



## Educate. Empower. Revolt

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# EDUCATE. EMPOWER. REVOLT

## Framing citizen journalism as a creator of social movements

**Paromita Pain**

*This analysis examines how citizen journalism in two very resource-poor areas in India is mobilizing communities and sparking movements demanding change. The Video Volunteers and CGNET Swara are two citizen journalism organizations that work in Central India, in areas whose human and development indexes are among the lowest in the country. Citizen journalism has been studied both as a consequence and as an instigator of social revolution. The Arab Spring movement and the case of Mohamed Bouazizi in the 2010 Tunisian uprisings are prominent recent examples. But citizen journalism in these and similar cases usually focus on the framing of martyr narratives where individuals and their protests or reactions against human rights atrocities make them “a symbol of the struggle for justice, dignity and freedom.” Through a content analysis of 400 news stories posted in the year 2015–2016 and qualitative interviews with 30 participants and a focus group of 15 participants, this study analyses how the Video Volunteers and CGNET Swara train citizens to produce news, the kinds of frame that are used to mobilize audiences, and encourage them to articulate outrage against the many human rights atrocities that occur in these areas. Findings show that citizen journalism succeeds because of the culturally resonant frames used and effective frame alignment that resonate with their main audiences and producers. The news produced and disseminated activates connective structures to facilitate collective action among audiences and communities who earlier had little means or recourse to address such issues. This collective action encourages participants to gather offline to fight for their demands and positively transform their communities.*

**KEYWORDS** CGNET Swara; citizen journalism; India; movements; Video Volunteers

### Introduction

April 16, 2016, was a day of celebration for the people in the remote village of Naudiha, in Uttar Pradesh, India. They finally had electricity after six months of living without basic electricity. The villagers had made many futile petitions to the government officials of the area requesting a repair. After six weeks of sweltering in the heat, they posted a story of their suffering on the CGNET Swara<sup>1</sup> news site. The phone number of the officials in charge was announced in the story and listeners were exhorted to call till they took action. Within a month, the transformer was repaired and finally “children didn’t have to do homework in candlelight” (reporter, April 17, 2016).

In a similar situation, reporters from the Video Volunteers posted a story about villagers, from the underdeveloped village of Tati, who were forced to drink polluted water from the local pond. The single hand pump that supplied clean drinking water to the entire hamlet had stopped working for the last six months.<sup>2</sup> The women wrote a petition for a

new hand pump but little was done. So armed with their petition and a video shot by a citizen reporter from Video Volunteers they went to the local officials in charge of sanitation and submitted their request for a hand pump (reporter, April 1, 2016). Audiences were asked to make calls to the officials whose phone numbers were shown in the story. It took two months of calling and protesting outside the sanitation department but the hamlet got a pump.

News by citizen journalism organizations like the Video Volunteers and CGNET Swara have not yet toppled governments and as protests these are not the usual examples that make global headlines. They certainly are no Arab Spring. Yet, in their seemingly limited contexts and achievements, citizen-produced news in this remote part of India is helping mobilize disenfranchised and hitherto powerless groups to not just articulate needs but also demand rights; thus enabling movements that seek to transform communities. Their protests to articulate issues of basic human rights, like access to clean water, is reminiscent of Gamson et al.'s description of social movements as types of group action consisting of large, sometimes informal organizations, that aim to replace dominant belief systems that serves to validate the status quo with an alternative belief order that supports political mobilization and collective action (Gamson et al. 1992, 25). As one CGNET reporter said:

It's not just about whether our voices matter. It is also about ensuring that we get the change that we want. (Personal interview, 2016)

As the new movement theory says, the actions and associations of social movements are not always solely political or designed to replace economic structures (Lim 2013) and scholars agree that the representation of social movements as largely homogenous subjects is no longer feasible (Ghosh 2007). The collective action, that reports from CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers inspire by creating news around the basic needs of people whose voices are not deemed important by the mainstream media in the country, is making important and tangible differences in some of India's most remote and poor villages. At the last count (December 2016), the Impact<sup>3</sup> sections on the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers had over 400 cases that had seen resolution.

The Video Volunteers and CGNET Swara thus encourage an examination of how citizen journalism in the Indian sub-continent is mobilizing communities to articulate and work for social change through the news they produce. Framing can be an effective mobilizer of public opinion if the issues which the frames within the narratives highlight are salient to the audience at large (Lim 2013). Based primarily on the framing theory delineated by Benford and Snow (2000) in their work on framing and social movements, and the role of cultural frames by Reese (2010), this paper specifically focuses on frames used in the news stories posted, the connective structures used to facilitate collective action among audiences, and the different ways in which listeners and producers are encouraged to gather offline to fight for their rights in the developing country of India. This paper does not examine how such alternative media mechanisms affect or influence mainstream media in India nor does it seek to understand how they may alter mainstream coverage of such resource-poor communities. The purpose of this analysis is to fill gaps in our understanding of how citizen journalism can be the spark for "joint action in pursuit of common ends" (Tilly 1976, 370) and thus effect social change in the developing world.

