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Ear to the ground or useless entities? Citizen journalism and mainstream media in India

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ABSTRACT

Citizen journalism is on the rise in India. Through the lens of the intermedia agenda setting theory, content analysis and qualitative interviews, this study looks at how one citizen led media outlet, CGNET Swara, works to influence the agendas of India's largest print media organisation, The Times of India. News done by the two media organisations and 30 interviews with local, mainstream and citizen journalists, show, that while mainstream media may routinely ignore citizen produced news; for local journalists from smaller local language newspapers, such news has much value. News produced by CGNET Swara is often highlighted, though with little credit to the original reporters.

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Introduction

Chhattisgarh might contribute 15% of India's steel, but community needs from this very resource poor area are rarely featured in India's mainstream media. However, Chhattisgarh's influential citizen-led mobile phone news channel, CGNET Swara is devoted to covering the poor and mostly tribal populations from this part of the country, far from mainstream media glare.

News on the CGNET Swara isn't just about covering issues but also about finding solutions to the many problems that affect local communities and, in the process, ensuring that the poor and therefore powerless are protected. When children who often have to travel long distances on foot, to school in Chhattisgarh, did not have drinking water, CGNET Swara broadcasted a story that said a pump had been sanctioned but it still had not been installed after more than a year.¹ The issue was resolved soon after CGNET Swara's coverage. Unfortunately, in India, citizen news services like the CGNET are rare.

Media scholars have extensively critiqued such democratic scarcities in a corporate dominated and commercialised media system, especially in the areas of inequalities of access, representation and political power (Fuchs, 2010). The gaps created by such inequalities are often fulfilled by alternative media, which provide the focus for both specific community interests as well as for 'the contrary and subversive' (Silverstone,

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1999, p. 103). Rodríguez (2011) has shown that people globally translate their resistance and frustration with corporate owned mainstream media in acts of independent, collaborative or participatory media making. The growing influence of citizen journalism attests to this (Allen & Thorsen, 2009; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010).

This study, set in India, seeks to understand the influence of citizen-produced media on mainstream media through content analysis and comparison of how stories are framed in one citizen media organisation (CGNET Swara) and the Times of India (India's most widely circulated newspaper) in the year 2015. Using qualitative interviews with reporters (a total of 30) from the CGNET, The Times of India and local journalists from the local vernacular press, this analysis also explores the reporters' choice of stories and ascertains their views on journalism produced by participants of CGNET. Through the lens of the intermedia agenda setting theory, this investigation examines the nature of influences that shape news agendas among differently produced media with radically different organisational size, reach and audience.

The study approaches issues from a framing paradigm in order to analyse intermedia agenda setting in terms of frames and attributes. By examining source influences through the sources used and interviews with journalists from The Times of India, local journalists and the CGNET Swara, the analysis also examines how the journalists view the role of citizen journalists in influencing the power structure between citizen and elite traditional media entities (Bruns, Highfield, & Lind, 2012). Most research on how journalists perceive their work and roles remains very focused on mainstream media in the West (Mellado & Lagos, 2011). This is among the few studies that look at emerging alternative media scenarios in a developing country.

Mainstream media in India

India's dynamic media scene is 'driven by a growing middle class. (BBC, 2018).' As the BBC India country profile says, '... newspaper circulation has risen, and new titles compete with established dailies. India has more than 150 million TV homes...' Scholars of journalism describe the Indian print press as one of the most influential and exceptionally free in the developing world (Hanson, 1995; House, 2009). Recent years have marked the rapid expansion of the media scenario in the country especially in the area of print and electronic media (Chadha & Steiner, 2015). The English-language press in particular is a major source of information about events outside India for the urban educated elite throughout the country (Rao, 2009). English-language papers in the country are owned by large private business concerns. Yet certain changes are afoot.

