, mobile phones are now vying with the other old and new media technologies. Goggin & Clark, (2009)[14], mentioned two things as noteworthy regarding mobile as the media: first across the world, mobile phones are more significant than the Internet in many ways, and they are the way that many people access the Internet; second, mobile phones are often connected to other media, to create new forms of connection and cultural expression like the camera-phone-generated content appearing on YouTube. Since the mid-1980s, community and citizens' media around the world have been radically and luminously extended with new social, cultural, economic, and technological developments associated with video camcorders, personal computers, computer networking, internet and free, liberal, and open-source movements. The mobile phone is playing a great role as citizen media, contributing much to the citizen journalism resulting in Information Democratization. Regarding the use of technology, as the two sides of the coin there is always good and bad associated with it. But when we look into the benefits Mojo helps to reveal the unrevealed especially by the underprivileged. Also to explore the unexplored. Mojo is a double-edged sword. When it is in the hands of ethically morally responsible citizen it serves the democracy and when it is with the nonprofessional, profit oriented group it ends in trivialism and commercialization. Moreover we must arrive at describing philosophies for the citizen journalism as it is time to think about their role in journalism. Mojo as a cost

effective technology is more powerful in informing to the whole world.

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