I conducted a content analysis of stories ( $N = 400$ ) that have had impact (filed under the "Impact" section<sup>4</sup> on the websites of the two organizations) from the year 2015–2016 to isolate the frames used. To analyze for master frames and frame alignment, I conducted a

qualitative textual analysis of the impact stories ( $N=400$ ) besides qualitative interviews with the journalists whose posts have had impact. In spite of their comprehensiveness, frames do not fully explain how they create resonance or influence issue perception (Earl and Garrett 2016). Recent research has also shown that individual participation is motivated by ideals beyond the potential outcome of protests (Chan 2016). To parse out the nuances of what makes audiences and reporters create and participate in protests and maintain validity, information found in the stories and those provided by the reporters are supplemented by interviews (a total of 30) and one focus group with 15 participants comprising officers and reporters directly involved with the process of change.

### **Citizens as Journalists**

Rodriguez (2001, 20) conceptualized citizen's journalism as a philosophy that encompasses a type of "journalism and a set of practices" that are a part of citizens' everyday lives and thus the media produced "is driven by the motives of these people." Citizen media usually arises from individuals and groups expressing a particular point of view (Reese 2007) and their producers might not work according to the usual norms and professional procedures of established mainstream journalism. Also, by nature, such organizations are smaller, commercially less viable, and usually follow a non-profit model. Globally, as Rodriguez (2001) has shown, reporters arising from the communities have always had a significant role to play in informing and empowering people as well as ensuring their space in traditional media. For example, during the revolution in Nicaragua, men and women from isolated rural communities ensured that stories from such areas were not neglected in mainstream media. Community-based television stations in Spain use Catalan, the local language, and preserves the ethnic identities of minorities. As Rodriguez (2001) has documented, the very act of engaging with video cameras and news production changed the way a group of Colombian women viewed their social positions.

Graeme Turner (2010, 10) aligns the rise of the citizen journalist with a crisis in the credibility of professional news itself, as well as with the "ordinary" person's effort at bridging the alienating gap between traditional journalism and its public. Therefore, examining the effects of such alternative media, like citizen journalism, through theories and concepts that have stemmed from analyses of mainstream media often prove too restricted in their definitions to parse out the nuances of the effects of such media (Rodriguez 2001).

This is especially true in the case of CGNET Swara and the Video Volunteers. For example, recent research on CGNET Swara (Chadha and Steiner 2015) shows that mainstream media journalists reject the notion that this can be a mechanism connecting voices of disenfranchised communities with mainstream media. My ethnographic work with the CGNET Swara and the Video Volunteers, over the course of three months, supplemented by extensive interviews and observations, show that this rejection does not, in any way, diminish the importance of the news the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers produce, especially for the poor and voiceless who need these outlets to ensure that basic human rights are protected.

### **Setting the Context**

The Video Volunteers and CGNET Swara are both philanthropically funded. They are active in eastern and central India where protracted low-intensity civil insurgency has made

life extremely difficult for the impoverished and marginalized tribal groups (Chandra 2014). Human development levels here are among the lowest in the world. The Indian mainstream media business, expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.3 percent to touch Rs 2.26 trillion (US\$33.9 billion) by 2020 (India Brand Equity Foundation 2017), routinely ignores such populations (Mudliar, Donner, and Thies 2012). But this was not always the case. In India, the press was a product of the country's freedom struggle against British imperialism and had a vibrant tradition of being anti-establishment and advocating social issues. But the economic liberalization of the 1990s (Chadha and Steiner 2015) led to rapid expansions of media industries and increasing media ownership by political interests and business houses. This increased demands for ratings-driven coverage and sensationalism, leading to a "Murdochization" of the Indian press (Thussu 2007) and gradually pushing away from public service news. Attention to issues pertaining to rural and primarily agrarian areas where the CGNET and Video Volunteers work is almost negligible (Mudgal 2011).

The Indian print press, which has been described as one of the most influential in the developing world (Merrill and Fisher 1980; Chen and Chaudhary 1991), also, often underserves rural communities (Mudliar, Donner, and Thies 2012). For example, the story about the lack of hand pumps and electricity was not news for the *Times of India*, India's largest and most influential print daily. No television channel picked it up either.

Print media in the country may have been predicted to grow at 7.8 percent CAGR, driven by regional markets (KPMG FICCI Media and Entertainment Industry Report 2016), but for outlets like the *Times of India* and other English and local news media with high circulations, only 2 percent of their space is devoted to rural issues, focusing mostly on crime, disasters, and malnutrition (Mudgal 2011). The sources quoted and voices highlighted tend to be mostly mainstream and official. Most stories of rural deprivation seem to come from reports and data generated by academic, non-governmental, and development agencies. Rarely are those with real stakes in these issues given an effective platform to share grievances (Mudliar, Donner, and Thies 2012).