A 2017 KPMG report stated that India's Rs 30,000-crore (\$4.48 billion) print media industry is set to grow by 8% annually for the next three years in a spurt driven by regional media. India has always had a flourishing Hindi language press. A report by India Ratings and Research, a credit ratings agency and a unit of Fitch Ratings, stipulated that the vernacular or local language print media would grow at 10–12% in fiscal 2017.

But the mainstream media, including the influential print media, often underserves rural communities in India (Arya, 2011). Participation in such forums is limited to the

most privileged members of society, excluding those individuals who are the most important stakeholders in the conversation (Arya, 2011; Thomas, 2014).

The background: CGNET Swara

Shubrashu Choudhury, a former BBC correspondent, set up the CGNET Swara in February 2010 for the people of Chhattisgarh. Populated primarily by the Adivasis, among the poorest and most socioeconomically disadvantaged indigenous populations in the country, Chhattisgarh has rich reserves of minerals but lacks basic school and health facilities. Of the state's 25 million inhabitants, 80% live in rural areas, and 30% are illiterate. The area is also home to the Maoist insurgency, a violent left-wing movement. In 2007, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh designated this insurgency as India's greatest internal security threat (Mudliar, Donner, & Thies, 2012; Thomas, 2014). Chhattisgarh is a difficult environment for the media. Due to a shortage of trained journalists in rural areas, there are no established news sources in the local tribal languages, such as Kurukh or Gondi, each of which has more than 2 million speakers (Mudliar et al., 2012). While newspapers and television stations have a presence in the state, only rarely do they cater to the needs or broadcast the voices of the Adivasi (tribal) population. The state government has been accused of encouraging 'paid news' by granting media government advertisements for uncritical coverage (Thomas, 2014). As Choudhury says, 'The residents of Chhattisgarh need to have a credible news source manned by journalists who know the language and culture of the land' (personal communication, 2015).

CGNET is a voice portal that citizens call using any mobile or landline to record a news story (Mudliar et al., 2012). Incoming calls are usually free, with outgoing calls costing a few cents. Once a message gets recorded from the field, journalists working for CGNET access the system using a web-based interface to review and verify the report. Approved reports are then made available for playback over the phone and can be accessed on the CGNET Swara site. CGNET Swara is not Internet dependent. Callers are guided through voice prompts. 'Literacy therefore isn't an issue,' says Choudhary. CGNET Swara currently logs more than 500 calls per day. Their stories have impact. The impact section of the site at the last count had over 300 documented issues that were resolved due to CGNET. As one reporter, an active woman journalist, says, 'Now I know I too have a voice,' (personal communication, 2015).

The background: the Times of India

The Times of India is the oldest English-language newspaper in the country. Established in 1838, it is owned by Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., which is owned by the Sahu Jain family. The Audit Bureau of Circulation pegs its circulation at 3,184,727 for the second half of 2016. The Times Group has over 11,000 employees and revenue exceeding \$1.5 billion. Its markets are in major cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Raipur and smaller cities like Ranchi, Guwahati, Trivandrum and Aurangabad. The World's Great Dailies: Profiles of Fifty Newspapers by Merrill and Fisher (1980) included the paper for its internationally recognised depth of coverage and independent views as did the BBC in their

ranking of the world best newspapers (Baxi & Prasad, 2005). Always aimed primarily at the English-educated intelligentsia, it continues to be widely read by academics, government officials, and other members of the urban educated elite (Fernandes, 2000; Lee & Maslog, 2005). For this study, we will examine the stories published in the 2015 Raipur edition of the times of India since Raipur is the capital city of Chhattisgarh.

Exploring relationships between citizen journalism and mainstream media

Graeme Turner (2010) 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. Though scholars still assert that professional journalism is the guardian of democracy (Peters & Broersma, 2016), this is increasingly perceived as a failed idea, suggesting the need for what more optimistic proponents of citizen journalism identify as 'media witnessing' (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Gillmor, 2004). The concept of 'media witnessing' implies closeness, a more personal approach to the subject of reporting unlike the objectivity required of and associated with professional journalism. Rodriguez (2001) defines 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 the media they produce that is driven by 'the motives of these people.' Gans (2003) has underlined the importance of 'multiperspectival' news that ensures a 'bottom-up' approach, where information comes not just from official sources but also citizens, the ordinary person on the street. Unlike traditional journalists who rely heavily on external sources, citizen journalists use more unofficial sources and opinion (Carpenter, 2008).

