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# **The professional and the amateur**

**- remarks on the changing  
nature of the journalistic field**

Paper presented at the IAMCR Journalism Research and Education Section  
International Conference on 'Media and Global Divides'  
University of Stockholm, 20-25th July, 2008

¿Pueden las personas convertirse en Periodistas?

# PERIODISMO CIUDADANO

Un fenómeno que se expande en el mundo

nowpublic  
crowd powered media



# Rue89

**Photograph your polling place.**

**Document democracy.**

**CITIZEN JOURNALIST**  
I REPORT WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR.

PERSON OF THE YEAR



# You.

Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world.

backfence.com

Jornalismo de CIDADAO



the cult of the amateur



andrew keen



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OhmyNews.com

"Every citizen is a reporter,"

Participez à la rédaction d'Agoravox

DEVENIR RÉDACTEUR S'INSCRIRE

WITNESS



*Partizipativer Journalismus?*



**Project:**  
“Changing journalism in the digital context”

**Task:**  
To grasp trends in mainstream and new media discourses about journalism

## Research questions

- ✓ **How are current antinomies and dichotomies about journalism (they vs. us; professional vs. amateur; crowd vs. elite, for the people vs. by the people...) providing new ideas and questions to re-elaborate the journalistic field in today's societies?**
- ✓ **What are the emergent topics concerning public discourses about journalism crisis capable of renewing knowledge and social action?**

## Corpus

✓ ***Corpus:*** composed by 321 texts gathered during 2007

✓ ***Sources:*** media texts (news, editorials, opinions), blog posts, business and academic, meta-media websites, watchdog institutions.

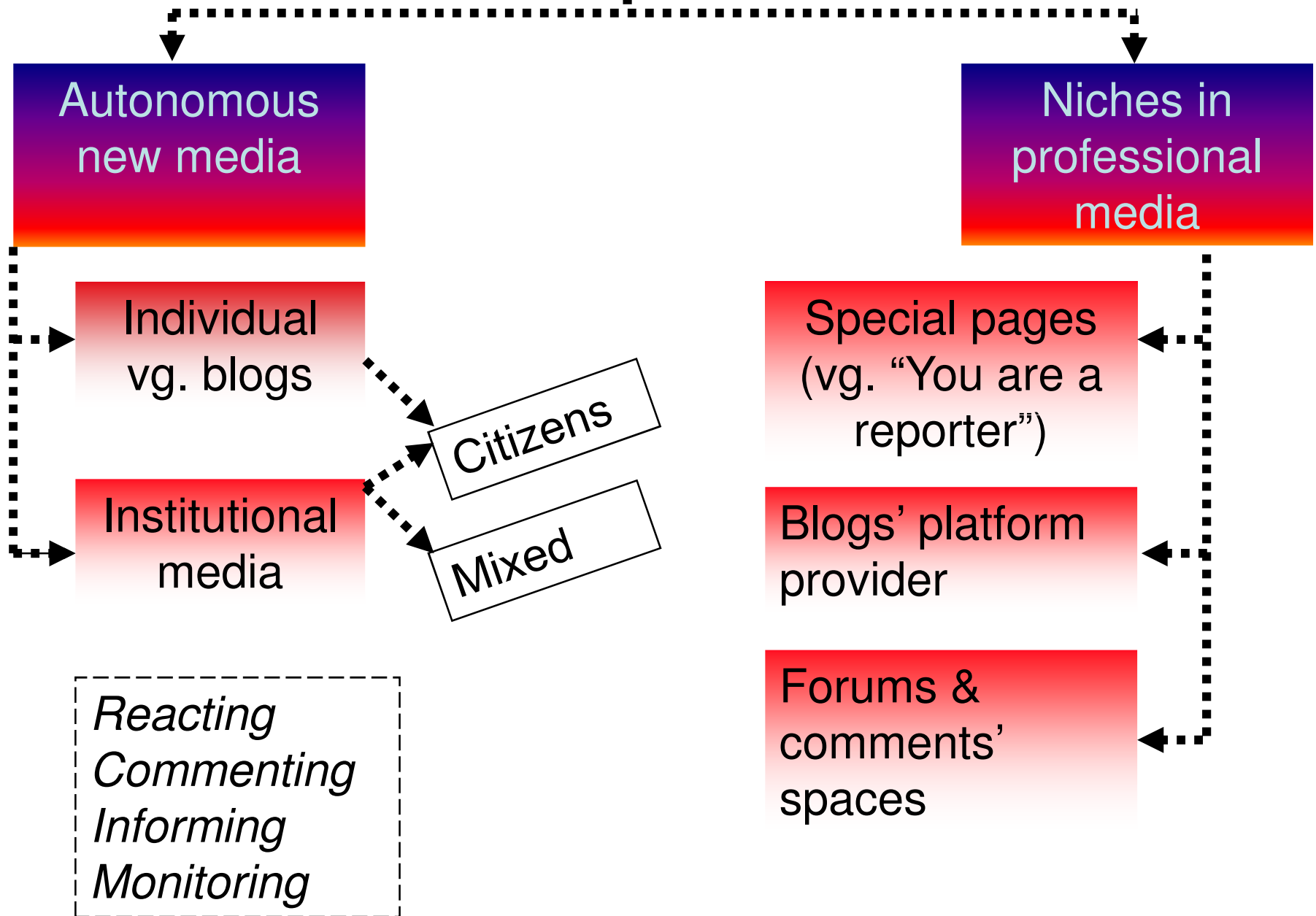
## 2007 Cases (1)

