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Digital Ethics: Photojournalism and the Public Sphere in the Age of Citizen Journalism and the Camera Phone

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that the material, which I now submit for assessment on the programmes of study leading to the award of a Master of Arts by Research is entirely my own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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I hereby certify that all the unreferenced work described in this thesis and submitted for the award of a Master of Arts by Research is entirely the work of Miriam O Connor. No portion of the work contained in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification to this or any other institution.

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In memory of my father, Jerry O' Connor who died on June 16th 1984.

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Abstract

Conventionally the media industries have a long history of being one-way transmitters of information, chief arbiters of public sphere discourse - closed fortresses regarding input from the public. An inevitable aspect to this agenda-setting paradigm underscores meditation on 'news' issues that are omitted in selection process – matters thus 'edited out' of public sphere parley. In recent years, technological advancements such as the mobile phone and attendant Web 2.0 technologies have called in to question what can be seen and heard, and challenged too who can dispatch with this 'news talk'. Broadly speaking, the term 'user-generated content' (UGC) is ascribed to material of this nature, while those who tender submissions to news and media organizations have been tagged as 'Citizen Journalists'. The result is that participatory media technologies that allow for the creation and distribution of UGC, overturns traditional notions of an all-powerful news media that have restricted for so long a largely passive audience.

The camera phone too is fast becoming an exemplar device in its own right, one that propels images and videos, 'photojournalism clips' in real-time fragments across the globe, crisscrossing geopolitical borders, hurdling in and out of nation states. Moreover little appears sheltered from the roaming eye of the camera phone and a growing army of citizen journalists of a global order. Yet, the ethical 'turn' of citizen journalism has been less than plain sailing, receiving its most stringent criticism from the very media industries which it serves - that is to say - the professionals. The ever-growing corpus of emerging research indicates that this phenomenon is a surely a topic *de jour* as attempts are made to grapple with benefits, drawbacks or definitions of this newfangled sensation. This exploratory study follows a similar trajectory, drawing on a news media event which took place during the research period of study as a method in which to test these hypothesis'. Thus - the extensive aim of this dissertation is to interrogate citizen journalism from a broad perspective, examine claims and counter-claims that have been made about the practice to date, and in doing so, explore how the practice subsequently intersects with ethical issues relating to the generation of content for the news media industries.

Introduction

A visit to London's, *Victoria & Albert* museum provides both inspiration and substance for Stuart Jefferies article entitled *The rise of the camera-phone* published in *The Guardian* on January 08th, 2010. As he negotiated the various visual wares on display during this unassuming outing, Jefferies was awestruck by a lone museumgoer, who insisted, much to the annoyance of others, on photographing each of the museums artifacts with his camera phone on that particular day. Later, tentatively approaching the photographer, Jefferies remarked that the pictures were likely to be of poor quality, while the snapper, rejecting this analysis retorted - "this is a 10-megapixel *Samsung SCH-B600*, actually, so the photos are going to be pretty excellent" (Jefferies, 2010). Additionally, it transpired that the unidentified snapper had already emailed some of the pictures from his phone to a friend, and planned to 'tweet' the shots later, imparting prove to others that on January 03rd, 2010 at 11.15am, he had witnessed the countless visual attractions the museum had on offer. Three decades ago - a visit to the museum had involved just that; a token of remembrance - a postcard perhaps, while 'tweeting' was commonly understood to be the chirp of a small or young bird. Conventionally too, the camera, in the vernacular sense at least, was assigned to special occasions such as - weddings, birthdays or holidays. But then again - that was then - and this is now.

In recent times, the proliferation of cheap mobile devices in the form of camera phones have now transformed how we interact with the museum or indeed any other kind of event; "from holding a camera aloft at a gig, to filming our friends falling over" - recording has for many become, the new experience, and indeed the new way of experiencing (Mullally, 2009). 30 countries worldwide have now exceeded 100 per cent mobile phone penetration with many individuals subscribing to more than one mobile phone network - the camera phone then has become, a truly ubiquitous

global communication device (Walace, 2006). In *Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone,* (2003) John Agar traces its development in historical terms and discusses the manner in which this communicative tool has now folded its way into the very social fabric of society much like Mullally (2009) argues. If wristwatches chimed to the rhythms and tempos of capitalism throughout the industrial revolution, then what values do the ring tones of today's mobile phone culture signify Agar ponders. Moreover, Agar inquires – what is it about 21st century humanity that has a perpetual desire to be in 'constant touch'? (2003). Such is the power and potency of this latest gadget and attendant Internet based technologies that facilitate 'constant touch', Fred Richin characterizes the current media environment as the 'living medium' (2009). Here, - emerging from this hive of user activity, interactivity and creativity, the prophecies of Marshall McLuhan's *global village* take definitive form and shape as billons of text messages, digital images and videos crisscross the globe each day. As well as engendering countless opportunities for ordinary citizens to capture and share mundane activities such as the museum experience, the camera phone, as well as the pulsating attendant Web 2.0 platforms provide avenues for ordinary citizens to talk back, talk shop, talk up or talk down all matters of public and private interest.

In recent years, the utilization of the mobile phone as a personal witnessing device to provide audio-visual records of news-related events is also increasingly observable (Anthony & Thomas, 2010). The 7/7 London Bombings in 2005 saw countless images and video clips taken by survivors that later formed part of the collective memory of this event. Bivens, (2008) notes that in the first hour alone of the London underground attacks, the *BBC* had received "about 22,000 emails and text messages, 300 photographs and several videos" (127). This imagery and public participation in

the news flow process was generally greeted with positive enthusiasm, while those who partook in such first-hand reporting were promptly tagged as 'citizen journalists' (Spicer, 2009). Broadly speaking, the term *User Generated Content* (UGC), is widely ascribed to submissions of this nature, while those who tender such material to news and media organizations have been labeled as *Citizen Journalists*.

Generally, the media industries have a long history of being one-way transmitters of information, harnessing direct control over public sphere discourse, and traditionally, closed fortresses regarding input from the public. While the 20th century saw the news industries, like other cultural industries subjected to a steady process of concentration and conglomeration, the contemporary media landscape was injected with new hope with the arrival of the Internet in the early 1990's. New media enthusiasts argued that the decentralized nature of this medium promised to restore some of the critical functions of the public sphere, that would eventually led to an overhaul of the print and broadcast industries control over gate keeping, framing, agenda setting and other traditional media roles (Hayes et al. 2007). Presently, the ability for users to comment and contribute on journalistic output is now a widespread activity and subsequently there is a view that this phenomenon, together with the widespread implementation and uptake of citizen journalism, a democratization of the news process has genuinely emerged (Lee Wright 2008; Goode, 2009; Singer, 2010). Moreover, professional media representatives who were traditionally assigned the task of gathering, representing, monitoring and reflecting public interest and expression have seen their positions shift and alter in recent times. Julian Lass remarks that traditional media now finds itself playing a new role, "rather than generating, all the news and imagery it is now becoming a content consolidator, gathering and filtering information" (Lass,

2009: 12), and "the old model of top-down, from-the-pulpit editorializing just doesn't work anymore" (Singer & Ashman, 2009:13).

Blurring the boundaries between professionals and amateurs then, citizen journalism is advanced as a practice that fractures the power and editorial leverage traditionally held by mass media organisations - a brand new breed of news-making championed for its promise to empower ordinary citizens to critically and actively engage in the news making process (Jarvis 2009; Gilmore, 2006; Rosen 2005). Although generally associated with the Internet material produced by citizen journalists does not begin or end in online environment, as broadcast news feeds off and incorporates elements of citizen journalism, while print media routinely serve as pertinent avenues for distribution. As the practice has swiftly evolved in to a routine activity with reputable news organizations actively soliciting for imagery and commentary from a growing pool of citizen journalists on a global scale, UGC now serves as an invaluable resource in the spheres of photojournalism, journalism, broadcast news media, and in particular, at the site of breaking news events. Peter Martyn, (2009) notes that "there is hardly a news websites to be found these days that does not include clickable hyperlinks to audiovisual content, either wire service feeds, local staff productions or citizen journalism submitted by the public at large" (198). Moreover, editorial decision-making is increasingly relegated or bypassed by citizen journalists who frequently migrate, by default almost, towards Web 2.0 platforms such as *Twitter* or *Facebook* to disseminate information and express their experiences directly to the public sphere.

In recent times then the practice has garnered a substantial degree of interest from media scholars, professionals and academics alike. From the corpus of emerging research, the rise of citizen journalism is widely seen as heralding a new era where

ordinary citizens have the power to define and shape what constitutes as news and are subsequently empowered by this process. Equally, new media technologies that allow for the creation and distribution of UGC overturn traditional notions of an all-powerful news media that define and restrict a largely passive audience. Yet, this evolution towards an interactive media environment has also raised questions about what counts as truth and where responsibility lies for actions of those who are not affiliated with any given news media organization. In other words, in some circles, citizen journalism has endured some pretty bad press, where the practice it seems 'does not mesh well with set notions of professionalism' (Spence & Quinn, 2008; Singer, 2010).

The extensive aim of this thesis is to interrogate the practice of citizen journalism from a broad perspective, examine claims and counter-claims that have been made about the practice to date, and in doing so, explore how the practice subsequently intersects with ethical issues relating to the generation of content for the news media industries. Yet – where or how should this wide level of inquiry commence? How best to broach this contemporary phenomenon which has at it nucleus, local and global horizons, detectable and non-detectable actors - new media and old media enthusiasts, amateur and professional ideologies, all colliding together - effortlessly. On the face of it, it would appear that technological determinism has finally won the day, and there's little else to be said about the practice - aside from accepting the narration from advocates, or indeed consenting to analysis from the critics. In this capacity then, the technological basis of citizen journalism, including understanding how new information and communication technologies have shaped and influence the practice must be a focus of inquiry. Indeed - any attempt to 'investigate' citizen

journalism cannot materialise without an exploration too of the attendant technologies that support and subsume the exchange of digital information on a global scale.

Other questions too equally exhibit a need for attention, such as where do citizen journalists converge and why? How do they communicate their message, through what avenues, and indeed, who is the message for? Moreover, what roles, if any, do established media organisations play in this process of message delivery? Is the practice of citizen journalism intrinsically influencing public sphere knowledge in the present day climate, or better conceptualised as a fad *de jour?* Are citizen journalists and new media technologies perhaps advancing the democratic project, aiding in 'the citizens right to be heard' and 'the publics right to know' or - indeed 'know more'? Equally, why such bad press for the citizen journalists and citizen journalism in a broad sense? What ethical standards serve then as their bedrock, or function as the basis in which moral actions are exercised?

A fitting way to approach these contemporary inquiries and concerns then is to observe citizen journalism acutely from the sidelines, and in doing so, critically engage with the issues, questions and 'problems' outlined. 'Citizen journalism' and 'the citizen journalist' must subsequently come under the microscope, and be observed 'in action' as it were. A news media event which took place during the research period of study acts as the primary catalyst for the exploratory study to get underway, functioning therefore as a method in which these inquiries can be engaged with in a meaningful manner. The study itself will appoint particular focus and analysis towards imagery produced by citizen journalists during this news media event, and in turn, critically assess the impact citizen journalism is having on photojournalistic practices - our present-day 'ways of knowing' or 'ways of seeing' in this 21st century.

Chapter Overview

Following on from the Introduction, Chapter One will situate the practice of citizen journalism within a theoretical framework thus reviewing relevant literature to the field of study. Drawing on mass communication theory, theories of the public sphere, new media and globalization theories, the trajectory and tradition of audience engagement and participation in the news flow process will be mapped out. The review will additionally chart emerging research and highlight a number of ethical challenges posed by the emergence of citizen journalism in recent times. This chapter concludes by outlining the research questions and hypotheses.

Chapter Two – 'The Twitter Revolution' examines the manner in which the Internet and the social networking site *Twiiter* was utilised by citizen journalists during the disputed presidential election campaign in Iran of June, 2009. The purpose of the analysis attempts to examine the role and importance of citizen journalism in a context of political repression and media censorship, whilst highlighting a number of ethical issues such as attribution and veracity regarding information that is accrued in this context.

In the third chapter entilted – 'Citizen Journalism – A Moral Maze', a short piece of camera phone footage depicting the death of a female protestor filmed during this period provides the basis in which the ethical dimensions posed by the practice can be examined in further detail. This study considers the moral dilemmas that the footage accentuated from the point of view of producers, editors and audiences. Moreover, this chapter underscores in a direct sense changing photojoutnalistic practices and ways of knowing in the current globalised media environment.

The fourth chapter's main concern or question is to deliberate upon what it means to be a citizen journalist operating in the 'digital age', and takes as it's central theme the afterlife of images in an online environment. Entitled, 'Image After Life in the Web 2.0 Age', the chapter engages with an image purporting to be that of the female protestor who had died during the political unrest in Iran, and examines the new contexts in which the image emerged. This chapter demonstrates the ease with which images and information can be freed from their origin context in the latest phase of Internet technology known as Web 2.0.

In the closing chapter - 'Everyone's a citizen journalist' - attempts are made through an online questionnaire to consult directly with those involved in the practice. The purpose of this exploration attempts to garner a keener sense of how citizen journalists view their role in the current media landscape, as well as providing a platform in which they can personally consider and respond to ethical issues and challenges experienced in the creation of UGC for the news media industries. The difficulties incurred with this method provide the basis for addressing key ethical loopholes associated with the practice – citizen journalism responsibility and accountability.