Citizen journalism has been theorised to have transformative potential for news production hierarchies (Coddington, 2014; Harlow, 2017). Some of these include opening and calling on unofficial sources (Carpenter, 2010) as well as valuing conversation, transparency and collaborative work (Coddington, 2014; Peters & Broersma, 2016). Trends show that traditional media usually pick up human-interest stories regularly from social media sites (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012) and while (Meraz, 2009) political bloggers are likely to link to traditional media, traditional media were unwilling to link to political blogs. Relationships between citizen journalism and reporters from traditional media are uneasy.

User-generated content reinforces a tendency towards human-interest stories, leaving in-depth coverage for professional journalists (Harrison, 2010). News organisations usually publish citizen journalism they believe would be valuable to their audiences and benefit the organisation (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). In a series of interviews with reporters and editors, Hermida and Thurman (2008) found that gatekeeping practices in organisations like The Times (London) are keen to use a lot of user generated content but only select those comments that 'fit their brand' (p. 350). Mythen's (2010) study on the influence of citizen journalism in the area of risk information show that while citizen journalism adds to the plurality of discourse and sets forth alternate news values, problems of distortion and the lack of objectivity remain. Thus, as Lewis et al. (2010) have shown media's rejection or acceptance of citizen journalism depends on philosophical as well as practical grounds. Singer et al.

(2011) suggests that mainstream journalists maintain a traditional view of audiences; casting audience members as active recipients of the news rather than as active participants in the process of constructing it.

The associations between citizen journalists and mainstream news organisation are more dynamic in the area of television journalism where 'citizen journalism is less a story of exploitation and more a story of negotiation' (Palmer, 2013). The interdependence of CNN and citizen reporting 'complicates the static maps of the world that professional journalism attempts to construct' (Palmer, 2013). Palmer (2013) has shown many of the interviewees felt proud seeing their own pictures and videos air on CNN's official newscasts which in turn fuelled their desire to continue producing.

In the print area, as Heinonen (2011) suggests, integration between journalists and audiences is still limited in scope amongst mainstream news organisations. Hard news remains the preserve of professionals (Hermida, 2011). The argument that journalists should be working with 'gifted amateurs' to form a 'profitable cooperation of hybrid activity' (Lewis, 2011) is not entirely supported. But Wall and Zahed (2015) show that the New York Times Lede blog incorporated videos created by citizens in Syria into their online content. The authors believe that this is the emergence of joint creation of news (termed the Collaborative News Clip) by professional journalists and citizens in situations of conflict. Though citizen media can offer interesting 'bottom-up' alternatives to conventional 'topdown' practices of news making, it is clear that the impact of weblogs and citizen media on traditional, professional journalism, thus far, has been rather limited (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010).

Citizen journalism in India

Contrary to predictions of journalism being in a systemic crisis in the western world, the news about journalism in India raises some hopes (Chadha & Steiner, 2015; Ram, 2011). Citizen journalism in India has had an impact mainly in situations of crisis (tsunami, earthquake, rains, terrorist attacks), but it is also increasingly influencing politics by exposing corruption and highlighting social issues such as the sexual harassment of women and the life situations of minorities of gender, religion, caste, and ethnicity (Sonwalkar, 2009). The different citizen journalism sites in India include Merinews, which calls itself the largest citizen journalism portal in India (Thomas, 2011).