- ✓ **PRO-AM projects:** NewsAssignment (**J. Rosen & Wired**); Rue89 (**Journalists+experts+citizens**)
- ✓ **International news agencies AP e Reuters – adopt initiatives about ‘citizen journalism’**
- ✓ **Gazeta Wyborcza newspaper (Poland) engages 40,000 citizens to investigate maternity care in Poland’s 400 hospitals.**
- ✓ **Failure of ‘citizen journalism’ projects – v.g. Backfence (and comments about it)**
- ✓ **Conferences and Fora: ‘Citizen Reporters’ (Seoul); ‘Cinquième Pouvoir’ (France).**

## 2007 Cases (2)

- ✓ **Report by D. Gillmor ‘Citizen Media: a Progress Report’**
- ✓ **New editor of Le Monde writes an editorial sharply against the idea of weblogs as journalism**
- ✓ **Debates and controversies on A. Keen’s book ‘The Cult of the Amateur’**
- ✓ **Release of “The Latest News Headlines—Your Vote Counts”, by PEJ, comparing news agendas of the mainstream media and a host of user-news sites.**
- ✓ **‘Citizen Journalists’ evade blackout on Myanmar news and broke the news to the world.**

# 'Citizen journalism'



## **Results- global remarks**

- ✓ **Informative texts emphasise the novelty, the potential and achievements of the new ‘phenomenon’**
- ✓ **Opinion texts generally show a sympathetic view of ‘citizen journalism’**
- ✓ **The most impressive conclusion: the emergence of a strong critical approach by different sectors (journalists, editors, bloggers, politicians, writers...)  
(see following slides)**
- ✓ **A set of ideas and arguments is growing, enabling research, discussion and knowledge**

## **Most relevant shortcomings underlined**

- ✓ **Limited range of issues**
- ✓ **Weak participation levels (ex.: overview of Backfence)**
- ✓ **Too much anonymity and hidden agendas**
- ✓ **Ground for ‘digital utopias’ (A. Keen)**
- ✓ **Proliferation of ‘digital narcissism’**
- ✓ **Digital divide weakly questioned: most of those who have voice are also those already possessing symbolic capital**