The final Conclusion Chapter discusses the general research questions, returning specifically to the claims and counter claims which have been advanced about the practice to date. This analysis is followed by a discussion of the hypotheses in relation to the findings from the main case studies. The overall strenghts and limitations of the study are profiled and recommendations for continued research in the field are outlined.

Literature Review

1.1 - Introduction

Few would argue with the notion that the institutions of the mass media - print media, radio, television or more recently the Internet play a significant role "in the spheres of politics, culture, everyday social life and economics" (McQuail, 2005: 4). John Scott & Gordon Marshall define mass media as large-scale organizations which use one or more of the mediums outlined above "to communicate with large numbers of people", thus the term 'mass media' emerges (Scott & Marshall, 1994: 391). How the media communicate with citizens or the ability for the 'masses' to influence and steer this discourse has a long history in mass communication theories.

While one of the central aims of this research is to examine the practice of citizen journalism as it intersects with ethical issues relating to the generation of content for the news media industries, it is necessary first to situate the practice within a theoretical framework. Although the concept itself appears novel, it is evident that much current discourse associated with the practice can be detected in earlier mass communication theories, where similar arguments have been deliberated upon regarding the nature and form of an ideal 'public sphere' and civil society. Additionally, new media theories too express familiar themes and arguments, in particular the concept that the Internet provides the basis for a more democratic or all-inclusive communicative environment to emerge. To surmise then, in order to trace these communicative theories, the literature review will initially address concepts of the public sphere and consider how mass media institutions relate to this liberal model. Of equal relevance in this discussion are political economy perspectives of the media. When political economy theory is applied to mass media institutions, meaningful exchange between media producers and audiences is questionable, in particular - the level of agency audiences can exert over media texts or their ability to

direct or participate in the news media agenda. Outlining the political economy perspectives will provide the basis in which theoretical positions regarding the Internet as an ideal public sphere can be explored then in some detail. Thus the question becomes how far does the Internet represent for its audiences a break with traditional practices of media consumption and participation.

Processes of globalization are also a focus in the literature review as no account of the media can fail to consider how the Internet in particular is advanced as a communicative medium which dissolves nation state borders and geopolitical boundaries. These lines of inquiry will provide the basis in which to then assess where the practice of citizen journalism sits within this broad theoretical framework and engender an opportunity to review emerging research in the field. Additionally the literature review draws attention to pertinent ethical theories and advances a number of ethical issues that the practice of citizen journalism has prompted in recent times.

1.2 - The Media as a Public Sphere

Central to debates surrounding the role of media in culture a primary concern lies in what media or mediums provide ideal platforms or frameworks for meaningful debate and public participation. In *Culture and the Public Sphere*, Jim McGuigan deliberates the vexing conundrum regarding democracy and the rights of citizens by asking the difficult question, "what are the conditions for achieving expressive citizenship?" (McGuigan, 1996:180). In a concise response he argues that democracy is about the rights of citizens, and all citizens should in short have a satisfactory means of communication. The concept of an informed citizenry has always been regarded as central to the functioning of democracies and it is because of this, "that mass media primarily in their information function have been hailed as the lifeblood of

democracies, pivotal for the functioning of healthy and vibrant democratic systems" (Gurevitch et al. 1991: 195).

In the liberal tradition mass media are seen as essential to the development of democracy and viewed as helping to secure rights of citizenship by disseminating information and a pluralism of views in society. Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks note "the public sphere is a concept which in today's society points to the issues of how and to what extent the mass media, especially in their journalistic role can help citizens learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what courses to adopt" (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991:1). Traditional liberal theory accords three positive functions to the media - to act as a watchdog over the state, thus acting as 'the fourth estate', to act as an agency of information and debate for citizens to participate in their democracy and of equal relevance, to act as the voice of the people to the state (Curran, 1991). Traditional liberals contest that the media should be based on a free market approach, since this would guarantee its independence from the state or party political affiliation, and contend that audiences are in a position to shape media discourses in as much as the media can be positioned as shaping society (Gurevitch et al. 1991; Fiske, 1989). The liberal view of the media has always been to suggest that the media reflect wider social realities in culture rather than purposefully constructing them.

Grounded in political theory, the public sphere concept advanced by Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (1962/1989) addresses key questions about what makes democracy work effectively. In this seminal text, Habermas examines the nature of citizens' participation in public sphere discourse, and deliberates on what role the media perform in advancing an informed citizenry. Modelled on the coffee houses and debating salons of eighteenth century Europe, for

Habermas the essence of the public sphere is a space between civil society and the state, one which is open to all citizens where activities of the state can be discussed and subjected to rational debate through the public use of reason. Periodicals and journals that arose from these discussions served also according to Habermas as an avenue in which "to inform the public of useful truths" (Habermas 1989: 25). The demise of this liberal model Habermas argued occurred " as soon as the press developed as a business in pure news reporting to one involving ideologies and viewpoints and became the gate through which private persons invaded the public sphere" (Habermas: 1989, 182-188). Highly critical of mass media institutions ability to engender rational debate and meaningful citizen participation, Habermas remarks "the world fashioned by mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (Habermas 1989: 171).

This Habermasian model has been subject to a large degree of criticism however and it is generally agreed that this prototype model was far too limited, restrictive and elitist to qualify for the august role for which Habermas has auditioned. A number of authors have argued that the Habermas model celebrated a golden age of bourgeois intellectuals which were complicit in the subordination of women and one in which class biases prevailed and patriarchal dominance existed (Garnham, 1990; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991; Fraser, 1992). To this end, the public sphere model advanced by Habermas was as much based upon citizen exclusion rather than inclusion. Media critic James Curran delivers a spirited attack on this model by pronouncing that Habermas "celebrates a Golden era that never existed" adding that " the newspapers celebrated by Habermas were engines of propaganda for the bourgeoisie rather than the embodiment of disinterested rationality" (Curran, 1991: 40 - 46). Equally, Jim McGuigan mirrors Curran's analysis by pointing out that, " the difficulty is that the

public sphere was originally conceived as an artefact of the modern nation-state, and was in practice, a restrictive class, gender and racial culture in the context of the geo-political hegemony of imperial Europe" (McGuigan, 1996: 179).

Raymond Williams, a key thinker and contributor to discourses associated with the role of the media in culture deliberated on what a system of free communication would look like. Adapting a radical liberal approach Williams outlines that public opinion is shaped through public and entertainment discourses as well as cultural pursuits. Most media output according to Williams, "are a way of talking together about the processes of our common life" (Williams cited in Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991: 33). For an enlightened citizenry to emerge Williams remarks that cultural institutions need to be democratized and decentralized for the conditions of free and authentic expression to materialize (Stevenson, 2002).

Williams support for a democratic public sphere shared some common ground with the utopian model advanced by Habermas; the main difference in approach however pivots upon the function of mass media communication systems in society. Williams argued that new mediums of communication, such as the press, television and cinema were capable of bringing about a democratic climate which responded to what citizens needed. In contrast, the demise of the public sphere according to Habermas occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century where the conditions of modernity - industrialization, urbanization, the growth of literacy and the popular press signalled its surrender to the control of capitalism. Rational public discourse was then seemingly supplanted as the independent press was transformed by the extension of the state, privatization and commercial concerns. Such developments resulted in a transformation of the public sphere where public opinion was no longer a process of rational discourse, but the result of publicity and social engineering in the media

(Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991; Stevenson, 2002). Another definitive complication associated with the Habermasian concept is that it fails to take into account the manner in which power is exercised through capitalist and dominant structures and consequently does not consider fully how the media relates to wider social strands in society.

1.3 - Political Economy Perspectives of the Media

Marxist analysis of mass media has long sought to emphasis the uneven power relations that prevail between media producers and their audiences and is chiefly concerned with issues surrounding ownership and control. Karl Marx's political economy theory is frequently applied in the analysis of how mass media function in society and arguably questions the ability for citizens to participate in public sphere discourse in any meaningful manner. Marx believed that Capitalism was an oppressive economic system because of the unequal distribution of wealth among powerful elites. In his seminal text, *The German Ideology* (1845) Marx famously argued, "the idea of the ruling classes are, in every age, the ruling ideas" (Marx cited in Strinati, 2004: 116). According to this stance, ideological positions are a function of class positions, and the dominant ideology in society is the ideology of its dominant class. Moreover, Marx argued that ideology works to produce a type of false consciousness amongst the masses where audiences are positioned as cultural dupes and destined only to subscribe to the established order of things (McQuail, 2005).

In Marx's political economy approach, a base-superstructure theory is conceptualized to account for the manner is which powers structures operate. The base-superstructure theory postulates that the base of a society is its mode of material production, the

economic system by which it reproduces itself and the source of exploitative class relations. In economism, the economic base of society is seen then as determining everything else in the superstructure, including social, political and intellectual consciousness. As Marx outlines, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness" (Marx cited in Strinati, 2005: 118). Mass media research in this tradition interprets the culture industries, including the media, in terms of their economic determination. Accordingly, "contents of the media and the meanings carried by their messages are primarily determined by the economic base of the organizations in which they are produced" (Gurevitch et al. 1982: 18). The theoretical approach of Graham Murdock and Peter Golding is seen as the most sustained case for a political economy of the media. Central in their thesis, based on empirical research, are issues of concentration where media ownership is centralized in the hands of a few major companies (1977).

Members of *The Frankfurt School*, which emerged in 1923, and led by a collective body of theorists such as Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin were particularly critical of the bourgeois intentions and ideological inherencies of mass media structures and set out to extend classic Marxist theory by examining the relationships between class, ideology and the media through a framework of neo-Marxist theory. Although the School remained committed to the main tenets of classic Marxism regarding ownership and control, they argued that Enlightenment theories and traditional Marxist analysis were too essentialist in nature. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Benjamin posits new technologies such as photography, film and print media as sources of enlightenment and progressive change - tools which would help to dilute the power

structures of the ruling elite. Considering art in particular, Benjamin argued that although the art object lost its aura with the advent of reproductive technologies, the same technologies made the art object accessible to all classes and not necessarily to elite members in society.

Less optimistic about the role of mass media in culture, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer coined the phrase 'the culture industry', referring to the collective operations of the media and famously noted "no independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973: 137). The main defining feature of the culture industry for Adorno was the notion of standardization, and such standardization referred not only to the products of the culture industry, but to how consumers performed and interacted with cultural and leisure pursuits. Consumers were predominantly advanced as passive or disengaged and wholly subservient to ideologies forwarded by the ruling bourgeois. As Strinati remarks, "the masses in Adorno's eyes, become completely powerless" (2004: 57). In a broad sense, *The Frankfurt School* analysis was ostensibly a radical critique of mass culture, demonstrating the crucial significance of the media in forming social consciousness and defining the limits of change under late capitalism.

More recently, those who subscribe to the powerful force of political economy theory argue that the news industries have been subject to a steady process of concentration and conglomeration, one that involves news being produced by minority groups of elite persons (Murdock 1982; Chomsky & Herman 1988; Garnham, 1990; Curran & Seaton 1997; Curran, 2000). In *Manufacturing Consent*, (1988), Chomsky & Herman for example firmly reject the view that the media enable the public to control the

political process by providing a pluralism of ideas, information or opinion, and argue instead that the media police the limits of debate in ways that protect the dominant conglomerate and state interests in society. In addition to reproducing class inequalities, media concentration is also considered to threaten cultural diversity by failing to represent the views and perspectives of marginalized groups in society.

1.4 - Challenges to the Political Economy Model

Although such perspectives draw attention to issues of political and economic interests in mass media institutions, classic Marxist analysis leaves little scope for human agency and ignores the variety of ways in which audiences can periodically 'resist' dominant ideological structures and ideas. Louis Althusser developed a structuralist approach in the analysis of Marxist theory and stressed that although the economic base remained a determining factor in how the cultural industries functioned, the interrelationship between ideological structures and the economic base should not be dismissed wholly. Accordingly, Althusser argued that ideological structures such as the mass media, maintain a relative autonomy from the economic determination of capitalism and rejected the notion of false consciousness advanced by Marx. Commenting on Althussuers attempt to rid classic Marxism of its economic determinism, Strinati argues that "we are still left with a theory which is neither one thing or another and again reinstates but does not solve the problem [...] the concept of relative autonomy does not resolve the problem of economic determinism." (Strinati, 2004: 140).

More recently the writings of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci have been seen as a way to overcome some of the problems of economic determinism prevalent in classic Marxist analysis of mass media. In this regard Gramsci attempted to enrich the traditional and sometimes aptly termed 'vulgar' form of Marxism with a sophisticated analysis of mass psychology (Femia, 1981). Hailing from a working class background, a member of the Italian Socialist Party, and a political activist, Gramsci was imprisoned in 1926 where he wrote his infamous 'Prison Diaries'. Strinati argues that Gramsci's "politics shaped his ideas directly in that they grew out of his political experiences and the political repression and hardship he suffered" (Strinati, 2004:145). Underlying Gramsci's entire critique was his desire to restore the possibility of conscious, creative human activity in the historical process" (Femia, 1981: 71).

In his writings, Gramsci conceptualized the theory of hegemony which emphasized the site of struggle and conflict between the ruling elite and the proletariat. A defining feature of Gramsci's hegemony theory stressed that those who are subordinated by dominant groups accept it as common sense or natural, yet, the position of subordination has come about in a willing manner, achieved through consent rather than coercion. In fact as Femia suggests, the notion of consent becomes so naturalized that "an individual can perceive no realistic alternative [...] and consent comes about almost from "a profound sense of duty" (Femia, 1981; 39-41).