Beside this, others include the Khabar Lahariya and the Video Volunteers. The Khabar Lahariya is a low-cost weekly rural newspaper (sold at about two rupees-\$.0005) which is entirely produced by women – mostly from the very marginalised communities in the rural districts of Uttar Pradesh in north India (Naqvi, 2007). The Video Volunteers (set up in 2008) has an active presence in some of the most under developed parts of the country. Sites like the WhiteDrums.com, MyNews.in and multi-lingual websites like the Global Voices Online, funded by philanthropic groups and run by a community of bloggers, also aim to 'redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens media' (Globalvoicesonline.org, 2009). The CGNET Swara was chosen for the study because from the outset impact was an important aspect of its reporting and it has many documented cases where its reporting has helped resolve issues.

Citizen journalism and the agenda setting theory

The agenda setting theory, which documents the effects of mass media on audience cognition, is one of the most enduring theories of mass communication (Meraz, 2009). While research has focused on the mobilisation and political knowledge creation aspects of citizen journalism, few studies have concentrated on the intermedia agenda setting aspects of citizen journalism and mainstream media, especially in the developing world.

Intermedia agenda setting seeks to explain the flow of influence among media entities (McCombs, 2005) and how the media's agenda is set by sources. Intermedia agenda effects have been documented between elite to less-elite traditional mass media (Lim, 2006; Reese & Danielian, 1989) and between elite newspapers and television news broadcasts (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994) as well as newspapers and newswires (Lim, 2006). Research within the United States shows that traditional media still has the power to set non-traditional media agendas at the issue level (Meraz, 2009) and convergent agendas also exist between news portals and elite media entities in the area of print and television. In the area of traditional-to-citizen media agenda transfer, Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, and Jeong (2007) found greater reliance on traditional media than citizen media. Singer et al. (2005) have found that traditional media outlets were more prone to legitimise other traditional media outlets rather than citizen media projects. Elite media drives coverage across other elite media.

The agenda setting impact is stronger with unobtrusive issues or issues that have less direct, personalised impact on audiences (McCombs, 2005). Also, audiences are less influenced by media agenda where abstract issues are concerned rather than concrete issues, especially those with which they have direct experience (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). The media finds it easier to set agendas in dramatic and conflict areas (Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010). In the area of citizen journalism to traditional media influence this is significant. Since content has to be filtered before being published in mainstream media, the growth of information via citizen journalists has been slow (Codrington, 2014; Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

This study approaches the narratives from the two news organisations through the lens of framing theory because as a theory framing's value also lies in the way it bridges parts of the field that need to be in touch with each other: quantitative and qualitative, empirical and interpretive, psychological and sociological, and academic and professional (Reese, 2007). The study relies on qualitative interviews with journalists from both the organisations to understand the agenda process better. Also, local journalists were interviewed to understand their views on news produced by CGNET.

McCombs (2004) has characterised frames as a special class of 'macro' attributes representing the dominant perspectives of an object. By comparing the attributes used by journalists in traditional and citizen journalism this study focuses on understanding how intermedia agenda setting might occur across citizen and mainstream media. Besides frames, the choice of source is an important aspect as well. This study looks at source choices through a comparison of official and unofficial sources used by the CGNET and the Times. In this light, this paper analyses:

- RQ1:** What are the major frames used by the CGNET Swara and The Times of India in their coverage of issues and is there a significant difference between the frames used to cover similar topics?
- RQ2:** What are the major topics covered by the CGNET Swara and The Times of India and is there a significant difference between the topics covered?
- RQ3:** What sources do the CGNET Swara and The Times of India use and is there a significant difference between the sources used in the two sites for similar stories?

To understand the influences on the content and choices of issues the study also interviews the journalists of the two projects and local journalists from the area CGNET operates in. Their perspectives lend credence and help explain the findings of this study.

Methodology

This study questions the nature of the influence of citizen journalism media traditional media in India through the lens of intermedia agenda setting by analysing how issues are framed and intermedia agenda setting occurs between a mainstream newspaper and a citizen journalism site.