Chhattisgarh, where the Video Volunteers and CGNET work, is difficult terrain for journalists not specifically from the area. Most mainstream journalists are not well versed in the local language and have little knowledge of the complex tribal customs and issues faced by communities here. It is often this that leads to a "symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner 1976) of Chhattisgarh's poor from mainstream media. Pierre Bourdieu (Wieviorka 2005) described symbolic annihilation as a form of subtle violence, which disregards the legitimacy of an identity. It is this annihilation that news from CGNET and Video Volunteers tries to counter but it does not stop there. News here is produced for the people by the people not just for information alone but to engage them in finding solutions as well. Knowing is important but acting on the knowledge is crucial as mobilized communities for resolution of issues is the ultimate idea. Their work and its impact on social mobilization is reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's description of social movements as arising from a "widespread refusal" to accept prevailing conditions (Wieviorka 2005, 20).

### *Citizen Journalism in India*

Citizen participation in Indian media is most visible on television channels and radio entertainment programs where viewers contribute to the program or news content in the

form of SMS polls, video footage, complaints, phone-ins, and studio discussions involving citizen journalists (Sonwalkar 2009).

Citizen journalism, *per se*, in India has had an impact mainly in situations of crisis (tsunamis, earthquakes, rains, terrorist attacks). Today, it is increasingly influencing politics by exposing corruption and highlighting social issues such as the sexual harassment of women and the life situations of minorities who suffer gender, religion, caste, or ethnicity related violence (Allan, Sonwalkar, and Carter 2007). The different citizen journalism sites in India include Merinews, which calls itself the largest citizen journalism portal in India (Thomas 2011). In contrast to the Merinews site, the Citizens News Services, available in English and Hindi, is an alternative news service that features prominent social activists blogging on a variety of issues in India. Allan, Sonwalkar, and Carter (2007) have described the active role played by CJ in Northeast India, an area consisting of seven independent “tribal” states. Manipuronline.com, E-Pao.net, Kanglaonline.com, and the Sangai Express have played important functions in supporting the causes of the population there and proved the capacity of citizen journalists “to bear witness to human suffering” (Sonwalkar 2009). Besides these, there are sites like WhiteDrums.com and MyNews.in, and multilingual websites like Global Voices Online, funded by philanthropic groups and run by a community of bloggers that aim to “redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens’ media”. CGNET and Video Volunteers are different in their approach to citizen-produced news because they report in the local languages of the areas they work in and actively encourage both reporters and audiences to seek redress and resolve issues. Unlike mainstream media, news from the CGNET and Video Volunteers nearly always has the contact details of officials who can be called, besides information on meetings, scheduled protests, and marches to encourage wide participation. Also, most stories posted end with a request to listeners asking them to make the calls, sign petitions, and register a protest.

#### *CGNET Swara: “Voice for the Voiceless”*

Shubrashu Choudhury, a former BBC correspondent, set up the CGNET Swara in February 2010 for the people of Chhattisgarh with an impetus to reach anyone with access to a low-end mobile phone. Professional journalists who volunteer for the site fact-check stories and post them to the website. The news is available in Hindi and Gondi and can be accessed by phone and on their website. Internet penetration in Chhattisgarh stands at 0.5 percent. Users of CGNET Swara place a phone call to the system (through the number 91-80500 68000), which presents them with the option of recording their news stories and listening to other messages (Mudliar, Donner, and Thies 2012). CGNET Swara currently logs more than 500 calls per day.

*Video volunteers.* “The primary reason behind Video Volunteers was the simple belief that people taught to use a camera could be empowered to bring about positive change in their situations and communities,” says founder Jessica Mayberry (personal interview, June 2013). “Today it’s our journalists who counter the usual government line about why people are dissatisfied. They bring out the voices of those displaced and whose basic human rights are threatened.” Set up in 2006, most of the correspondents of Video Volunteers come from tribal communities and have grown up with the realities of displacement.

## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

### *Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Tools*

Framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences, and essentially considers the ways people rely on expectations to make sense of their everyday social experiences (Reese et al. 2001). A movement's success depends on frames being adopted by citizens' groups (Dalton 1996, 81) and resonating across age, gender, and socioeconomic strata. Framing is, therefore, a popular theory used extensively to study social movements and collective action (Benford and Snow 2000; Reese et al. 2001). Frames organize and structure, and thus are bigger than topics (Reese 2010).