The concept of hegemony can be applied in the analysis of a wide range of social struggles in society, and when considered in the context of mass media suggests that positions of domination are not fixed and finite, and that the hold over subordinated groups can never be fully guaranteed. In his regard, hegemonic theory with its

emphasis on struggle makes way for a degree of human agency and subjectivity in terms of how citizens relate to and negotiate within power structures and dominant ideological power structures in society.

Drawing from Althusser and Gramsci's resistance to classic Marxist analysis of mass media, a number of new schools emerged in the 1970's and 1980's which sought to rid classic Marxism from its wholly theoretical position regarding media ownership and control. Research which emerged from these schools sought to grant less primacy to political economy approach and to underline that audiences can in some cases resist the dominant ideologies by positioning media texts as a site of contested ground. At *The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*, the schools central figure Stuart Hall argued that the although the media appear to reflect reality, they in fact construct it for audiences. Shifting the emphasis towards audience reception of media texts, Hall conceptualized an encoding/decoding theory which argued that although the dominant ideology is typically inscribed as the preferred reading of media texts, a multiplicity of possible meanings could arise from any given media message, the most important of these being the counter hegemonic reading, or in Halls terms 'the oppositional reading'. Halls encoding/decoding model is seen an attempt to rediscover and rescue ideology from its conception as an oppressive force wielded by the ruling classes in the classic Marxist tradition of political economy theory. Equally however, Hall's model grants a degree of authority and freethinking to the audience, and as such, this autonomy advances audiences with a limited degree of 'consciousness'. In Halls model then, citizens are both aware of the dominant ideologies or messages advanced but are capable of resistance where determining factors of resistance might include, social, political or cultural backgrounds, experiences or knowledge. Yet, such

studies have also been the subject of ample criticism with Nick Stevenson remarking that Halls work places far too much emphasis on ideological workings of the media and fails to take ownership and control in to account (Stevenson, 2002). Generally however, such research has argued that a variety of filters such as audience attention, perception and retention of texts often resists producer intentions and steers audiences away from a wholly passive disposition in the media chain.

From the various strands of Marxist theory that attempt to make sense of how media organizations function is society, together with the agency that audiences command in this context, no account is conclusive or final. The political economy approach remains a dominant force however in terms of assessing how traditional mass media communication models operate in society and undeniably casts doubts upon the level of agency citizens have to steer and participate in public sphere discourse. Since the mid 1990's, and the advent of the Internet however, the work of Habermas has once again become relevant regarding the political impact of new information technologies and in particular the Internet as a forum which can revitalize a burgeoning public sphere. Discourses in new media theory frequently appoint this medium as one in which facilitates connectivity and interactivity, potentially leading to a new era for democracy and reform. It is against this background that dialogue associated with the practice of citizen journalism can be detected, a place where similarities begin to emerge. The Internet then, so oft framed as a democratic mode of communication when it comes to the nature and forms of interactivity and audience experience.

1.5 - The Promise of a Mew Medium...

Each time the media landscape changes debates regarding the capacity for new media to advance societal progress and empower citizens reemerges. Subsequently, many of the utopian and dystopian narratives regarding new mediums are again echoed in contemporary debates about the Internet. For theorists of the media, the Internet is frequently constructed as a political technology whose locus of power is the challenge it presents to traditional mass media forms and institutions. The Internet, as Martin Lister and colleagues outline has been heralded as the grand new frontier (Lister et al. 2003) and "is already seen as the new public sphere, leading, potentially to a new era for democracy" (Milioni, 2009: 412).

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan's arguments are at the core of claims that new mediums of communication foster frameworks for enhanced citizen agency, and is famously noted for adapting the view that new mediums act directly to change a society or culture. In McLuhan's analysis, new technologies have an autonomous power to create news societies or new human conditions and can be considered extensions of the human body (McLuhan, 1964). Another dominant concept underscored in McLuhan's theories advances the notion that new mediums represent the world in a more realistic and authentic fashion, more so than any other medium which has come before. Lister argues that McLuhan's ideas resonate directly in discourses surrounding new media and points out;

> McLuhan's all-at-onceness or simultaneity, the involvement of everyone with everyone, electronic media's supposedly connected and unifying characteristics are easy to recognise in many of the terms now used to characterise new media – connectivity, convergence, the network society, wired culture, and interaction (Lister et al. 2003:77).

Frequently cited as a technological determinist, McLuhan's work has great appeal for those who see new media as bringing about radical social and cultural change in society. Raymond Williams, a key critic of McLuhan opposes such an idea and argues instead that technologies develop as an outcome of human needs and intentions and examines the ways in which technologies are mobilised for certain ends. To illustrate his point, Williams argues, "for there is no way to teach a man to read the Bible which did not enable him to read the radical press" (Williams, 1974: 125). Williams sought to show that there is nothing in a particular technology which guarantees the cultural or social uses it may have and argued that technologies have uses and effects which are sometimes unforeseen by conceivers and developers.

Nonetheless, many of McLuhan's ideas have been taken up by a range of theorists interested in new media and the information society and advance the Internet through a thoroughly optimistic prism (Rheingold 1993; Poster, 1997; Bell, 1999; Urry, 2000). Daniel Bell discusses the Internet as an example of technological empowerment as "it provides enormous access to the cultural resources of humankind in a way never known before" (Bell, 1999: lvii). Howard Rheingold echoes Bells enthusiasm and has sought to theorize the activities of users online in terms of the Habermasian model and argues that virtual communities invoke new practices of citizenship (Rheingold, 1993). Broadly speaking, those who are optimistic about the Internet hold the view that this medium has the potential to disseminate information, rather than decentralise it, postulate that the Internet makes way for new interpersonal and interactive communication, which will invariably revitalise a citizen-based participatory democracy.

Singling out the adjective 'potential', Glolam Khiabany argues that "potential means nothing if it cannot be realized" and argues that "there is no reason to believe that once connected all citizens will be empowered and will conduct their social lives in meaningful ways (Khiabany, 2003: 146-147). Current research by media scholar Dimitra Milioni indicates that the public sphere perspective for approaching the Internet runs counter to Habermas' model (Milioni, 2009) while more recently, in an interview with *The Financial Times*, Habermas himself firmly rejects the notion that the Internet injects new hope for the public sphere and argues;

> the Internet generates a centrifugal force [...] it releases an anarchic wave of highly fragmented circuits of communication that infrequently overlap [...] but the web itself does not produce any public spheres. It's structure is not suited to focusing the attention of a dispersed public of citizens who form opinions simultaneously on the same topics and contributions which have been scrutinized and filtered by experts" (Habermas, 2010: 19).

It is within this context that James W. Carey famously characterized much of the literature that advances the Internet as somehow revolutionary as the rhetoric of the technological sublime. He argues that "to think technology as something operating abstractly outside of history, outside of the political and economic moment in which it is born, is to misunderstand both the possibilities and limitations of any given technology" (Carey, 2005: 447). Like older forms of mass media then, the Internet is also analyzed within a political economy model, with media theorist Manuel Castells noting that new media technologies simply reinforce old values of elitism and dominant social structures rather than necessarily transforming society (Castells, 1996). As early as 1995, media analyst Philip Elliot raised concepts of the digital divide and argued that not all information on the Internet should be levelled as educational and could even be described instead as infotainment (Laughey, 2007). Jim McGuigan reflects the political economy perspective by pointing out that "by the

early 1990's media corporations and transnational conglomerates were well advanced in planning the wholesale commodification of the actual and potential services of computer mediated communications" (McGuigan, 1996: 183). It is evident then that the Internet is not exempt from political economy forces and must also be appraised as a medium that is "structured and embedded into the antagonisms of capitalist society" limiting both "self-determination and participation" (Fuchs, 2009: 76).

Processes of globalization are bought in to sharp focus however in the presence of new media technologies, as unknown Internet users worldwide connect with one another across real time frameworks. The proliferation of satellite and cable television, online communication networks, coupled with omnipresence sophisticated digital technologies have bought about a transformation in the media landscape like never before. Since McLuhan launched the concept of the global village to describe how media technologies were fracturing barriers between different nations and changing societies over three decades ago, communication technologies in particular have occupied central stage in now familiar globalization debate. Information technologies and globalization are, as Khiabany has argued now seen as "the new messiah" (Khiabany, 2003: 140).

1.6 - A Local-Global Mediascape

Much still hangs on what or how globalisation can be understood as "there is no single theory on globalization"; rather there are competing theories where common themes can be discerned (Sparks, 2007: 126). Common motifs to the globalization debate are issues such as the breakdown of national boundaries, time-space compression, interconnectedness, real time communication, and the emergence of a

single global public sphere. Virtually all discourses associated with globalization place a sizable emphasis on the concept that information and exchange now takes place on a global scale and is no longer tied to nation state borders or bound by geopolitical boundaries. In the contemporary media environment, Colin Spark argues, "the nation state is simply no longer strong enough to put a boundary around a territory and a people and regulate all that they can do or watch" (Spark, 2007:137). Media scholar Sinnaka Sassi reflects this analysis by noting that "the public previously harnessed by the nation state and national borders have been corroded" in the current climate of globalization, and in response to such disintegrating tendencies, a global public sphere and a corresponding abundance of new publics have emerged (Sassi in Hacker & Van Dijk, 2000; Yang, 2003). Similarly, Kai Hafez (2007) argues that the Internet can now generate alternative publics; unite political actors and oppositional landscapes worldwide for a global civic society to emerge.

Within the field of mass media there is no longer a sharp dividing line between media content that is global and that which is national or local, while the Internet and satellite-based television news systems occupy central positions in this process. There is evidence that in an increasingly global communication environment that production of programmes, news and entertainment are no longer monopolized by media conglomerates and have undergone a dramatic decentralization process. Daya Thussu illustrates this heterogeneity by citing examples such as, Brazilian television being watched in China, or Indian films having a following in the Arab world, or drawing attention to the growing popularity and availability of news from *Al-Jazeera* in the Western hemisphere. Thussu thus suggests that the growing dissemination of non-Western media "can reduce inequalities in media access, contribute to a more cosmopolitan culture, and in the long run perhaps affect national, regional and even

international political dynamics" (Thussu, 2007: 4). Broadly speaking, such conditions too suggest a more democratic or all-inclusive media environment and advance ideal conditions for marginalized voices or alternative views to receive ample airtime in the news media agenda. Yet, despite such euphoric discourses, globalization itself does not suggest the end of media conglomerates or corporate dominance and it is argued that by virtue of preexisting ownership, major media companies stand to benefit most from globalization processes. In the spheres of news media for example, it is evident that the corporate structures and the pressures of world markets still persist and invariably impact upon news selection processes (Thussu, 2007; Sparks, 2007). Roberto Herrscher argues that although globalization has bought about a more diverse richness to the world, "the distribution of money, welfare, and power is as unequal as ever" (Herrscher, 2002:277). Consequently, Khiabany argues, "globalization is certainly not an equalizing process [...] the so called global media companies with their content and images, which link us to distant localities, do not exist out of the realm of commodities and economic interest [...] nor have the transnational nature of trade and economics made either nation states or regional blocs obsolete"(Khiabany, 2003: 139).

Focusing on the cultural dimensions of globalization Arjun Appadurai argues that no single theory can be applied when understanding the aggregated nature of a new global order cultural economy, and outlines that it has to be understood in terms of "existing center-periphery models " (Appadurai, 1996: 28). In Appadurai analysis, electronic media and mediation "transforms pre-existing worlds of communication and conduct ...[and]... neither images, nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound with local, national or regional spaces (Appadurai, 1996; 2-3). Coining the term 'mediascapes' Appadurai references the manner in which today's

electronic media propels local issues towards a global audience, prompting terms such as "glocal" or "glocalization" to emerge. (Hafez, 2007) Within these mediascapes "audiences around the world experience the media as complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens and billboards"(Appadurai, 1996:31) David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* defines this phenomenon as the "ravages of time-space compression"(1990: 293). In Harvey's review, "the whole world can watch the Olympic Games, the World Cup, the fall of a dictator, a political summit, a deadly tragedy" at once (1990: 293). Yet, the postmodern tempo of all such information is likened to that of the speed of light where all manner of information is consumed at " the twinkling of an eye" (Harvey: 1990: 288). Other postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard (1985) or Paul Virilio (1989) focus on the nature of speed and vision as two primary preoccupations of the globalised media experience which regulates everything from a distance in which societies are now saturated by real time media and information technologies that can facilitate this process.

In the globalised media climate, Colin Sparks argues that electronic media in particular are much less bounded by physical distance, characterized by speed and immediacy, and one single theme undoubtedly prevails - that of being in "persistent interaction and exchange" (Sparks, 2007:133). Commenting on the current global news media environment, Simon Cottle acknowledges this phenomenon adding that "news now breaks 24 hours a day [...] instead of at a leisurely pace" that prevailed before the rise of cable television networks and the Internet (Cottle, 2009: 34). A number of media scholars have argued also however that this scenario has "ushered in a new generation of viewers who, if not intentional news avoiders, follow a highly selective pattern of viewing that does not include news programmes " (Lee-Wright, 2008: 251; Singer, 2010). Moreover, Dueze et al. argue that such conditions have

challenged news organizations to extend their level of engagement with audiences as participants in the processes of "gathering, selecting, editing, producing and communicating news" (Deuze et al. 2007: 323). This very scenario, Seth Lewis and colleagues have argued provides the perfect setting for citizen journalism to develop and flourish (Lewis et al. 2010).

1.7 - Citizen Journalism – What's in a name?