Tankard's (2001) list of frames is used to classify the frames in a post. The unit of analysis was each story or post that fell within the frames selected during this time period. Articles from the Raipur edition (the city closest to Chhattisgarh where the CGNET Swara works) of the Times of India and on the CGNET Swara site for the year 2015 (1 January 2015–31 December 2015) were content analysed to isolate the frames the narratives were placed within. CGNET Swara published 568 stories, while the Times of India published 1000 stories in the corresponding time period. Since the number of stories for the Times of India exceeded those of the CGNET significantly, random numbers were assigned to the both samples using the RANDANDBETWEEN Function on the Excel data sheet, and the first 500 stories selected were subsequently selected from each publication for coding. The RANDBETWEEN Function on Excel sheets helps generate random numbers, which are then used to select items from given samples. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. A total of 30 interviews were also conducted with journalists from both the Times and CGNET to understand their motivations and choices of issues.

To answer RQ1, which examined the frames CGNET Swara and The Times of India use and the significant differences between these frames, this study depended on nominal variables that coded for the use of: (a) Injustice frames: defined as emphasising moral outrage, the significance of a problem and injustices being done; (b) Sympathy frames which provoke support, compassion, or sympathy for the people portrayed as underdogs; (c) Legitimising frames: defined as recognition or support of the claims of the people in the post, fostering the public's support for the protesters, or portraying them as having a real, legitimate reason to protest; (d) Accountability frames which suggest a consensus that an issue is wrong and needs changes or monitoring; and (e) Contextual frames, defined as those frames

that look in-depth at the history and background of issues (Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Boyle & Hoeschen, 2001). Examples of injustice frames included stories that clearly stated how people in a country like India still suffered from a lack of drinking water, a basic human right. Stories, for example, about sick children who needed help but were too poor to afford healthcare would be coded for sympathy frames. Narratives that demanded government officials to do their job were coded for accountability frames. Crosstab functions analysed if there was a significant difference between the frames the two sites used and to answer research question RQ1.

RQ2 asked about topics most frequently covered by the two news outlets. To characterise the content on CGNET Swara and The Times of India, detailed coding of the frequently recurring topics was done looking for subjects that dealt with issues of nationality or rights as citizens, economy, health, immigration, human rights, and environmental issues. A sample of 150 stories selected randomly from the CGNET Swara and The Times of India showed that these were the recurring topics. Stories in the human rights category were coded for women's issues, human rights, and opportunities for self-improvement, campaigns and demonstrations. Stories dealing with issues of jobs, employment schemes, economic parameters like poverty level indicators, below poverty line families, and references to salaries and other employment related matters were coded for economy. Crosstab functions analysed if there was a significant difference between the topics the two sites covered.

RQ3 dealt with the kind of sources used. All humans quoted in the story were counted. All sources were considered official if they had government connections. Sources who were professionals (labourers, farmers, all those without links to official government bodies) were considered unofficial or citizen voices (Harlow & Johnson, 2011). Crosstab functions analysed if there was a significant difference between the sources the two sites used and to answer RQ3.

Interview data

Open-ended interviews with reporters, 15 from CGNET Swara, 5 local journalists, and 10 from The Times of India, were designed to understand story selection criteria, selection of sources and other possible influences on their editorial process through questions like 'what motivates them to post stories,' 'why do they select the stories they do' and 'how do they view their roles of citizen journalism' and 'how is citizen journalism news viewed.' Five journalists from the local newspapers were interviewed as well. Using McCracken's (1988) long interview technique allowed a 'step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves' (Creswell, 2007; McCracken, 1988). Questions were added in while the journalists spoke depending on the issues they were referring to (McCracken, 1988). Journalists were questioned about particular stories that stood out while the content analysis was being done. The data was coded into categories by grouping together interrelated ideas (Creswell, 2007), and reviewed multiple times, for critical understanding and manifest meaning. A triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods was done to enhance the validity of the study.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university granted approval for the project on 14 July 2014.

Reporter demographics

The average CGNET reporter is generally a man, who has had some access to school and on an average knows how to sign his name but has little or writing or reading ability beyond that. Their average income was about Rs 50 (\$1) a day. They all reported having a single non-smart mobile phone per family.