Framing studies typically consider frames at an issue-specific (i.e. topical or episodic) or generic level, including thematic frames such as values, adversarial, consequences, or human-interest frames (Iyengar and Simon 1993; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1995; Matthes 2009; Harlow 2012). It is about "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman 2004, 5). For example, stories done by CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers in their stories talk about events and violations clearly articulating the wrong, offering solutions, and suggesting ways in which collective action might help the situation.<sup>5</sup> This paper uses the definition proposed by Reese et al. (2001, 11) that frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.

*Collective action frames and the framing processes.* Recent scholarship on collective action frames and framing processes in relation to media studies, in general, and social movements, in particular, emphasizes the importance of the role of framing with resource mobilization and other opportunities, as an important and central axis to understand the character and nature of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Reese et al. 2001). Social movements work to change dominant belief systems that uphold the status quo with an alternative system that supports political mobilization and collective action (Gamson et al. 1992, 20; Lim 2013). They are also products of the social actors who are actively engaged in working with the state, media, and the public to create (Snow and Benford 2005) what Hall describes as "the politics of signification" (Hall 1982). The signification occurs, say Benford and Snow (2000, 614), when frames "help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action." This derives from the work of Goffman (1974, 21), who described frames to be "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large. It is this development of a collective identity dependent on a collective understanding of the issues that brings people together to work for common goals (Melucci 1996; Adler 2012). For example, CGNET Swara tackles issues of poverty by constantly talking about fair wages that people from the community are not often paid.

### *Social Movements and Martyr Narratives*

German sociologist Claus Offe (1985) says that social movements develop a fundamental meta-political critique of the social order and representative democracy and start

by challenging institutional assumptions. This is often done through the concept of martyr narratives. Martyr narratives make individual protests or reactions against human rights atrocities “a symbol of the struggle for justice, dignity and freedom” (Lim 2013, 925). For example, “The most prominent names and faces of the historic ‘Arab Spring’ in Tunisia and Egypt were not those of politicians or military commanders. Instead, they belonged to two young men who never lived to see it” (Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey 2013, 330). The Mohamed Bouazizi video (Lim 2013) in Tunisia helped activists successfully bridge geographical and class divides as well merge or link offline and online activists.

### *Initiating Participation*

Participation in social movements is a multifaceted phenomenon (Klandermans 1983) and the work of social movement organizations is to produce, negotiate, and maintain interpretive collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000; Adler 2012). Collective action frames perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the “world out there,” but in a manner that is “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Benford and Snow 2000, 625). Collective action frames are primarily action-oriented sets of beliefs that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations and they differ from Goffman’s “schemata of interpretation” by being the “outcome of negotiated shared meanings” (Benford and Snow 2000, 630). They are created, as shared meanings are negotiated between social actors and their audiences about issues, understandings of problems that need solutions, find agents to blame and encourage group action (Snow and Benford 2005). Snow and Benford (2005) identify three core functions of collective action frames. They include “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing” (to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem), and “motivational framing” (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action). Collective action frames thus help social movements actors proactively create “consensus mobilization” (dissemination of the views of the movement organization) and “action mobilization” (refers to the transformation of those who adopted the view of the movement into participants) (Klandermans 1983). As Benford and Snow (2000, 632) explain, the collective action frame “fosters or facilitates agreement whereas the action mobilization fosters action, moving people from the balcony to the barricades.”

*The master frame.* Enhancing the effect of the collective frames function is the master frame. Master frames are linked to cycles of protest, and work at the most general level of analysis, functioning to “turn the heads” of movement participants and (especially) leaders to see issues a certain way (Oliver and Johnston 2000). Whereas most collective action frames are context specific (e.g., drunk driver frame, cold war frame, exploited worker frame, environmental justice frame, etc.), a master frame’s articulations and attributions are “sufficiently elastic, flexible, and inclusive enough so that any number of other social movements can successfully adopt and deploy it in their campaigns”. Examples of master frames include the “rights frame” defined by the southern civil rights movement that became a part of other racial/ethnic movements and the women’s movement, and which then diffused to gay rights, animal rights, abortion rights, fetal rights, and student rights (Oliver and Johnston 2000).



### *Frame Amplification*

Besides frame resonance, its ability to catch and sustain public attention depends on the process of frame amplification (Snow et al. 1986). Snow et al. (1986) identify four frame alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation, and emphasize that frame alignment is necessary for participation and that this alignment is typically an interactional and ongoing accomplishment. As Reese (2010) explained, frames can exist in text, culture, and the cognitions of the perceiver. Cultural frames tend to be general in character and broader than news themes, topics, and issues (Reese 2010). Reese (2010) looks at frames as both a product and expression of power where all the actors (journalists, sources) involved in the communication process create frames that interact and create information.

### *Activating Connective Structures*

While framing is important, protests would have a limited impact if they did not diffuse to expand bases for “a denser, diverse, and more centralized network” (Tilly and Tarrow 2006, 116). From the Arab Spring and Los Indignados in Spain, to Occupy Wall Street and beyond, large-scale protests use media in ways that go beyond sending and receiving messages (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 752–753) term this connective logic, as, “taking public action or contributing to a common good which becomes an act of personal expression or recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships.”