User contribution in the news flow process has been around for longer than the Internet itself, in the form of letters to the editor, opinion polls or public commentary on news events. Other pre-digital esteemed events include Abraham Zapruder's footage of John. F Kennedy assassination in 1963, or George Holiday's videotaped footage of the Rodney King beatings in 1991. With the advent of the Internet in particular, opportunities for audience participation widened dramatically with websites such as *Indymedia* emerging in direct response to perceived shortcomings in mainstream news media coverage (Deuze, 2007). In the current media landscape, citizen journalism "a new breed of news making has been championed by various scholars [...] for its potential to empower the former audience by granting ordinary citizens a novel, hands on role" in the news-making process" (Anthony & Thomas, 2010; Robinson, 2009, 2009(b); Reich, 2008; Gillmor, 2006; Rosen, 2005).

It has been argued that still and video footage supplied by ordinary citizens during the London Underground bombings (2005) represented a paradigm shift in public attitude regarding the manner in which inexpensive digital imaging technologies such as camera phones could be utilised to engage more freely in the news flow process. This event according to research by media scholar Jackie Harrison "heralded a new era in the way ordinary people could report and recall witnessed events" (Harrison, 2010:

248). In the intervening years numerous other accolades have been added to the citizen journalism arsenal which include; images from Abu Ghraib (2004), camera phone footage from Suddam Hussein's execution (2006), the protests in Burma (2007), the Mumbai terrorist attacks (2008), Ian Tomlinson's death at the G20 summit (2009), or the coverage from the disputed presidential elections in Iran (2009). More recently still, citizen journalists have again being the subject of media attention and debate throughout the Tunisian Uprising (2011) and during the over throw of Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak in January 2011 (Abdalla, 2011; Whitaker, 2011).

From a mainstream perspective, "the *BBC* and *CNN*" are now cited as dominant 'players' in the citizen journalism market (Goode, 2009: 1289). Yet, a myriad of independent initiatives have emerged, the most recent of these is *Demotix*, a new citizen photojournalism website that subsumes UGC and redistributes it towards mainstream media spheres. *Global Voices*, as the name suggests, is another alternative initiative which aims to redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens' media with an awareness that seeks to represent marginalized voices in society. In tandem with such developments, citizen journalists increasingly use social media networking sites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Flickr* as personal platforms for dissemination of UGC, ideas and experiences.

In recent times then the practice has garnered a substantial degree of interest from media scholars, media professionals and academics alike. Emerging research has focused on the ways in which citizen journalism can be defined and understood and largely these inquiries regard the term itself as somewhat problematic, ambiguous in nature, and argue that different varieties of citizen journalism and participation prevail (Lascia, 2003; Outing, 2005). Along with what constitutes *as* citizen journalism, recent research indicates the term itself is utilised in an interchangeable manner. To

this end, it is common to see phrases such as 'open source journalism' (Dueze, 2001, 2007), 'people's journalism' (Merrill et al. 2001), 'participatory journalism', (Bowman & Willis, 2002) 'mobi journalism' (Kovačič & Erjavec, 2008) 'DIY Journalism' (O' Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008) 'street journalism' (Munthe, 2009) or 'user generated content' (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Lee-Wright, 2008; Thurman, 2008; Örnebring, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009; Harrison, 2010; Singer, 2010; Lewis et al. 2010) all employed in an interchangeable manner by different authors.

In an attempt to unpack some of the ambiguities surrounding the practice, Luke Goode turns attention to what the practice might include, and cites a range of activities such as "current affairs blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eye witness commentary on current events" (Goode, 2009: 1288). Hermida & Thurman incorporate a broader range such "polls, message boards, Have Your Says, comments on stories, Q&A's, blogs, reader blogs, your media, and your story" (Hermida & Thurman, 2008: 345). Nip, (2006) offers a typology of five models of audience participation i.e., traditional, public, interactive, participatory and citizen journalism, while Kovačič & Erjavec remark argue that "not all UGC can be defined as citizen journalism" (Kovačič & Erjavec, 2008: 876). Goode makes an interesting comment however about the practice and remarks that "the broader in scope the definition, the more nebulous and potentially unwieldy the term citizen journalism becomes" (Goode, 2009: 1288). Broadly speaking then, similar to the globalization debate, some common themes must be discerned from emerging research.

1.8 - Citizen Journalism - Claims and Counter Claims

From the corpus of emerging research, the rise of citizen journalism is widely seen as heralding a new era where ordinary citizens have the power to define and shape what constitutes as news, are subsequently empowered by this process and no longer advanced as passive and disengaged. Subsequently, a common thread across much recent research is preoccupied with the democratic possibilities that the practice engenders and reflects the notion that citizen journalism feeds "the democratic imagination" (Goode, 2009: 1292) by enabling ordinary citizens to participate, influence and contribute directly in the news flow process. Additionally, citizen journalism is advanced as a framework which may be significant in reengaging beleaguered audiences with the news, as well as challenging traditional institutional dynamics. (Lee-Wright, 2008). Such engagement, a number of researchers conclude, holds the promise for a more transparent public sphere to emerge (Pavlik, 2001; Gordon, 2007; Goode, 2009; Anthony & Thomas, 2010).

Another theme identified in emerging research suggests that citizen journalism present challenges to those who inhabit professional media spheres and the practice has the potential to undermine long held dominance by corporate media institutions. In *We the Media*, (2006), Dan Gillmor an early adopter of the practice, paints a compelling picture and argues that citizen journalism enables audiences to tell their own news rather than being dictated to by established media organizations (Gillmor, 2006). Moreover, a number of research initiatives have argued that in some instances, citizen journalism reportage potentially undermines mainstream media coverage and represents a way in which minority or marginalised groups in society can be finally represented in the media. (Robinson, 2009; Robinson, 2009b).

By examining what types of content some users are generating and their viewing contexts, a few studies are less optimistic and argue that citizen journalism incentives are often market driven, with a high level dependency on a major breaking news event, where mainstream media stand to benefit the most. (Kovačič & Erjavec 2008; Örnebring, 2008). Equally, far from the "bowling alone effect" suggested by research scholar Zvi Reich (2008), it has been argued that in order to gain journalistic credibility many citizen journalists actually seek to replicate formal qualities of journalism and will frequently link back to mainstream media platforms in a bid to reach out to a wider audience base (Thorsen, 2008; Messner & Watson DiStaso, 2008; Deuze et al. 2007).

In the professions of journalism and photojournalism, increased pressures for profitability, changes in media consumer behaviour, and new technologies have altered the media landscape like never before. Commenting on the current fiscal pressures facing media organisations Peter Martyn contends " in recent years, this pressure has often meant orders to do more with less, to produce more content of a greater variety, with fewer staff" (Martyn, 2009: 197). Accordingly, Goode argues that the political economy of citizen journalism is now in flux "with large-scale commerce and advertising dollars quickly encroaching in this area" (Goode, 2009:1289). He cites *Yahoo*'s purchase of *Flickr* or *Google*'s accusation of *Blogger* and *YouTube* as examples which indicate that market forces have begun to play an important role for media organizations which solicit for UGC. Moreover, the practice is also viewed as a framework in which large-scale media organisations can recoup losses and cut costs in the current global economic downturn.

While acknowledging the agency that new media technologies have engendered for individual users, Mark Dueze argues that news editors in the current climate are

increasingly expected to develop citizen journalism initiatives and incentives in a bid to reconnect to disappearing audiences spurred on by the presence of the Internet and fragmented globalised networks of communication (Deuze, 2007). Not surprisingly then a large focus for recent research in the field is directed towards how mainstream media organisations and professionals are coping with practice, adapting their roles and newsroom procedures, and examines the advantages and drawbacks of UGC within professional spheres. (Deuze, 2007; Gordon, 2007; Bivens, 2008; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Domingo et al. 2008; O' Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008; Thurman, 2008; Singer & Ashman, 2009; Lewis et al, 2010; Singer, 2010).

A number of media scholars accord that the "thirst to be the first" spurred on by the 24-hour non-stop news culture (Lewis & Cushion, 2009; Lewis et al, 2009) is a problematic element in the arena of UGC (Keith et al. 2006; Huxford, 2007; Bivens, 2008; Thussu, 2009). Commenting on this development, Cottle argues that nowadays speed means everything for news media organisations and "there is a growing sense that getting it first is more important than getting it right" (Cottle, 2009: 34) while content supplied by citizen journalists in this process is now regarded as a commonplace activity and an invaluable resource. Subsequently, it is here, in the arena of ethical discourses that the practice of citizen journalism appears most problematic and less easier to negotiate with Harrison noting that moderating contributions from the public "has proven to be one of the most time-consuming and resource-hungry elements of the UGC phenomenon" (Harrison, 2010: 250).

1.9 - Citizen Journalism – Ethical Dilemmas- Moderating Actions

Research scholars and academics alike frequently assert that new media technologies tend to fuel ethical debates in several professions, but most notably in the field of journalism (Deuze & Yeshua, 2001, Herrscher, 2002). While a large degree of recent research in the field advances the practice is a positive light, in the spheres of mainstream media, and evidenced from emerging literature, citizen journalism has been the subject of heated debate and viewed by some in a less favourable manner (Gaber, 2009; Slattery & Doremus, 2009; Steinman, 2009). Spence & Quinn (2008) remark "though it unfair to assume that citizen journalists are not ethically motivated, it is good to be sceptical of their awareness of reporting standards and effects that unintended departures from these standards can have on the social well being of news audiences and their communities" (266).

Underlying ideas about ethics and decision-making are grounded in classic philosophical theories about moral human conduct that emanate from the thoughts and writings of Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Ethics presupposes a human beings awareness of right and wrong and in their most concrete expressions, ethical standards are spelled out through codes and lists of rules (Wheeler, 2002). Immanuel Kant's landmark contribution to the field of ethics outlined that acting morally should be arrived upon out of a sense of duty. In *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)*, Kant's 'categorical imperative' outlined that one should act according to that maxim which you can at the same time will to become a universal law. Utilitarianism, and its principle architects, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham provide strong arguments in favour of moral ethical behaviour and their theories are not foreign to everyday decision-making carried out by photographers, journalists, editors and audiences alike. Unlike duty-based ethical

theories, utilitarianism's moral doctrine makes ample provision for the consequences of an act and presupposes that an action is right if it brings about the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Warburton, 1998). Considering such theories in light of existing policy documents as set out by the media industries, it is evident that issues of morality and how to 'act' underpin their very nature.

The evolution to a digital media environment has long raised questions about what counts as truth and in particular where responsibility lies for actions deemed inappropriate in professional journalistic spheres. With the emergence of digital photography in the 1980s for example, a surge of literature ensued regarding how to safeguard against image deception and manipulation in professional spheres. (Lester, 1990; Ritchin, 1990; Kobre, 1991; Belsey et al, 1992). In so far as the Internet and new technologies have offered tremendous scope and publication capacity for the news media industries, the same tools when utilised by those who do not inhabit professional spheres of journalism and photojournalism raise a new set of problems. According to Mark Dueze, the Internet poses a new set of ethical issues which include, the use of hyperlinks, the spread of disinformation, difficulties with accuracy and credibility, unidentifiable sources, privacy invasion and regulation, all of which are frequently cited when citizen journalism is debated upon in professional spheres (Deuze, 2001). Recent research reflects some of these concerns where it is argued that UGC and the practice of citizen journalism in a general sense has created a huge range of tensions for journalists and editors where key characteristic norms of quality, impartiality, accountability and veracity are often compromised or undermined (O' Sullivan & Heinonen 2008; Witschge & Fenton, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Lewis et al. 2010; Singer, 2010).

The general view is that these "potential news gatherers who have not been trained in journalism and committed to its standards for fairness, accuracy, balance" pose a risk to the professionalism of industry (Spence, 2008: 266). Similarly, research by Singer, who approached newspaper editors from Ireland, the UK and Scotland encapsulates the common response from professionals who frequently note that - although welcomed, UGC and the practice of citizen journalism poses a threat to long established journalistic norms (Singer, 2010). Moreover, as activities in the field intensify, recent research indicates that media organisations are now beginning to take a tougher stance on material submitted by citizen journalists by adapting their usual gate-keeping roles *vis-à-vis* moderating content or through direct editorial governance.

Despite the ethical misgivings that the practice has raised a number of authors argue that media organisation can no longer afford to ignore citizen journalism and *need* to incorporate it into their daily news routines, primarily as Singer and others have outlined - for fear of being left behind (Deuze, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Singer 2010). Lewis and Cushion argue that the inclusion of 'breaking news stories' is something that in fact now "defines" the 24 hour news culture (Lewis & Cushion, 2009: 305) and content supplied by citizen journalists in this process is regarded as a commonplace activity and an indispensable resource. Yet, being the first to relay the latest scenes from breaking news events unequivocally puts the business of contemplative reflection at a distinctive risk (Bivens, 2008; Thussu, 2009) while others have argued that reporting live from the scene of dangerous disturbances, riots or protests may in fact exacerbate these events (Tuggle & Huffman, 2001; Huxford, 2007).

Set against this expansive theoretical framework then, and drawing from an ever-growing corpus of emerging research and approaches, this exploratory study can now get underway, commence as it were, *vis-à-vis* the case study reviews. As underscored throughout the literature review, 'the promise' of a new communicative medium - from print journalism, to the invention of the camera, to radio, television, cinema, through to the Internet, has cultivated its fair share of polar discourses and indeed impassioned debate, utopian and dystopian narratives. A key concern for consideration and review throughout this study then must keep in mind - how far does the practice of citizen journalism represent for ordinary citizens a break with traditional practices of media consumption and participation. In turn too, through this process of exploration, a central issue needs continuous underscoring and referencing - that being - can citizen journalism be framed, conceptualised, understood and ultimately realised as a more democratic way of communicating in today's globalised media environment ?