Reporters from the Times of India were all based in Raipur, the city. They all had master's degrees. Their average incomes ranged from Rs 30, 000 to Rs 50, 000 (\$ 1000) depending on experience and education. They covered various beats like health, social development; the city and crime among others.

The five local journalists (all men) interviewed were from a very popular Hindi language newspaper in the area. They were satisfied with their jobs but were keenly aware that their English media counterparts were perhaps viewed as better reporters, better paid and influential.

Their age range varied from 30 to 55 years.

The CGNET reporters and local journalists were interviewed on the field. This involved 56 h of participant observation and interviewing done as part of a field visit in 2015. Eight of the Times of India reporters were interviewed in person. Two were interviewed over the phone. Each interview lasted for an average of 45 min. The respondent names were kept confidential. The interviews of the participants were analysed qualitatively in conjunction with the content analysis and are explained in the discussion and interview analysis sections in detail to lend context to the analysis.

Inter-coder reliability

To establish inter-coder reliability, the author and the coding assistant coded a total of 50 stories from CGNET Swara and 50 stories from The Times of India paper. Inter-coder reliability for individual variables showed a Kappa range from .61 to 1, with an overall mean of .85, exceeding the acceptable minimum standard (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000).

Table 1. Major frames used in the coverage of issues.

CGNET Swara	Times of India
73.9%***	37.5%***
40.3%	22.9%
61.3%**	33.3%**
27.7%	25.0%
21.0%*	2.1%*

***Shows the significant differences in the way the sites used the frames ($\chi^2 = 19.6$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.)

**Shows the significant differences in the way the sites used the frames ($\chi^2 = 10.78$, $df = 1$, $p = .001$.)

*Shows the significant differences in the way the sites used the frames ($\chi^2 = 9.319$, $df = 1$, $p > .001$.)

Table 2. The percentages of stories for each topic.

	CGNET Swara	Times of India
Human rights	81.5%***	20%***
Health	12%	23%
Economy	35%	30%
Migration	0%	42%
Environment	4%	7%
Nation (Politics)	1.7%**	60.4%**

***Shows the significant differences in the way the sites used the frames ($\chi^2 = 8.218$, $df = 1$, $p > .001$.)

**Shows the significant differences in the way the sites used the frames ($\chi^2 = 21.487$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)

Table 3. Sources used.

	CGNET Swara	Times of India
Non-official	100	20
Official	0	80

$\chi^2 = 23.50$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$

Results

In answer to RQ1 (Table 1), on the major frames employed in the coverage of issues, the analysis showed that the injustice frame was the dominant frame in both the CGNET stories and The Times of India followed by the context frame. The accountability frame was used the least by both the sites. The injustice frames were used 37.5% of the time by the Times of India and 73.9% of the time by the CGNET Swara. Sympathy frames that evoked sympathy or support for the protesters were employed 40% of the time by the CGNET Swara and 22.9% of the time by The Times of India. CGNET Swara used the legitimising frames 27.7% of the time, and the Times of India used it in 25% of their stories. Accountability frames were used 21% of the time by the CGNET Swara and 2.1% by The Times of India. 61% of the stories on the CGNET Swara used the history or in-depth context frame while 33% of the stories on The Times of India used this frame.

The chi-square analysis showed that among the two sites there was significant difference in the way the frames injustice (Asymp. Sig..000), contextual (Asymp. Sig..001) and accountability (Asymp. Sig..002) are used. There was no significant difference between the ways the sites used the sympathy (Asymp. Sig..2) and legitimising frames (Asymp. Sig..1).

RQ2 asked about the major topics covered by the CGNET Swara and Times of India. Human rights and politics formed the bulk of the stories for both while environment was the least popular topic (Table 2). 81.5% of the stories on the CGNET Swara were about or related to human rights while The Times of India had 20.4% of the coded stories on the topic. The CGNET Swara had 34.5% of their stories on the economy while the Times of India devoted 30% of their coverage to this topic. The CGNET Swara had no stories on migration while 41.7% of the Times of India stories were devoted to this. Environment was the least popular topic with the Times of India (7%) and only 3.4% of CGNET Swara's narratives were on this.