In this light, this paper seeks to examine the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the major frames used by the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers in their coverage of issues?

**RQ2:** How does the coverage of issues by the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers mobilize audiences for collective action?

## **Methodology**

To understand the kinds of frames that reporters from the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers use to mobilize audiences and communities to demand their rights, three research methods were used: in-depth interviews, content analysis, and qualitative textual analysis.

The interviews, conducted in Hindi and English, were conducted in 2015 and 2016. Interviews (20) were completed as part of a month-long field visit to the areas where the journalists work and 10 were conducted over the telephone from The University of Texas at Austin; a total of 30 interviews and one focus group with 15 participants were conducted. Ten reporters from CGNET Swara and 10 reporters from the Video Volunteers were interviewed; 10 other participants included officers (4) who had helped the resolution of issues and listeners (3) who were regular viewers and users but who did not report on stories (3), as well as three trainers who work in the field helping people use phones and video cameras. Two specific cases (that the participants deemed the most important) from stories filed by the CGNET and Video Volunteers were analyzed to understand how the stories helped mobilize people. A 15-member focus group was held as part of the field visit to Chhattisgarh in 2016 and this group included listeners, reporters, viewers,

and users who did not report on stories in 2015 or 2016, to understand frame alignment and amplification.

Qualitative interviews with the participants shed more light on the use, selection, and impact of frames and how the frames activate connective structures so that a movement can expand its base to have “a denser, diverse, and more centralized network” (Tilly and Tarrow 2006, 116) as well as understand how “action mobilization” (the transformation of those who adopted the view of the movement into participants) happens. McCracken’s (1988, 85) long interview technique was used to “step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.” The interviews helped code for the action mobilization frame that refers to the transformation of those who adopted the view of the movement as explicated by Klandermans (1983). Participants were asked to describe the impact of the two organizations, talk about what encourages them to participate, and how they mobilize to participate in the process of bringing about positive change to their communities.

A content analysis of the stories that have impact or have seen resolution to issues was performed to identify the collective action frames used. There were 650 impact stories in the impact section of CGNET Swara; Video Volunteers had 355 stories. A RAND Sample was done to select and analyze 200 stories from each organization for a standardized sample. A desired sample size of  $N = 400$  (Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf 2016) was then content analyzed to isolate the frames. The codes for content analyzing the articles were operationalized based on Snow and Benford’s (2005) description of such frames. Collective action frames, as delineated by Snow and Benford (2005), include the “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing” (to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem), and “motivational framing” (serves as a call to arms or rationale for action). My analysis also coded for “consensus mobilization” (dissemination of the views of the movement organization) and “action mobilization” (referring to the transformation of those who adopted the view of the movement into participants) frames. I used qualitative textual analysis of the stories to analyze for the master frame. Inter-coder reliability for individual variables showed a Kappa range from 0.61 to 1, with an overall mean of 0.85, exceeding the acceptable minimum standard (Poindexter and McCombs 2000).

## Results and Findings

**RQ1:** What Are the Major Frames Used by the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers in Their Coverage of Issues?

In answer to RQ1 (Table 1), which asked which major frames were employed in the coverage of issues, my analysis showed that the prognostic and consensus mobilization frames

**TABLE 1**  
Major frames used in the coverage of issues (%)

	CGNET Swara	Video Volunteers
Diagnostic	80	85.5
Prognostic	90	95.9
Motivational	92.3	80.3
Consensus mobilization	92.7	86.0

were the most popular frames used by both the organizations. CGNET used the prognostic frame in about 91 percent of the stories while the Video Volunteers used it in 95.9 percent of the stories. The motivational frames followed this and the CGNET used it in 95 percent of the stories coded and the Video Volunteers used it in 80 percent of the stories. Comparatively, the CGNET Swara used the diagnostic frame the least. The motivational frame was used the least by Video Volunteers. CGNET used the motivational frame the most. Most stories had more than one frame. For example, while a story highlighted an issue, it also discussed possible solutions, thus using a mix of diagnostic and prognostic frames.

Reporters from the CGNET and Video Volunteers emphasize that an ability to express their views and show authorities that they have the means to do so is often more encouraging even than producing stories that have impact. But as one trainer who works with the communities to enable them to use CGNET said, it was hugely encouraging for audiences to listen to the impact the stories: "We used these stories to explain that using individual stories to answer broader questions of government neglect and corruption will have better effect," he said (personal interview, 2015). "People now know to place their stories in broader contexts rather than just post individual cases."