1.10 - Research Hypothesis and Methodology

A primary concern for much scholarly research in the field has admittedly directed much attention and analysis towards how mainstream media are adapting and integrating the practice of citizen journalism into their daily newsroom routines. Concurrently such studies have reflected the ethical complexities that the practice ostensibly raises. Emerging research has also speculated on how the practice outwardly engenders greater agency for ordinary citizens in the news flow process and to a large degree, much of this euphoric discourse has its origins well placed in new media theory, in debates associated with the Internet, as well as borrowing aspects and snippets from the global media debate.

While a few studies have examined specific citizen journalism initiatives or concede that citizen journalism can engender a greater public understanding of a news story by providing more diversity to mainstream coverage, it has being discerned that much of this analysis tends to approach the practice in generalised or uniform manner. In this context, research associated with the practice fails to apply a systematic inquiry to events where citizen journalists acted as the primary source of information regarding a news event. In recent times, the success stories of citizen journalist have undoubtedly had a visual leaning, that is to say, photographs and video clips providing the soundest application of the practice in action as it were. Yet, much analysis around the practice fails to project or afford focus on photography and photojournalism practices, or indeed examine how the citizen journalists have the ability to challenge our ways of knowing in recent times. In light of these developments, this thesis takes as its primary aim an exploration of the following research questions through the subsequent case study reviews.

RQ1 - How are technological developments and globalization of the media environment influencing citizen journalism practices?

RQ2 - Has citizen journalism created conditions for a more transparent and democratic public sphere to emerge?

RQ3 - Do images produced by citizen journalist present new ethical challenges for photojournalism?

RQ4 - What ethical challenges does the practice pose and what frameworks lie in place for accountability?

This research will direct attention towards a specific news event which took place during the research study period in a bid to critically engage with a number of the main claims that have been forwarded about the practice to date. With mainstream media largely prohibited from recording events during the disputed presidential elections which took place in Iran on June 12th 2009, material produced and circulated by citizen journalists became the main source of information regarding the political unrest, in what has become known as "The Twitter Revolution". In the post election period citizen journalists produced a rich supply of material, including images, videos clips, through to personal accounts, all of which through a variety of online platforms were channeled swiftly across the Internet and were subsequently utilized by broadcast and print media outlets on a globe scale.

In repressive media environments individuals are frequently stripped of their communicative rights and it could be argued that Iran acts as an ideal framework in which to test the democratic claims associated with the practice, as well as critically engaging with the ethical issues frequently cited when the practice of citizen journalism is debated. In an attempt to probe the discourses that declared this event as a 'Twitter Revolution', the first of the case studies turns attention to the social media-networking site *Twitter* to observe the activities of citizen journalists on this site during the election aftermath. As well as engaging with commentary and analysis circulated by print media and online journalists who responded editorially to this event, this case study will employ qualitative content analysis of messages and posts observed on the social media networking *Twitter* throughout this period.

For the second case study, a short and controversial video clip created by an Iranian citizen journalist on June 20th, 2009, during the post election disputes will be employed as a method is which to directly assess the ethical complexities associated

with the practice. This case study explores the ethical issues that this clip has raised from the point of view of producer, editors and audiences who might have engaged with the footage.

Subsequent erroneous imagery which arose from this video footage will then provide the basis in which to assess the environment in which the citizen journalist operates. This case study will determine a variety of sources where the images were utilized, examine the notion of image after life, and postulate a number of reasons how this imagery so hastily became associated with the video footage, and indirectly with the practice of citizen journalism.

Finally, a short open-ended questionnaire will be circulated directly to citizen journalists in a bid to gain a broader understanding of how they view their role in the current media landscape. It is hoped that this questionnaire will primarily act as a forum in which citizen journalists can directly respond to claims that are advanced about the practice in a broad sense, while at the same time, this method will provide an opportunity for citizen journalists to respond to ethical challenges which they have faced in the creation of UGC for the news media industries.

The Twitter Revolution

2.1 - Introduction

The growing power and importance of citizen journalism has been well demonstrated during breaking news events, most prominently during the volatile political protests that succeeded the Iranian elections on June 12th, 2009. This chapter focuses on the role of citizen journalism during this period with specific emphasis on citizens' use of the social media site *Twitter* as a forum which enabled users to exchange information during a period of extreme political tension and uncertainly. The study acknowledges that citizen journalists contributed a great deal to the circulation of public opinion regarding this event, and to a large extent, due to professional media censorship, directly influenced the way mainstream media relayed accounts of unfolding events to global audiences. Professor Clay Shirky of *New York University* has since called what transpired in Iran, "as the big one, the first revolution that has been catapulted on to a global stage, transformed by social media, while others have hailed this event as 'The *Twitter* Revolution' (Shirky, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Johnson, 2009).

In so far as the activities of citizen journalists around this time proved an invaluable resource to Iranians and mainstream media organizations alike, the use of *Twitter* to gather information has also been the subject of ample criticism, raising a number of ethical issues surrounding a lack of professional normative values demonstrated in this context. How then did *Twitter,* and those who utilized it throughout this period measure up to time-honored professional standards? Worth noting too that such professional yardsticks have in fact 'become' the norm and indeed normalized through institutional practice. Unsurprisingly then, and perhaps skeptical of these new ways of working, a number of journalists and media commentators have forcefully denounced 'The *Twitter* Revolution', redirecting attention instead towards ethical issues regarding material which was published and disseminated in this context, thus

reflecting frequent criticisms associated with the practice of citizen journalism in a broad sense (Dyszyński, 2009; Heaven, 2009; Mishra, 2009; Palfrey et al. 2009; Barzegar, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2010; Weaver 2010; Gladwell, 2011; Morozov, 2011).

This case study initially contextualizes the Iranian media landscape illustrating the challenges posed in recent years by the arrival of satellite television networks and the Internet. Emphasis is then turned towards the *Twitter* platform in a bid to relay its main design features and structure, together with outlining the manner in which it is conventionally utilized by users. The key communicative functions that *Twitter* supported for citizen journalists during the elections disputes will then be discussed, while sample messages extracted from the *Twitter* service will support this content analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of *Twitter* will be outlined in a debate which follows, which serves to highlight a number of ambiguities that naturally arise regarding material circulated in this context. The chapter concludes with a discussion surrounding the nature of real-time news, the use of *Twitter* by mainstream media organizations during this period, and postulates if the medium is in fact sending out the wrong message about citizen journalists.

2.2 - Iran's quest for democracy and the role of the media

In order to acknowledge the importance of Iranian media and their role in fostering a democratic politics, it is important to look initially towards the current political system in Iran which in recent decades has been the subject of a dramatic transition. Democracy as a political system is attractive to many, and citizens in Western countries remain fundamentally free from arbitrary state repression enjoying many rights not shared by those under authoritarian rule. The complex democratic debate in Iran grows primarily out of demands for greater social freedoms and a resolute call

for a democratic political system that endorses fairness and transparency. The 1979 popular revolution that overthrew Shah Reza Pahlavi and saw the return of exiled of Ayatollah Khomeini marked a key turning point in Iranian political history with the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an end to the monarchy that had ruled mercilessly for decades. Thereafter a constitutional framework for government was set in place and a theocratic political system came into being. Within this system, although "riddled with contradictions and paradoxes" (Blankson & Murphy, 2007: 150), conservative and reformist factions primarily dominate, each harboring conflicting stances in terms of how the system should operate. Mehdi Semanti notes that while one camp seeks to make the Islamic Republic more pluralistic and to open the existing political system to a wider democracy participation, the other camp seeks to move beyond theocracy and the Islamic Republic by separating religion from politics within a new constitutional framework of a secular democracy (Semati, 2007). Although a parliament exists which in theory supports political transparency and a democratic civil society, on a higher level, the office of supreme leader has the ultimate governing power, appointing key positions such as the head of judiciary, the head of national radio and television, and the clergy members to the powerful and highly influential Council of Guardians.

One persistent confrontation between reformist and conservative camps centers on the media and the role they play in fostering a democratic public sphere. Ali Abootalebi argues that political and civil rights should not be understood as Western or non-Western ideals alone, but rather "as a universal right entitling individuals to shape their own future and be protected from an abusive government"(Abootalebi, 2000: 2). The limits of free speech in Iran are grounded in the constitution however with restrictions extending over a broad range of topics including religion and politics

where it is considered a crime to insult or defame the government and supreme leader. While Iranian citizens have struggled to protect these rights for over a century, periods of relative freedom have been followed by severe crackdowns over expressions of political dissent. One period of comparative freedom, characterized as the 'third republic', saw the presidential period of Mohammed Khatami from 1997 to 2005 as a term which reflected a renewed focus towards a more transparent and democratic political system. Although Khatami never fundamentally challenged the pillars of the Islamic Republic, his policies included prioritizing civil society, the rule of law, as well as increased political freedoms which were subsequently seen to energize Iranian's citizens with allegiances towards a secular democracy (Abootalebi, 2000, 2004; Aras, 2001; Blankson & Murphy, 2007).

In a recent report by *Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre* however the country is described as "the middle east's biggest prison for journalists" (May, 2009). Indeed, control of the press itself has become one of the central preoccupations of the conservative faction with numerous publications "closed through the judiciary enforcement of vaguely worded rules and regulations" (Samii, 1999: 3). Equally, Iran's only state-owned broadcasting body, the *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* is frequently criticized for its biased coverage of domestic and political issues, while fractional issues play a substantial role in print media closures, prompting one reformist newspaper in Iran to ask in their headline, "how should we write the news?" (Samii, 1999: 3). The difficulty with freedom of speech and the ability for the media to function as intermediaries between the state and civil society is therefore fraught with ambiguities and the regime definitively holds a distinctive advantage in managing public opinion.

In recent years, many Iranians have consequently turned to foreign Persian-language services to provide an alternative to domestic views. Currently there are approximately 30 Persian satellite television networks available in Iran which the government has made no serious effort to curtail. Semanti argues that satellite networks have become "the potential to act as a surrogate for Iranian civil society" but cites the Internet as an ideal forum which has opened up social, political and cultural spaces to Iranians in a way never experienced before (Semanti, 2007:153). Similar analogies are cited in countries such as China, North Korea, Burma, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Vietnam or Cuba (Allen & Johnson, 2009). Like Iran, the Internet therefore functions as a 'space' or 'place' where citizens who are subjected to authoritarian rule on a day-to-day basis can potentially exercise freedom of speech in a more liberal fashion. Moreover, the same communication technologies have become powerful tools for political mobilization, resistance and citizen participation in political discourse.

2.3 - Internet use in Iran – A force that no state can afford to ignore

The regime's ability to exercise control over public sphere discourse through state-owned mass media systems has in recent years suffered a substantial setback with the arrival of the Internet. The demographic structure of Iran is frequently cited as playing a pivotal role in Internet usage, where it is estimated that currently more than 70 percent of Iran's population were born after the 1979 revolution, and of it's 69 million population, 67 percent live in urban areas (Rahimi, 2003; Blankson & Murphy, 2007; Semanti, 2007). Rahimi argues that this young population, many of whom are part of Iran's university system utilize the Internet "in search of new ways to express themselves [...] especially women who are finding in blogs an alternative medium for expression that is denied to them in real public spaces" (Rahimi, 2003:3). Equally,

migrating to the Internet has been one way that many journalists, writers, and pro-reformist activists have resisted state-imposed sanctions on the freedom of speech. In so far as the popularity of the Internet represents a troubling trend for Iranian state officials, the same medium functions as a platform that simultaneously engenders political and economic benefits for the nation state, whilst acting as the ideal forum in which "to spread the word of the prophet" (Rahimi, 2003: 4). Moreover, authoritarian regimes are also eager to employ the Internet for their own brand of political activism, since if dissidence is channeled through cyberspace; monitoring such activity is conclusively easier to track. (Palfrey et al. 2009).

With over 23 million Internet users in Iran and an estimated 60, 000 active Persian web blogs, a number of media scholars have argued that this is a force that no state can afford to ignore (Rahimi, 2003; Semanti, 2007). While the Internet is technically harder to control than traditional mass media platforms, efforts to do so got under way in 2001 when the state started putting pressure on Internet Service Providers to filter and block specific websites as well as deploying a technical filtering system that currently requires all Internet Service Providers to route through state-controlled gateways (*OpenNet Initiative*, 2009). The *OpenNet Initiative* report outlines that Iran now deploys domestically manufactured technical filtering facilities and joins China as the only other country in the world that filters the Internet using their own technology. Attempts to filter content circulating online intensified in 2006 when *The Ministry of Communications and Information* issued an order which declared that high-speed broadband connections are no longer deemed necessary for household use or public use in Internet cafes, although exceptions prevail for the purposes of business and academia (*Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre*, May, 2009). This policy therefore restricts the ability for private Internet users to upload or download

larger files such as multimedia content, images and video in a timely fashion, and is likely to hinder access to online alternative media sources that might compete with tightly controlled state-owned media (*OpenNet Initiative*, 2009).

Existing laws that govern print publications, newly developed Internet laws and criminal laws now dictate the manner in which Iranians negotiate the Internet on a day-to-day basis. *Iran's Human Rights Documentation Center* recently outlined testimonials from numerous journalists and web bloggers who have been put under house arrest, detained, imprisoned and subsequently tortured for perceived dissident online activity or for speaking out against the regime (May, 2009). Despite the Internet frequently being advanced as an unfettered medium of communication in the West, it is apparent that such enthusiasm is questionable in restrictive communicative environments such as Iran. Equally in China, Korea or Burma, similar situations prevail where registrations, filtration, government censorship and cooperative Internet Service Providers all serve to manage Internet content and use (Allen & Johnson, 2009).