The chi square analysis showed significant difference between the ways the two sites covered common topics. The differences were most significant where the topics of migration, human rights and stories that focused on nationality. The Asymp. Sig. between the sites where migration was concerned was .000. The Asymp. Sig.

between the sites where human rights was concerned was .004. The Asymp. Sig. between the sites where stories focused on nation was concerned was .000. There was little significant difference among the topics economy (Asymp. Sig..511), health (Asymp. Sig..068) and environment (Asymp. Sig..119). While human rights formed a significant number of the stories for both, the CGNET Swara had significantly a larger number of stories devoted to the topic.

The stories were coded for two kinds of sources, official and non-official. As the analysis for RQ3 revealed there were significant differences between the sources used in the two sites for similar stories (Table 3). For the CGNET Swara, the non-official sources play a very active role being quoted over official sources and for the Times of India official sources being the main spokespersons for the narratives.

Interview analysis

From the interviews with the journalists of CGNET Swara, Times of India and local vernacular newspapers certain key themes, on story and source selection and how citizen journalism was viewed, emerged.

The Times of India reporters were clear that their readership was primarily city based and therefore wanted stories 'close to what they could identify with' (personal communication, 2015). The reporters were clear that while they were interested in covering development from the point of view of the poor and marginalised they had to make sure that their essentially city-based audiences also identified with the stories covered. 'Capturing and maintaining readership' (personal communication, 2015) was a primary goal. Official sources were their mainstay because that lent *gravitas* to stories. They were aware of the work done by CGNET Swara and identified with their struggles, especially those portrayed in the stories posted and found their roles as citizen journalists 'commendable.' But they didn't think that the news produced met journalistic standards. CGNET reporters knew about the Times of India. Respondents from CGNET described it as the 'large newspaper that people who knew English read (personal communication, 2015).' They were not sure how much the Times wrote about the kind of issues CGNET posted on. They also said no journalist from the Times had ever spoken to them.

With the local journalists' relationships were more nuanced. The five local journalists interviewed said they were regular listeners of CGNET; it was their 'ear on the ground (Personal Interview, 2015).' They didn't check the website since data and Internet connections were expensive. One participant said, 'CGNET helps us get stories we otherwise wouldn't know about.' They often pick up stories posted on CGNET especially those focused on health and unpaid wages. They use sources from the communities CGNET serves. They often quote the reporters and the human sources used in the original story. But they don't mention CGNET as the first news source. 'It would feel we aren't doing our job,' said one respondent. The local reporters and CGNET reporters regularly meet to exchange story ideas and discuss ways to highlight issues more prominently. The CGNET reporters were aware that the local journalists were helpful and sympathetic to their cause. But they also knew that as small local newspapers, the journalists '...couldn't do much to help resolve their issues since they were only reporters and didn't own the newspaper.' They readily shared information but wished they were acknowledged as reporters not merely as sources.

Discussion and conclusion

Examining the intermedia agenda setting between the citizen journalism website CGNET Swara and the mainstream newspaper The Times of India shows certain discouraging but complex and interesting trends in the area of citizen journalism and its influence on media agendas in India. While the Times may disregard the news produced by CGNET, the smaller local journalists valued this service and considered it an 'ear to the ground,' helping them keep abreast of news they otherwise find difficult to access. Elite English language media may reject citizen journalism in the local language, but local vernacular media respected it. Intermedia agenda setting might not be strong between mainstream newspapers and citizen produced news but citizen journalism is important too and has definite impact on smaller local newspapers. There is a definite exchange of information with CGNET providing news from hard to access areas and local media highlighting them in a bid for news as well as sympathy and desire to help beleaguered communities.

Larger and traditional media might find it easy to ignore citizen produced news but for local newspapers it another way to serve audiences. CGNET helps smaller papers highlight issues and thus amplify them through more mediums. But reporters from CGNET are also aware that such organisations are also hampered by their sizes and limited spheres of influence.