This also helps the production of news stories involving a variety of voices and prevents CGNET or the Video Volunteers from becoming "complain lines where people only talk about things that have affected them" (trainer personal interview, 2015). In a training session, the trainers from CGNET constantly emphasize, "*Haq se mangiye!*" (These are your rights. Ask for them boldly!). The impact stories are listened to and people are shown the benefits of using master frames and putting stories into context and moving away from individual narratives. One reporter, from the Video Volunteers, said:

What will shock you is how simple solving our problems are. The hand pump doesn't work. The government has everything necessary for setting this right. It's just that they won't do it. (Personal interview, 2016)

Martyr narratives are not encouraged unless the issue is a striking one. In one story the hands of day laborers were cut off when they demanded fair wages. The CGNET reporters focused on the victims but also did follow-up stories on the non-payment of wages and the many human rights violations associated with the issue.

Thus, reporters from both organizations did not give diagnostic and motivational frames much space in their stories. As the interviews emphasized, the reporters and their audiences were aware of the problems; what they needed was an impetus to work together to find solutions.

As the focus group revealed, it is this understanding of issues and the different rights violations around them that often propel them to participate in issues that may not be affecting them directly. As one participant said:

When those in power are determined not to help, getting together to channelize our energies to ensure that change happens is important. It's not enough to be angry alone. (Focus group, 2016)

The prognosis frame is used mostly to exhort people to call and pressurize local officials to get issues resolved. While describing the impact of CGNET, a participant who was a reporter said that before CGNET participants said they would:

try to solve our issues through sending news reports through local journalists talking to local officials, strikes, marches, and protests to officials but it took very long and involved too much work. On CGNET all we need to do is post the news and we can hope for something positive. (Personal interview, 2016)

The Video Volunteers team has many women who report on issues and as one participant said, she found posting the phone numbers of officials and exhorting audiences to call useful:

I am first taught about the issue and then told about why I need to take action. (Personal interview, 2016)

The action component proposed is a simple one. Participants said, most owned a phone and outgoing calls were cheap. It made “taking action simple” and gave them a sense of “doing something, however small” to ensure change.

Some stories on the site show that people interviewed often talk about the impact of Video Volunteers on their lives. For example, one story has an interviewee state that:

Your organization Video Volunteers is doing a lot of good work for public interest. It is a great medium to bridge the gap between people and governance.<sup>6</sup> (Personal interview, 2016)

The CGNET used the consensus mobilization frame about 92.7 percent of the time. Stories on the CGNET start with an introduction about who the reporter is and where the story is being reported. They have extensive training sessions where people are told that CGNET is a channel for voices that do not find a place elsewhere. Reporters are encouraged to talk about the role of CGNET while posting stories to encourage others to participate. A majority of the focus group participants reiterated:

Creating news for CGNET is sometimes a way for us to understand our problem better. For example, now it’s no longer about not getting water. It’s about first articulating and then demanding our right to clean water. (Focus group, 2016)

About 85.0 percent of the stories posted by the Video Volunteers use the consensus mobilization frame. Participants from the Video Volunteers said they spoke about the work that the organization does for people, especially when they gather around to watch the videos. Video Volunteers works in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who select people for the training. CGNET trainers walk into hamlets and villages, beat on drums, use puppets to encourage people to use the service. Anyone can ask questions and people are given simple tips on how to report and post stories. Participants reported greater “understandings of issues” when listening to CGNET and Video Volunteers. As one participant said:

When I hear about other people living without electricity, I realize that there are more like me. I am not alone. I call the officers and request for lines to be restored. I also hope when I need it, others will come to my aid. (Personal interview, 2016)

The major topics covered by the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers show that human rights were the most covered topic for both the sites: 91.5 percent of the stories on the CGNET Swara were about or related to human rights while Video Volunteers had 90.4 percent of the coded stories on the topic. CGNET Swara devoted 84.5 percent of its stories to the economy while the Video Volunteers had 80.2 percent of the coded stories

**TABLE 2**

Percentage of stories devoted to common topics

	CGNET Swara	Video Volunteers
Human rights	91.5	90.4
Health	11.8	22.9
Economy	84.5	80.2
Environment	3.4	4.0

on the topic. While human rights formed the bulk of the stories, environment and health were the least popular topics. [Table 2](#) shows the percentages of stories for each topic.

### *Textual Analysis*

A qualitative textual analysis shows that a majority of the stories use the master frame of human rights or places stories in the context of human rights violations. Four hundred selected stories (200 from Video Volunteers and 200 from CGNET Swara) were textually analyzed to understand the master frame used.