In spite of such intense difficulties however, the Internet has been enthusiastically adopted in Iran as earlier statistics outline, and in a broad sense, functions as a medium which is able to withstand censorship tactics more so that other traditional mass medium. *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center* notes that regardless of complications Iranian Internet users experience, they continue to navigate the maze and finds ways around the regimes efforts to suppress, alter and control (May, 2009). Internet activity during the disputed presidential elections in June 2009 definitively substantiates these claims where an endless succession of online activity from Iran's citizen journalists sought to expose state sponsored violence and perceived electorate corruption.

With international media forbidden from covering unfolding events, the social media site *Twitter* became the most formidable avenue for channeling communication from the nation state, while material produced by citizen journalists acted as a primary resource for international audiences to engage with. Commenting on the Iran elections prominent journalist and blogger Andrew Sullivan argued that "this is the first revolution that has been catapulted onto a global stage and transformed by social media" (*The Sunday Times*, 21-06-09), while *Twitter* became a major 'talking point' and resource for many mainstream media organizations attempting to relay accounts of the unfolding political unrest. Before addressing the nature of how *Twitter* was unlisted by citizen journalists and mainstream media organizations throughout this period, an overview of the sites' infrastructure will be briefly profiled.

2.4 - What's Happening on Twitter?

According to a *Nielsen Report*, in the past year, *Twitter* use has grown by 1298 percent with the amount of users set to rise expotentially in the foreseeable future (Arceneau & Schmitz Weiss, 2010; Johnson, 2009). Since its introduction in early 2006, users have adapted *Twitter* for a myriad of personal functions, and the site was used extensively to relay accounts of unfolding events during the Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008, or during Moldova's elections in 2009 (Spicer, 2009). Additionally, *Twitter* has been propelled onto the international media stage most prominently for regularly being the first forum to relay images and accounts from breaking news events such as the plane that crash-landed on the Hudson River in January 2009. The online social media platform combines elements of text messaging and blogging into one, and is primarily understood as a micro-blogging platform. Initially designed for messages to be shared via SMS (Short Message Service), the maximum length of any given message or 'tweet' is 140 characters, and this character

limitation continues to prevail. More recently, users have begun to find a route around the character limitation, employing *Twitter* as a pointing device by posting abridged URL's within a message or tweet that link up to other web pages.

The central feature of *Twitter* which users encounter when they log in is a live stream of tweets posted by those they follow, listed in reverse chronological order which serve to privilege "the instant and the now " (Walker Rettberg, 2009:454). A user who is being followed by another does not necessarily need to reciprocate this action and users have different strategies for deciding whom they follow. The service itself is free for anyone to join with notable political figures such as Barrack Obama or Al Gore frequently posting updates regarding "What's Happening? " - *Twitter*'s main tag line question. Every prominent media organization that supports and subsumes UGC has a *Twitter* presence and have adapted this platform as a tool for interacting directly with their audiences as **Fig 2.1** illustrates.

Figure 2.1 - The BBC_HaveYourSay *Twitter* Account- A prototypical request for audience interaction

Various other behavioural conventions have developed over time and have become inscribed in the *Twitter* technology. These include the 'at' symbol [@)] which directs messages at specific users on the public stream, or the hash tag symbol [#] which is utilized to mark tweets with topical keywords, such as #Iran Election. Retweeting or

RT is another convention that has emerged over time and is concerned with the retweeting or rebroadcasting of a message by another user. The retweeting feature can result in a user gaining a broader understanding of a conversation unfolding on the public timeline, while at the same time, users who encounter retweets need not necessarily partake in the conversation. Thus - retweeting presents opportunities to observe and potentially interact with unknown users worldwide. Users who follow one another can also available of *Twitter*'s direct message service or DM, and although the character limitation prevails here also, direct messages are private and do not appear on the public timeline.

Particularly unique to *Twitter* is the notion that the website itself can still be accessed even if the *Twitter* hosting website is restricted or blocked and users frequently navigate it through countless other aggregated applications available for mobile phones such as *Seesmic, TwitterFon, Twit2Go , Echofon*, or *Tiny Twitter*. This precise scenario provides a plausible explanation regarding how information and accounts of the post election disputes managed to circulate online in the presence of strict media censorship during the presidential elections in Iran of June 2009. Roshan Norouzi an Iranian photojournalist writing for *The Digital Journalist* illustrates the extent of censorship and the role of citizen journalists in the following passage;

> I tried to take photos of street protests but it was really hard. When I saw other photographers' photos from protests, I could do nothing but praise their courage. [...] The government announced that reporters were not allowed to cover non-official events. It was bad news for the Iranian media and especially me. I wasn't able to shoot any photos after the election. But, the government wasn't able to shut down citizen journalism. Before violence shut down the protests, protesters themselves published their own videos and photos taken with mobile phones and amateur equipment. Getting the news out to the world in this way, we saw a different way to make journalism in Iran (*The Digital Journalist*, July 2009).

This different way to make journalism that Norouzi refers to is particularly significant because information which did emerge from Iran during this period originated primarily from citizen journalists on the ground, while simultaneously in many cases, bypassed 'professional' editorial governance via the *Twitter* platform. Equally, this same information transpired to be *the* primary source of information that international media organizations could utilize to relay accounts of events transpiring in the nation state. Furthermore, Chris Dyszyński (2009) for *Just Journalism* reports "the information coming out of *Twitter* was not just published as it was; it was refined into a narrative", while a number of other media commentators championed the event as 'The *Twitter* Revolution' (Sullivan, 2009; Shirky, 2009)

Although this affirmation has been challenged in the intervening period, it has been discerned that *Twitter* supported five dominant communicative functions throughout this time, acting as a gateway to aid citizen journalists in Iran, diaspora communities globally and mainstream media internationally. Dyszyński argues that material produced by citizen journalists during this period does however "raise traditional questions about how journalistic standards are maintained" - a by now familiar mantra when citizen journalism is discussed in professional spheres (Dyszyński, 2009). Before engaging with this obvious concern, a number of sample *Twitter* posts illustrating the dominant communicative functions supported by *Twitter* during this period will be profiled, and later the case study will engage critically with the concept of 'The *Twitter* Revolution' and material produced by citizen journalists during this period.

2.5 - The Twitter Revolution under the Microscope

More than any other election since the formation of The Islamic Republic in 1979, the June 12th 2009 general elections were characterized by an intense degree of tension and anticipation, with many Iranian citizens yearning it to usher in a new political administration. Perceived irregularities that gave conservative electorate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a sixty three percent landslide victory over his main reformist opponent, Mir Hossein Mousavi drove thousands of Mousavi supporters in protest to the streets, most prominently in Iran's capital, Tehran. In the run up to the Iranian 2009 election campaign, many reformist websites, foreign blogs and social media sites such as *Facebook, Flickr* and *YouTube* were all sporadically blocked, but once election results were issued and the protests began, censorship tactics by the state intensified. Due to it's robust architecture, *Twitter* functioned as the platform less susceptible to censorship and blocking tactics and subsequently became the primary source for circulating information emerging from the nation state.

The Social Media Guide - *Mashable* estimates that the hashtag, #Iran Election was generating 221,744 tweets per hour in the immediate aftermath of the election results, a figure which peaked on June 17th (Parr, 17-06-09). Although such assessments have been contested it is evident that a vast amount of discourse concerning the elections was generated in the wake of results being declared. A quantitative analysis of tweets associated with 'Iran Elections' on *Twitter* carried out by the *Web Ecology Project* attests that in the first eighteen days alone, post election, 480,000 users contributed to the conversations that emerged online (2009). Throughout this period, the researcher 'followed' multiple users on *Twitter* who posted information regarding events that were transpiring in Iran. Although posts affiliated with the elections were easily identifiable via the hash tag #iran election, the volume of material emerging on the

public time line was overwhelming. By way of example, a key user identified by *The Web Ecology Project,* '@dominiquerdr', in the first eighteen days, post election results, posted 12,584 tweets. This equates to approximately 700 messages a day, while this user has to date, posted 129,023 tweets as illustrated in **Fig 2.2**. Subsequently, due to the chaotic nature of material emerging on the public time and the sheer magnitude of data, random screen grabs were taken in a bid to discern what primary communicative functions *Twitter* supported during this period for citizen journalists. These tweets were later assessed by the researcher and have subsequently been categorized into five dominant themes outlined.

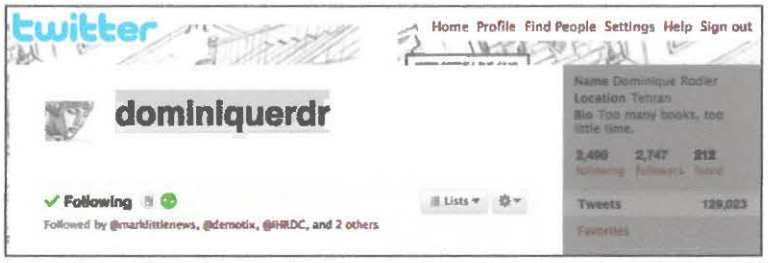

Fig 2.2- Twitter User @dominiquerdr

1. **Twitter functioned as a forum for citizen journalists to channel accounts, still and video representations of unfolding events in Iran.**

Despite the dangers and difficulties encountered by Iranian citizens on the ground, new digital imaging technologies, camera phones and the Internet enabled users an opportunity to relay vivid representations and accounts of events as they unfolded. On *Twitter*, the 140 character limitation for each post meant that users shortened URL's, redirecting audiences instead to other social media networking sites such as *Flickr*, *Youtube* and *Facebook* or alternatively towards personal web blog pages. The utilization of this strategy therefore acted as a pointing device, enabling global audiences the opportunity to potentially view multiple sets of images and video clips

pertaining to the hash tag #iranelection. **Fig 2.3** illustrates an example of the 'tweet' structure itself where an abbreviated message draws immediate attention to a shortened URL containing an image of people in Tehran being beaten by the police. The message is accompanied by the hash tag #iranelection and the hash tag #iran, denoting its affiliation with the election disputes. The use of abbreviated text such as 'Ppl' as opposed to 'people' serves two purposes. The first of these is to keep the message as short as possible, thus adhering to the 140 character limitation, while at the same time, a short message presents opportunities for another user to retweet or rebroadcast the message to their followers and still remain within the 140 character limitation.

Figure 2.3 – Shortened URL to images of police violence

Requests for images and video clips of the protests were also administered through this network as outlined in **Fig 2.4**, while additionally the forum functioned to remind those partaking in protest marches to record such events using mobile phones as set out in **Fig 2.5**. Worth noting also is that **Fig 2.5** has been sent from a 'mobile web' application and not from a desktop application, while the message content indicates that the request for "everybody try to film as much as possible on mobiles" is directed at Iranian protestors taking part in marches in the nation state.

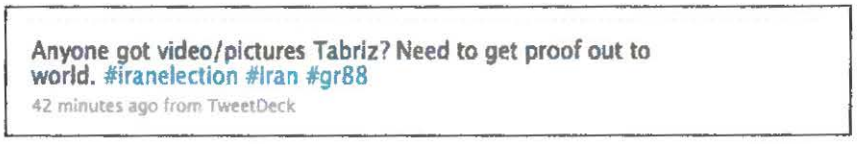

Figure 2.4 – Request for images and video clips

Figure 2.5 – Request for protestors to record events on mobile phones

2. Twitter functioned as a channel to mobilize Iranian diaspora communities

According to a *Migration Information Source* report published in 2006, the Iranian diaspora was estimated to be between 2 million and 4 million people around the world; a population that has a "well-established presence on the Internet" (Hakimzadeh, 2006). In September 2001, an Iranian journalist, Hossein Derakhshan, residing in Canada, outlined instructions on his website regarding how to set up a web blog and it has been argued that this simple innovation alone, which spread swiftly online, lead to an explosion of Persian web blogs internationally as well as within the nation state. Outside of Iran, a number of diaspora websites such as *Tehran Bureau* also served as portals for accumulating and disseminating information regarding the election protests. It is evident that citizen journalists in Iran were critically aware of how diaspora communities globally could be enlisted to circulate accounts regarding events transpiring in their country, advancing their cause, as well informing these communities of the political unrest in a direct sense. Haleh Afshar writing for *The Guardian* argues that it definitively "falls on the diaspora to disseminate and broadcast the information coming through" (Afshar, 24-06-09).

Twitter thus functioned as a platform where links to prominent images and videos were posted; acting a forum also in which instructions for assistance were frequently posted and re tweeted. **Fig 2.6** illustrates a request of this nature where the user @oxfordgirl is reaching out the diaspora community and outlining ways in which the political situation in Iran could be catapulted on to the international news media

agenda. The tweet itself is also a retweet and has been sent from a source where an Internet connection is not blocked. This can be discerned from the use of the application *Seesmic Desktop* which is an application for desktop computers as opposed to a mobile phone application, and subsequently relies on the *Twitter* hosting page in order to function.

Figure 2.6 - Request for help from the diaspora community

Additionally, the diaspora community were mobilized through tweets which outlined protest march meeting points and times for international audiences as outlined in **Fig 2.7.** Also worth noting is the continued use of the hashtag #iranelection displayed in green which is prevalent is every post outlined below.