## **Substantive critiques to ‘citizen journalism’ ...**

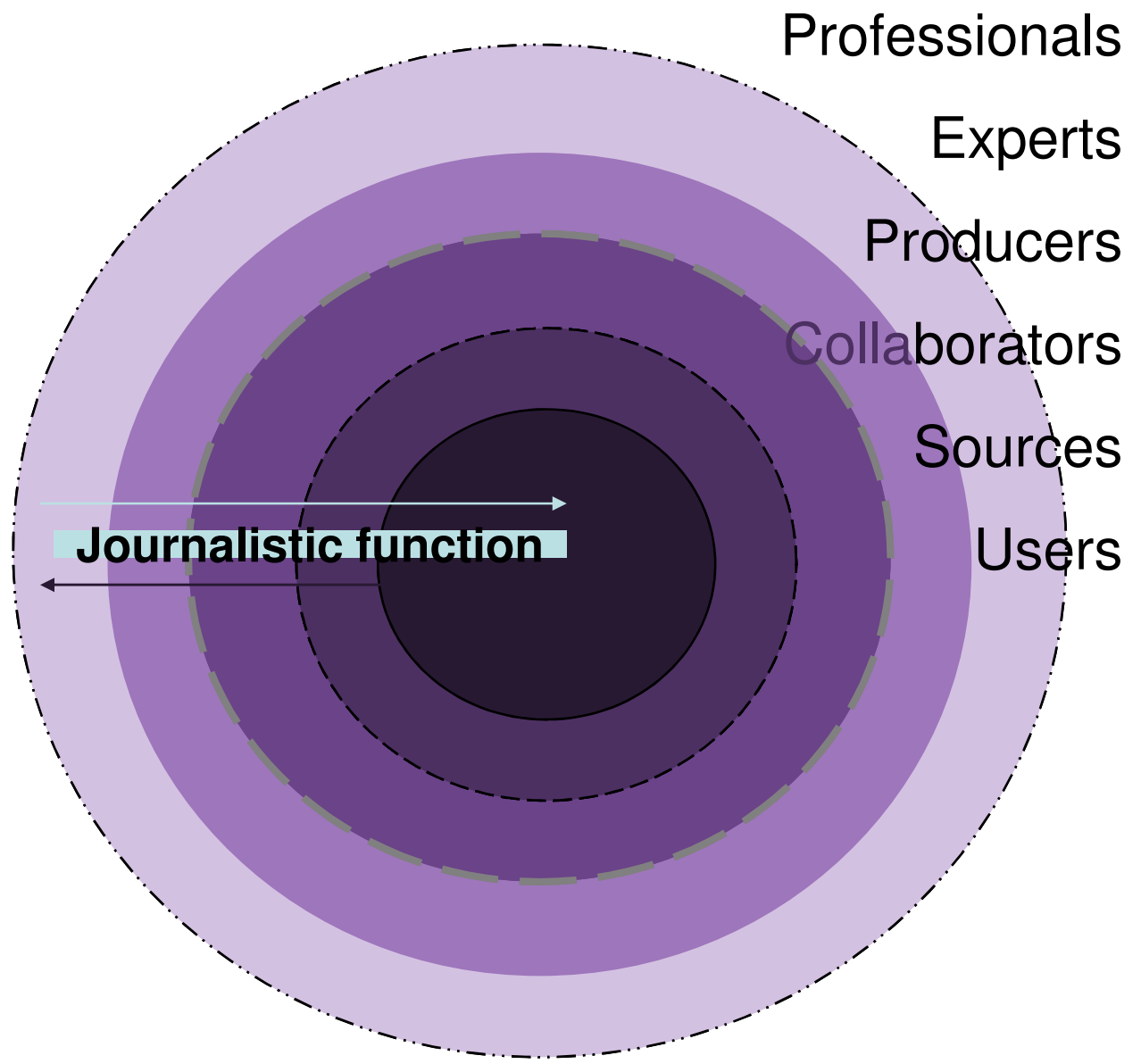
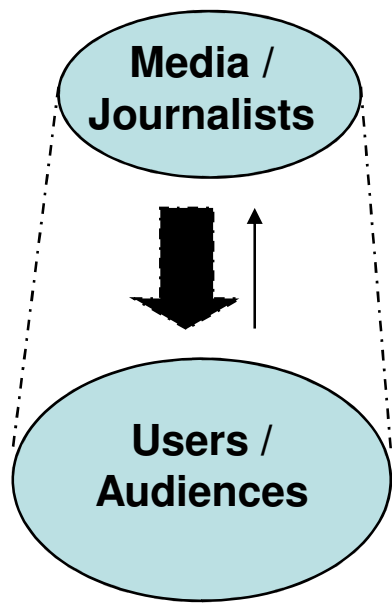
- ✓ **Quality questioned (lack of ethics , precision, balance)**
- ✓ **“Pseudo-journalists that ignore the fundamentals of the profession” (Fottorino)**
- ✓ **Too much opinion (by ‘inflated selves’)**
- ✓ **Rise of arrogance vis-a-vis mainstream media and their professionals, which jeopardizes accountability and transparency**

## **... but,at the same time**

- ✓ **Consistent signs of the crisis of journalism – from inside and outside (power of institutional sources; media conglomerates; job cutting in newsrooms; frequent ethical slidings).**
- ✓ **Cultural debates emphasise knowledge construction as a shared and interactive social process.**
- ✓ **No mainstream media can pretend to cover extensively and intensively what is of public interest.**
- ✓ **The reduction of citizen participation in journalism to casual or special occurrences seems to be diminishing approach.**

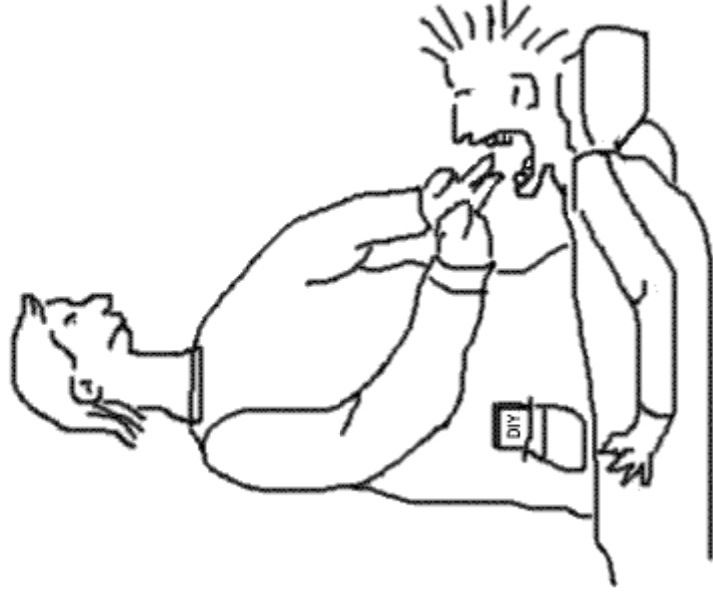
## Summing up

- ✓ **Canonical journalism is under pressure, even besieged: by sources, by conglomerates, by audiences**
- ✓ **Technologies may foster participation, but are not a sufficient condition.**
- ✓ **Crisis is a ground for critical questioning and for decisions**
- ✓ **Ethics – which is a keystone for journalists- is also a keystone for the participatory journalism**



## **Topics for discussion**

- **Citizens and ethics education**
- **Participatory journalism and media literacy**



I'm still not convinced  
that this citizen dentist  
thing is the future