For the Video Volunteers, stories highlighted issues and usually focused on how people had a right to certain services. For example a story<sup>7</sup> on how a school got a hand pump after 10 years thanks officers who helped as well as the people who took action in support of the cause to provide children with access to clean water. The reporter signs off saying that everyone has a right to clean drinking water. For the CGNET Swara, a constant refrain is how rights were an integral part of every citizen and therefore people should boldly ask them. A story on how a transformer was not being repaired exhorted people to ask for a new one because they had a right to light and basic electricity.<sup>8</sup> Another talks about how a woman was severely beaten by her husband and underlines that domestic violence is a crime. As the focus group interviews revealed, the master frame provides a context with which audiences can identify. One focus group participant said:

My issue may be about water and another's may be about a school. At the end of the day, it's all our rights being casually violated. After all, we are poor and therefore have no way to retaliate, right? (Focus group, 2016)

**RQ2:** How Does the Coverage of Issues by the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers Mobilize Audiences for Collective Action?

The stories on CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers mobilize their audiences by informing about upcoming protests, describing experiences at protests, calling for solidarity with causes, calling for investigations into issues, and demanding justice ([Table 3](#)).

**TABLE 3**

Call for mobilization (%)

	CGNET Swara	Video Volunteers
Inform about an upcoming protest	88.3	81.7
Describe experience at protests	61.5	38.5
Solidarity with cause	92.4	87.6
Call for investigation into issues	86.4	83.6
Demand for justice in general	95.5	94.5

Volunteers and trainers from the CGNET Swara and Video Volunteers agreed that posting the number of officials in charge and asking people from all parts of the country who listen to the news to call produces a sense that “they are all in this together” (personal interview, 2016).

The master frame serves as a point of unity. As one participant said:

Human rights of people have been violated and that can happen to any one of us here because we are all poor and therefore powerless. That’s why listeners are easily convinced to make the call even if an issue does not directly affect them. (Personal interview, 2016)

The frames, as the analysis shows, lie in the culture, ways of life, and the texts of the stories. The reporters come from the very situations they report on. The frames that encourage the collective action lie in the text, the culture of journalism, and resonate with the lives and cognitions of those who view and listen to the story. One participant said:

Our reports on poverty ... are the voices of the people on the ground ... It’s not a story done by an outsider. (Personal interview, 2016)

Reporters from within the community know the ground realities. They have access to sources the audiences identify with. The specific linguistic metaphors (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Reese 2010) used in the stories come from the everyday language that the residents of the area use. For example, a story on the lack of water will show people (familiar faces) from the area, use the local language (“*pani nahi hai*”: there is no water), and set out the issue in a way that audiences identify with. This lends stories a familiar voice and tone. Thus, they activate connective structures that encourage frame amplification.

The actions the stories inspire are also relatively simple for the people to act on. For example, making a phone to bring pressure is a simple way to register protest. If repeated calls do not work, then full-scale protests are organized and people are given information about how and where they can participate. CGNET relies on active users who also are important field personnel that help to organize and lead protests. Since the situations in the areas that CGNET and Video Volunteers operate in are so similar, it is not rare to find that people post and listen to stories produced by both organizations.

## Cases Illustrating Frame Alignment

### *Health Crisis*

In July 2015, the moderators of the CGNET Swara found a story (<http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?id=3726>) posted around midnight that talked about a remote hamlet in Maharashtra where cholera was spreading. It reported that within three days 15 adults and three children had died and requested emergency medical help. The moderators realized it was an emergency and posted the story without fact checking it. CGNET trainers on the field were notified immediately and they verified the story later. They also informed the Chief Health Officer of the district. Meanwhile, audiences from the neighboring villages heard the story and started calling the officials, urging them to act. One participant said he made the calls to help since he realized that cholera could spread to his own village and children could die as well (personal interview, 2016). Finally, medical help reached the village. For the first time in its history, the village had a government ambulance come in. The health officer interviewed (personal interview, 2015) denied that he had

received any information from CGNET. He said his superior had called him with the news. The reporter, who reported the story, believed that CGNET made all the difference (personal interview, 2015). The reporter, neighboring villages, and field workers worked in tandem to ensure that the village got the attention it needed. A follow-up story posted later said that a team of doctors visited with the Chief Medical Officer of the district and stayed with them for a week.

### *Fair Wages*

The Indian government has the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to ensure that steady employment is available to the rural poor year round. It is a program designed to alleviate poverty but is plagued with the non-payment of fair wages. Independent contractors charged with ensuring employment often refuse to pay the laborers the agreed rates of payment. Video Volunteers has over 114 video reports produced since 2010 highlighting the different problems with this program. The Video Volunteers decided on a reform-based approach to resolve issues. In conjunction with Poorest Areas of Civil Society, a NGO, they organized various meetings in 2015 in which participants were taught the nuances of the MGNREGA and where they could take their complaints of non-payment of wages for speedy redress. One correspondent used video footage to mobilize the community and fight for the plight of 100 workers who had not been paid their wages. A group of workers was organized and they marched to the officer in charge and through the video documentation ensured that payment was released to all 100 workers.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This analysis seeks to understand how citizen journalism in India can be the spark for social or “joint action in pursuit of common ends” (Tilly 1976, 366). It specifically focuses on frames used in the news stories posted, the connective structures used to facilitate collective action among audiences, and understanding how listeners and producers are encouraged to take protests offline. Using content and textual analysis of stories posted by the reporters of CGNET and Video Volunteers to understand how the stories are framed to encourage collective action, the study supplements the analysis with qualitative interviews with participants from both organizations. The mobilization efforts of citizen journalism here is very in keeping with new movement theory that says that social mobilization does not always have to lead to replacing economic or political structures (Lim 2013). What is of interest is the way citizen journalism is uniting communities together for common causes.