Recent literature suggests that news organisations publish citizen journalism they believe would be valuable to their audiences and thus benefit the news organisation (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). While the journalists interviewed at the Times acknowledged the value of the work done by the CGNET, they didn't believe that it could find space in pages of the Times. Audiences are less influenced by media agenda where abstract issues are concerned rather than concrete issues especially those with which they have direct experience (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). In cases like the CGNET Swara, which serve specific communities with certain characteristics like being resource poor with little access to education and health facilities, the idea of significance becomes contested. Reporters from the Times believed that their primarily city-based audiences would not identify with CGNET's news focus. While commending the CGNET for the work they did, reporters from the Times believed that the professional journalist was more equipped to do in depth coverage (Harrison, 2010; Hermida & Thurman, 2008). While The New York Times may have started collaborating with citizens in conflict zones leading towards 'Collaborative News Clips' (Wall & Zahed, 2015), there is little evidence that show collaboration between the Times and CGNET reporters. Mainstream media is interested in covering issues those populations in such resource poor areas face but in selecting perspectives they may often exclude those with the greatest stakes in such conversations (Mudliar et al., 2012).

With local newspapers, there is much more exchange and sharing of ideas, stories and discussion centred on narratives. CGNET is an important influencer on news and source choices. There is professional camaraderie between the reporters. But CGNET isn't acknowledged as a partner. Its contribution is more as a source with reporters from both entities aware of this reduction.

The Times and the CGNET Swara uses the injustice frame for a majority of for their stories but issues relevant to the poor of Chhattisgarh is rarely highlighted. The argument that journalists should be working with 'gifted amateurs' to form a 'profitable

cooperation of hybrid activity' (Lewis, 2011) was again not true. Reporters from mainstream news were aware of the work done by CGNET reporters but citizen journalists or the content produced weren't an integral part of the mainstream newsroom. As one respondent said, being too close to the issue meant a lack of objectivity, which then compromised the essential nature of news. Conflict prone Chhattisgarh may be difficult terrain for the media, but the Times still didn't look at the CGNET for news. Unlike the area of television news where Palmer (2013) has shown citizen journalists have room to negotiate, the importance of citizen-produced news here is negated immediately.

Intermedia agenda effects have been documented between elite to less-elite traditional mass media (Lim, 2006) and in the case of elite newspapers to television news broadcasts (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994) as well newspapers and newswires (Lim, 2006). While the Times journalists were interested in covering social development they didn't regularly listen or visit the CGNET site. An awareness of the work done by the site did not make them use unofficial sources (Carpenter, 2008) or value conversation, transparency, and collaborative work (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008) with, these journalists in any way. The CGNET reporters, while knowing about the Times, do not read the newspaper simply because literacy is an insurmountable barrier. There was little opportunity for the journalists of CGNET Swara to challenge in any way the journalists' monopoly of the occupational practices at the heart of their professional identity (Singer, 2005). Hermida (2011) has shown that in the area of print, collaboration between professional and non-professionals remains limited in scope and hard news remains the preserve of professionals. Unlike the New York Times Lede Blog, there is little scope for collaborative work (Wall & Zahed, 2015). So, the claim that the work of citizen journalism might be shattering the very paradigm of the field through its authentic, first-hand perspective is not true here.

But as the local journalists from vernacular media reiterated, it was an important news source for them. Elite media may drive coverage across other elite media but here citizen media is seen influencing coverage in smaller local media. Thus, it can be believed that in time citizen journalism produced by poor and powerless people with little access to education can change news production hierarchies, at least, in smaller local media. With regional media, in India, set to grow at 8% annually for the next three years and the vernacular or local language print media at 10–12% in fiscal year 2017 with English language media as investors (India Ratings and Research, 2016; KPMG, 2017), citizen journalism may have found important opportunities to grow in influence and importance.

Note

1. <http://CGNETswara.org/index.php?id=28514>.

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