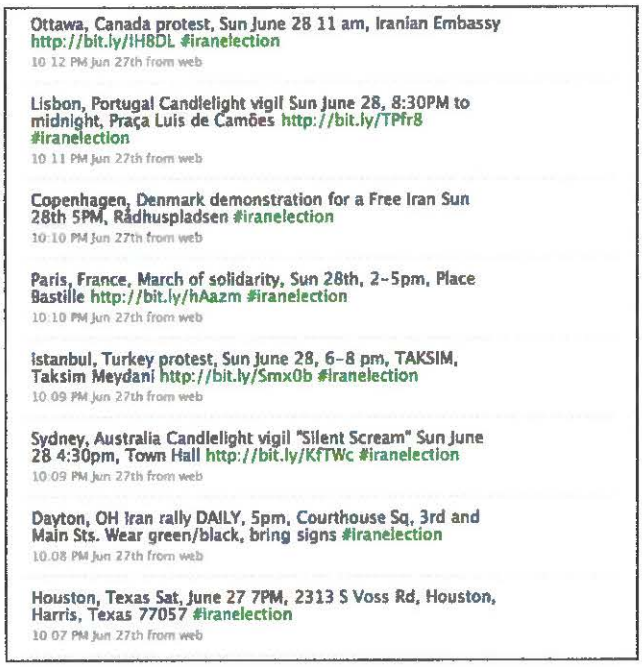

Figure 2.7 – Tweets outlining locations and times of protest marches globally

3. Twitter functioned to propel international media attention towards the political unrest in Iran.

With practically no professional coverage permitted from the ground, citizen journalists amplified their circumstances on *Twitter* illustrating the power of citizen journalism to influence mainstream media discourse thus ensuring that established news sources broadcast reports on the election disputes. Journalists and media commentators have also argued that due to its 'real time' infrastructure *Twitter* gave a "truer sense of the breaking story" as opposed to any other media platform (Barnett, 2009; Hegarty, 2009; Jarvis, 2009). In the immediate aftermath of the election results, it was rapidly acknowledged on *Twitter* that the cable television network *CNN* failed to provide ample initial coverage of the political unrest prompting *Twitter* users such as @mistabaka illustrated in **Fig 2.8** to post a message directly to @CNN_Newsroom and @cnn questioning their lack of live coverage regarding unfolding events.

Figure 2.8 – Tweet directed at *CNN* regarding lack of coverage

These actions seemingly stimulated controversial discussions on *Twitter* and beyond, generating so much discourse, that *CNN*'s lack of coverage became a trending topic on the *Twitter* homepage; a trending topic denoting what the most discussed themes are on *Twitter* at any given time. Subsequently users began to include the hash tag #cnnfail in their tweets as illustrated in **Fig 2.9**, prompting *CNN* to dedicate more airtime to the political unrest taking place. Gaurav Mishra for *World Focus* commenting on this development noted;

The #cnnfail meme on Saturday, which basically asked why the protests were not on the front page of *CNN* — that's a very clear example that the activists know what they're doing. They're using *Twitter* to focus international attention on Iran, and to put this on the media's agenda (Mishra, 18-06-09)

Figure 2.9- Tweet illustrating the #CNNfail hashtag

Figure 2.10 – Retweet outlining lack of *CNN* coverage in United States

Figure 2.11 – Tweet outlining *CNN* requests for material from citizen journalists

4. Twitter was deployed as a channel in which Iranian citizens outlined state media censoring.

Immediately after the election results were issued almost every mainstream media organization ran with the story that opposition members had being arrested in Iran, newspapers were being censored and reports circulated that Internet sites were being monitored and blocked. With many journalists restricted, detained or arrested, reports of censorship became *the* focus for the news stories as mainstream spheres turned to *Twitter* to get a sense of the unfolding events in Iran. The focus for relaying accounts of the censorship worked to fill gaps prevalent due to professional media restrictions,

with material supplied by citizen journalist serving as invaluable resource. Messages posted on *Twitter* accounts confirmed also the extent of the censorship endured by Iranians, with users indicating specific websites that were blocked together with outlining the difficulties experienced in accessing the Internet in a general sense (**Fig 2.12- Fig 2.14**). Additionally, much of this information was quickly circulated by the retweeting of posts (**Fig 2.15 -Fig 2.18**) enabling Iranians to navigate and gain access to web sites that were intermittently blocked.

Figure 2.12 - Tweet outlining professional media censorship

Figure 2.13- Tweet outlining censorship

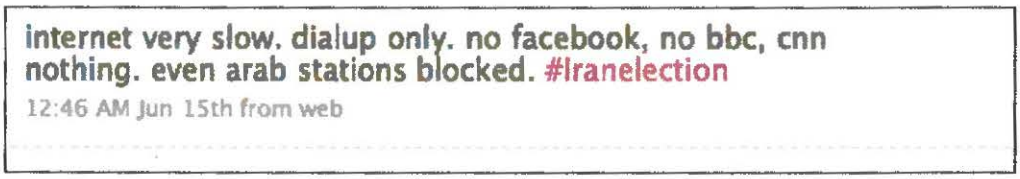

Figure 2.14 - Tweet outlining censorship

Figure 2.15 - Retweet outlining censorship

Figure 2.16 - Retweet outlining mobile phone censorship

Figure 2.17 - Retweet outlining print media censorship

Figure 2.18- Retweet warning users not to trust state media

5. Twitter was deployed as a channel that enabled global audiences an opportunity to engage with and offer support to Iranians in a period of political unrest and uncertainty. Support received outside the nation state also worked to disrupt state media censorship of the Internet.

Censoring of the Internet intensified in the days that followed the election results as more and more users began using *Twitter* as an avenue to express political views and circulate accounts of the political turmoil. A key tactic deployed by the Iranian government was slowing down Internet speeds to a crawl, functioning to prevent the upload of images and videos in particular.

Figure 2.19 - Tweet outlining a back up plan if Internet goes down

The 'backup plans' as mentioned in **Fig 2.19** primarily took the form of requests by Iranians for external proxies, an example of which is outlined in **Fig 2.20** below. These proxy servers enabled users to 'share computers' with anonymous strangers for content that the user was unable to reach by themselves, enabling continued access to the Internet, yet, permitting Iranian users to be unidentifiable to the authorities (Anderson, 2009; Ledwith, 2009).

Figure 2.20 – Tweet requesting Proxy Addresses

James Cowie of *Renesys Blogs* outlines that open web proxies are valuable commodities in places where it is forbidden, and possibly dangerous to surf the Internet (Cowie, 22-06-09), and as restrictions continued, requests for proxies increased. Many of these proxy addresses were passed through the Direct Message or DM service available on *Twitter* in order to avoid the scrutiny of the authorities. Proxy addresses that users had received through DM were then posted on the *Twitter*'s public time line; but instances of this became less frequent as censoring intensified. Outlined in **Fig 2.21** are proxy addresses posted on the public time line by prominent *Twitter* user Stephen Fry. With more followers than *CNN* on *Twitter*, Fry's tweet could circumvent the globe at an alarming pace (**Fig, 2.22 & 2.23**).

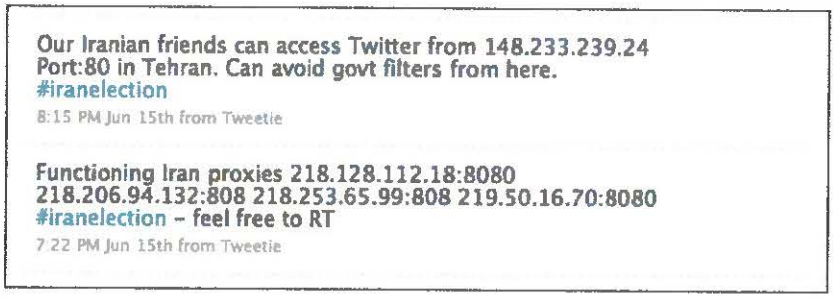

Figure 2.21 – Tweet from Stephen Fry with proxy addresses outlined

Figure 2.22 – Stephen Fry's account on *Twitter* outlining amount of followers

Figure 2.23 – *CNN*'s account on *Twitter* outlining amount of followers

As illustrated in the Stephen Fry post, proxy's outline in a very direct sense cooperation and assistance from users outside of Iran while a number of other strategies also emerged when *Twitter* too became the victim of increased censorship tactics by Iranian authorities. The first of these was that many users changed the

location on their *Twitter* homepage to Tehran, and subsequently modified their time zones from GMT to Tehran local time (**Fig 2.24**). Although it is not entirely clear if this manoeuvre worked, the principle idea behind the request was intended to overwhelm those censoring and monitoring *Twitter* and an attempt to trick Iranian authorities in to thinking that the messages were originating from Iran. The principle of the conjecture presupposed that if every user was potentially from Tehran, it would take authorities longer to crackdown on perceived dissident activity, and work to 'buy time' for Iranians who were relaying information regarding events that were transpiring to fellow citizens and to global audiences. Users who cooperated with any of these requests, regardless of their effectiveness, were perceived as acting in solidarity with Iranians and numerous messages posted on *Twitter* illuminated this perspective.

Figure 2.24 - Tweet requesting that users change their time zones and location

Another key event that indicated intervention and solidarity with Iranians was illustrated when U.S. State Department officials contacted the social networking service to urge it to delay a planned upgrade (**Fig 2.25**). More recently, in an interview with *BBC NEWS*, one of *Twitter*'s co-founders Evan Williams argues against this affirmation stating;

there were many people who asked us to do that, including someone from the State Department, but that's not why we did it. We did it because we thought it was the best thing for supporting the information flow there at a crucial time, and that's kind of what we're about - supporting the open exchange of information. (*BBC NEWS*, 06-08-2009)

Figure 2.25 – Tweet requesting *Twitter* Upgrade to be delayed

2.6 - Twittering Citizen Journalists

Although this brief evaluation provides insights into ways in which *Twitter* was utilized during the post election disputes, it is important to acknowledge that a variety of other social media sites were also harnessed during this period. For example, a *Facebook* group entitled, *100 Million Facebook members for Democracy in Iran* also acted as a primary portal for content created by citizen journalists and continues to operate and recruit members globally. The purpose of the analysis however was to illustrate the dominant communicative functions supported by *Twitter* during this period and it is apparent that citizen journalists in Iran, mainstream media internationally, diaspora communities on a global scale, and audiences world wide mutually benefited in this process. Chris Atton's definition of citizen journalism as " a philosophy of journalism and a set of practices that are embedded within the everyday lives of citizens, and where media content that is both driven and produced by those people" is pertinent in assessing the relationship between Iranian citizens, global audiences and mainstream media spheres illustrated throughout this period (Atton, 2003: 267).

It is evident that *Twitter* brought a new level of interconnectivity and integration to information coming out of Iran, tying together numerous forms of new media and magnifying their reach, while its "public timeline made it a superior way of accessing

information" (Grossman, 2009, *Time Magazine Online*). From a broader perspective, the activities of citizen journalists during this period, together with the use of *Twitter* reflect almost in a tangible manner the positive themes associated with the globalization debate. Some of these include, the utilization of new media technologies by marginalized and suppressed groups to propel national issues onto an international media stage, thus reflecting key concepts associated with an ideal global public sphere. Additionally, the manner in which diaspora communities responded to these events through the *Twitter* platform supports the idea that new media technologies can create conditions where nation states no longer exert complete control over it's citizens by regulating "all that they can do and watch" (Sparks, 2007:137). McLuhan's concept of the global village can appropriately be aligned in thinking about the manner in which unknown users connected and exchanged information via the *Twitter* platform on an international scale, while many of the conversations surrounding *Twitter* mirror in a direct sense the euphoric discourses which advance the Internet as a democratic forum which engenders new levels of connectivity's and agency for individual citizens.

Yet, critical attempts to engage with the use of *Twitter* in the post election protests have raised a number of broader concerns with several professional journalists highly skeptical of the inappropriately named '*Twitter* Revolution' (Heaven, 2009; Mishra, 2009; Palfrey et al. 2009; Barzegar, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2010; Weaver 2010; Gladwell, 2011; Morozov, 2011). Addressing this concept, Matthew Weaver encapsulates best the views of those who denounce such an affirmations noting, "the west was focused not on the Iranian people but on the role of western technology [...] *Twitter* was important in publicizing what was happening, but its role was overemphasized" (*The Guardian*, 09-06-2010). Other media commentators have directed attention towards

the digital divide prevalent in Iran and argued that the use of *Twitter* simply represented viewpoints from web-savvy, university led communities (Heaven, 2009; Lee, 2009; Mishra, 2009). Mary Fitzgerald reinforces this viewpoint noting "of the scores of protestors I met in Tehran and two other major cities, Isfahan and Shiraz, only one has used *Twitter* [...] most had never heard of it" (*The Irish Times*, 20-02-2010). While these viewpoints reflect the limited use of *Twitter* during the post election disputes and challenge the notion that new media technologies represent a more democratic public sphere, others have shifted the focus towards evaluating the material circulated by citizen journalists via *Twitter* during this period. Beverly Spicer from *The Digital Journalist* argues;

> Twittering and citizen journalism that had appeared to be genuine became a confusing never land of information mixed with disinformation, where no one could tell authentic fact from fabricated fiction. In the end, it's hard to know just how effective social media and citizen journalism were after all *(The Digital Journalist*, July, 2009).

Spicer was not alone in this response as numerous professional journalists aired similar views questioning the lack of normative values associated with material produced by citizen journalists during this period (Dyszyński, 2009; Grossman, 2009; Lee 2009; Ledwith, 2009; Weaver, 2009). It could therefore be argued that the use of *Twitter* worked to undermine or weaken material produced by citizen journalists rather than fortify their position. If this is the case, it is probable to argue that, rather than acting as platform that enabled citizen journalists' greater agency in public sphere discourse and political participation, *Twitter* served as a platform which instead compromised their position and reputation. In a bid to explore this matter further, it might be constructive to outline what types of problems manifested themselves on the *Twitter* platform throughout this term.