As the citizen journalists create narratives and mobilize around different issues like unfair payment of wages, lack of access to clean water and health care, issues routinely ignored by mainstream media, Pierre Bourdieu’s description of social movements as characteristically being an expression of “widespread refusal” to accept prevailing conditions (Wievorka 2005) is emphasized. Through the simple act of producing news, a non-political act, poor, disenfranchised, and insurgency-affected populations (Chandra 2014) now have the means of expressing their non-acceptance of a bureaucracy that often refuses to help. Now they are no longer weak citizens dependent on the whims of state actors like administrative officers. They have journalism as a potent tool of transformation.

Citizen journalism here is thus a method to create movements to strike back at the very factors that keep these communities poor and disenfranchised. As the analysis, based primarily on the framing theory delineated by Benford and Snow (2000) in their work on framing and social movements and the role of cultural frames by Reese (2010), show, frames are more than just categories or topics (Reese 2010). They lie in the texts of the narratives (Reese 2010) and are a product of and expressions of power. For the reporters, being able to express the various human rights violations they face is an act of power. Emerging from the shared experiences of the reporters and audiences, they find resonance through the common need for solutions through group action (Snow and Benford 2005). The way stories are framed, without martyr narratives or focus on the individual, encourages a common identification with issues and the taking of action, which contributes to the betterment of the community (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

Thus, reports are not merely filed to raise awareness; they also carry phone numbers of officers and information about meetings and marches to also ensure that audiences have the means of reacting and registering protests. The frames in the stories posted are produced by the culture of the lives of the audiences and reporters, and are meant to enhance connective logic. As one participant underlined, the reporters were one of them and not outsiders. The stories are not about individual issues or rights violations but always in the context of how the community is affected as a whole.

The stories use the rights frame as a master frame, ensuring that the narratives resonate and are salient with audiences at large (Lim 2013). Through the use of master frames that can diffuse effectively across situations, very like the “rights frame” defined by the southern civil rights movement that became a part of other racial/ethnic movements and the women’s movement, connective structures are created that then help to generate connective action.

The non-use of martyr narratives ensures that issues and not individuals are the unifying point of stories. The field workers and trainers from both organizations train the reporters so that stories are framed in a way that “help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Taking public action or mobilizing for common good then becomes an act of personal validation (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Also the action component is an uncomplicated one. Listeners are told that even a phone call makes a difference. Dates and information about protests are given.

The use of the rights frame as the master frame helps audiences attach common and familiar meaning to events and experiences, and thus participate and legitimize protests and create social movements to address overarching issues that need collective action (Adler 2012). As in the health case, one respondent said the disease could spread to his village and thus was not an isolated one. Master frames enhance the effect of collective frames and help audiences look at issues in a certain way (Oliver and Johnston 2000). Both organizations use collective action frames, in similar ways, using their interpretive function and simplifying aspects of the “world out there,” in a manner that mobilizes “potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Benford and Snow 2000, 610). The Video Volunteers case clearly highlights this. Since the approach to resolve the issue around unpaid wages was a reform-based one, collective action frames were used to encourage everyone to participate in the protest surrounding the issue. Yet comprehensive as they are, the use of these master frames still does not clearly answer how issues are really perceived (Earl and Garrett



2016) and future research can examine in more nuanced detail how individual participation is motivated by ideals beyond the potential outcome of protests (Chan 2016).

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## NOTES

1. See [http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?tag=NANAKCHAND\\_YADAV](http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?tag=NANAKCHAND_YADAV).
2. See <http://www.videovolunteers.org/impact-handpump-repaired-in-tati-village-jharkhand/>.
3. See <http://www.videovolunteers.org/our-impact/> and <http://cgnetswara.org/impact2.php>.
4. See <http://cgnetswara.org/impact2.php> and <http://www.videovolunteers.org/our-impact/>.
5. See <http://www.videovolunteers.org/>.
6. See <http://www.videovolunteers.org/impact-old-age-pension-finally-started/>.
7. See <http://www.videovolunteers.org/impact-school-gets-a-handpump-after-10-years-in-ambatari-jharkhand/>.
8. See <http://cgnetswara.org/index.php?id=88421>.

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