2.7 - The Trouble with Twitter

Twitter's 'free for anyone to join' philosophy may in theory represent a more democratic and open form of communication; yet, the same structure is particularly vulnerable to misuse and the spread of disinformation, raising broader issues around user identity and professional accountability. Jürgen Habermas was in recent times the victim of a fake *Twitter* account such is the ease with which any user can set up multiple accounts simultaneously under different usernames, and post any manner of erroneous material (Jefferies, 2010). In the days that followed the election disputes a similar situation transpired as *Twitter* began to act as an ideal playground for deceit and deception as fake accounts were forged by Iranian officials enabling them to monitor emerging conversations relating to the hash tag #Iran Election's (Heaven, 2009; Karr, 2009; Spicer, 2009). Equally, evaluating the sheer volume of messages emerging on the *Twitter* live feed made it intensely difficult to decipher reliable sources or the origins of information that emerged in this forum.

Mirroring the researchers own experiences in attempting to grapple with the masses of data emerging on the public timeline, Jeff Jarvis notes "look at the hundreds of tweets that emerge every minute [...] there's no way to tell who's who, who's there. Who's telling the truth, who's not" (Jarvis, 2009). This situation prompted many users to circulate the following message " DO NOT RT anything U read from "NEW" tweeters, gvmt spreading misinfo" (*Time Magazine,* 17-06-09). Subsequently, a spiral of doubt circulated regarding information and material that circulated on the *Twitter* forum prompting Sara Ledwith of *Reuters* to argue that "the problem with images of demonstrations and violence is that besides what can be technologically verified, the context of events or the identities of those involved cannot be independently proven" (Ledwith, 23-06-09).

In his theory of the networked society, Manuel Castells refers to the concept of "timeless-time" as an outcome of new media and information technologies, which works to compress years in to seconds and break the natural sequences of past and present (Castells, 2000: 484-491). Although Castells conceptualized this thesis before the rise of social media, it could be argued that the *Twitter* platform, with it's emphasis on 'real-time', interaction and exchange is reflected directly in Castells notion of timeless time, where a persistent preoccupation with 'what's happening" now prevails. Similarly, Jill Walker Rettberg underscores the preoccupation with "the instant and the now " that prevails on this forum (2009:454). Paul Virilio's course of thought in *Speed and Politics* (2006) embodies the notion of the wasting away of time in the postmodern switch to real time. Virilio warns that speed is the engine of destruction, and the speed of real-time often implies that a collision may soon follow. Considering Virilio's concept in light of 'The *Twitter* Revolution' played out by citizen journalists during the post election disputes, it is worth postulating on what 'collisions' might have occurred.

While the concept of real time may have lent a greater sense of immediacy to events which transpired in Iran during post election disputes, the majority of editorial commentary surrounding material circulated by citizen journalists on the *Twitter* platform illuminated unrelenting concerns over the absence of 'truth'. This analysis simultaneously concurs with a great deal of recent research in the field where it is argued that characteristic norms of quality, impartiality, accountability and veracity are often compromised or undermined (O' Sullivan & Heinonen 2008; Witschge & Fenton, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Lewis et al. 2010; Singer, 2010). In his analysis of 'the postmodern condition', David Harvey argues that "the greater the ephemerality, the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth that

might lie therein" (Harvey, 1990: 292). In this regard, while *Twitter*'s main advantage is indeed it ephemerality- a medium capable of disseminating 'breaking news' swiftly, the concept of truth inherent in the message itself remains a larger concern. In particular, this analysis was of grave concern to those who circulated these fleeting messages circulated through this ever so ephemeral medium throughout this period.

Contrary to McLuhan's belief that new mediums represent the world in a more realistic fashion, professional journalists relentlessly argued that *Twitter* acted as a platform where nothing could be verified, sources were unreliable, and no one could be made accountable. While *Twitter* may in McLuhan's terms, have been championed as 'the medium' of the moment, the broader message which emerged emphasized the unreliable nature of information circulated by citizen journalists, while at the same time, illuminated the need for professional media sources in a crisis of this nature. Similarly, recent research by a number of media scholars reinforce this viewpoint where it is argued that although citizen journalism adds more perspectives to news stories, the need for professional oversight is more vital now than ever before (Deuze et al, 2007; Bivens, 2008; O' Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008; Thorsen, 2008; Messner & Watson DiStaso, 2008). Indeed, the need for 'professional oversight' infact runs counter to the manner in which citizen journalism is often advanced, where it is argued that existing power structures no longer hold sway regarding information that circulates in the public sphere. In the case of the information produced and disseminated by citizen journalists in Iran during this period, it is clear that while mainstream media organizations might have framed it as unreliable, the desire to 'manage, edit and verify' continued as the modus operandi.

In the euphoric discourses which surrounded the use of *Twitter* in Iran during the post election disputes, it could easily be argued that citizen journalists did fracture

hegemonic structures by directly influencing the news media agenda, yet it is worth noting a number of other key factors regarding the rise of citizen journalism during this period. Guarav Mishra argues that one of the primary reason citizen journalists use platforms of this nature "is that it increases the chances that your cause will catch the attention of an international media" and concurs with a number of research studies which have underscored the manner in which citizen journalists continue to rely heavily upon mainstream media organizations in order to amplify their viewpoints (Reese et al. 2007; Bivens, 2008; Mishra, 2010).

Contemplating on the political impact of social media sites such as *Twitter*, Habermas argues that while accelerated communication does open up new possibilities and opportunities for citizens "real decision making still takes place outside the virtual space of electronically networked monads" (Habermas in Jefferies, 2010:19). This viewpoint was undoubtedly reinforced during the post election disputes as Iran's significance on the world stage influenced the manner in which international media organizations did respond to events which were taking place in the nation state. Blankson & Murphy (2007) argue;

> Iran's role in the world energy sector, its political economic relationship to various states in central Asia, its antagonistic relationship to the United States, its complicated foreign policy postures, and the ongoing dispute regarding its alleged interest in developing nuclear weapons all constitute a nation which will consistently garner international media attention (Blankson & Murphy, 2007:143).

While it may be the case that citizen journalists have the power to define and shape what constitutes as news and are subsequently empowered by this process, it is evident that existing power structures and dominant media institutions still persisted and invariably impacted upon news selection during this period (Cottle, 2009; Thussu, 2007; Sparks, 2007).

It is important to acknowledge however that in the absence of professional media sources in Iran during this period, mainstream media organizations traded instead on unreliable and ethically questionable material produced by citizen journalists circulated via the *Twitter* platform. This scenario concurs with many researchers who have argued that mainstream organizations *need* to incorporate citizen journalism into their daily news for fear of being left behind (Deuze, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Singer 2010) where the nature and demands of 24 hour news culture mean that "getting it first is more important than getting it right" (Cottle: 2009: 34). The next chapter of the thesis will focus on this concept in further detail concentrating on a controversial video clip that was produced by a citizen journalist in Iran during this period.

Citizen Journalism - A Moral Maze

3.1 - Introduction

This chapter will critically engage with the moral complexities associated with the camera phone footage depicting the death of Neda Agha-Soltan who died during an election protest march held on June 20th, 2009 in Tehran. Bearing all the hallmarks of citizen journalism, the footage was not produced in professional spheres, and was initially disseminated to the public sphere in the absence of any white-collar media governance. Concurrently, the same footage was promptly viewed by thousands of citizens across the globe, long before it circulated in mainstream media spheres - such is the power and adept nature of the technologies involved – most prominently - the camera phone extraordinaire. The ethical complexities inherent in the footage are representative of issues which are frequently voiced when citizen journalism is deliberated upon in professional spheres, therefore, this analysis considers such concerns from the perspective of producers, editors, and audiences. In doing so, the study will argue that the ethical matters raised by the footage are not in any way contemporary or unique *per se*, rather, similar and problematic themes are frequently echoed within professional photojournalistic practices and discourses.

Initially the inquiry contextualizes the footage itself and then considers the moral complexities producers face when relaying images of conflicts. It rationalizes why the footage of Neda was recorded and argues that regardless of sanctions or codes guiding professional practice, photographing events of a sensitive nature has always been 'ethically' problematic. The study then considers the role of the editor in professional practice and debates the principle moral difficulties that this position embodies. Numerous media commentators have argued that editing processes implicit in professional spheres raise scores of moral issues, as audiences are frequently relayed a skewed or distorted impression of world events. Informing this discourse also is the

concept that editorial governance, has, in recent times suffered a severe set back as images and information are ever more difficult to control. Additionally, of relevance to this debate is the notion of how the footage, and events of this nature, unquestionably represent a paradigm shift in terms of 'what' we know, and how quickly we come to now in the current globalised media environment. Moreover, the study also engages with editorial measures which were employed by Western mainstream media organizations during this period that helped 'soften the blow' regarding the nature of the footage for viewers in a broad sense. The final element in the chapter evaluates audience morality in relation to viewing images and deliberates a number of reasons why this footage garnered such a profound response from global audiences and diaspora communities internationally. In this context then, the notion of Neda as an 'image icon' is discussed and the long-term effects of the footage are discussed.

3.2 - Framing Neda

Late afternoon, on June 20th 2009, a short camera phone video serendipitously depicts Neda Agha-Soltan along with scores of other demonstrators filing their way through Karegar Street, Tehran, to participate in anti-government protests spurred on by the disputed presidential election results. Soon after, a separate camera phone video reveals Neda falling to the ground from a gunshot fired by an unidentified assailant in the nearby vicinity. This second recording graphically depicts in disturbing detail the last moments of her life. Amidst the chaos of the unfolding event, the producer of the video closes in on the victim, where her eyes are shown open, staring straight back towards the camera phone lens. Scarlet blood gushes from her nose and mouth and cascades across her ashen face. Hysterical screams of horror can be heard as those around her realize she has been shot and is dying. A number of men are seen

frantically attempting to save her life, but as the spasmodic footage continues, a swelling pool of blood surrounding Neda denotes that such attempts lie in vain.

Under a thick cloud of government censorship, the footage quickly appeared online unmediated, spreading virally, gaining prompt international media attention. 'The Neda footage', as it has come to be known, became an immediate phenomenon, after appearing initially on *Facebook*, circulating on *YouTube*, then rapidly elevating to a trending topic entitled #neda on the *Twitter* network. Later that same evening *CNN* broadcast a pixilated version of the video warning viewers that 'this report includes graphic content – viewer discretion is advised'. Within hours of the event, the footage was viewed by thousands of citizens across the globe in online forums and in television broadcasts and has become "one of the most potent threats faced by the Iranian regime in 30 years" (Tait & Weaver, 2009). Mark Tran for *The Guardian* remarked, "the footage, grainy and jerky, is the visual counterpart to the tweets, emails and messages on social networking sites that have helped to convey a measure of the turmoil in Iran"(22-06-09).

In so far as the footage fostered fervent political debate and moral outrage amongst human rights activists, policy makers and citizens alike, in the spheres of photojournalism and journalism, the focus shifted towards a number of ethical issues fore grounded in the short video clip. Displaying all the hallmarks of citizen journalism, it did not originate from professional photojournalistic spheres and initially, no editors were faced with decisions regarding whether or not it should be published and circulated to the public sphere. The ethical considerations raised by the footage are fused directly with photojournalistic decision-making, illuminating in a direct sense the moral responsibilities that might lie with producers, editors and audiences when faced with a scenario of this nature. It could be argued that the Neda

footage acts a prototype in that it directly embodies many of the concerns and criticisms that are frequently voiced when media critics deliberate on citizen journalism ethics. Equally, the moral pressure points can be seen to stretch across the spectrum with respect to producers, editors and audiences, all implicated in the process, all caught in the act of looking.

3.3 - The Neda Footage - A citizen journalist moral maze?

The corpus of associated literature on ethics and imagery focuses on four main areas: digital photo manipulation, decisions faced by photographers when shooting images of violence and tragedy, decisions faced by editors when considering images for publication and the effects images have on audiences. To be ethically adequate, professional photojournalists and journalists must live up to the implied contract, report fairly and truthfully on events and adhere to codes of practice set out by media organizations. The codes work in a number of ways, acting as benchmarks in terms of how professionals should perform, as well as functioning to promote good behaviour and responsible photojournalism. Leading writers in the field have long debated that one key element of every professional's job is deciding whether or not to photograph a newsworthy yet private moment, while the common consensus in professional spheres outlines that photographers' need to exercise caution in such contexts, and in turn, resulting imagery needs to be restrained, enforcing concepts of self-censorship at the point of production (Lester, 1990; Taylor, 1998, 2000; Wheeler, 2002; Sanders, 2003).

Reacting to the footage of Neda soon after the event, media academic Thomas Keenan noted "there are many pictures of dead people, and there are many pictures of

shooting at people, but pictures of people dying are quite unusual" (*Photography and International Conflict Conference, 26-06-09*). While this may traditionally be the case, digital media, and in particular camera phones with video capabilities continue to challenge what events are now recorded and circulated in the public sphere, as Mirzoeff argues, in the current media saturated environment " someone is nearly always watching and recording" (Mirzoeff, 1999: 2). Additionally he remarks that while in today's society we live under constant surveillance with omnipresence CCTV and Webcams, some new developments are emerging where devices such as digital cameras or camcorders are engendering ideal conditions for "more and more people to look back" (Mirzoeff, 1992: 1). In an interview with the *New York Times*, Iranian photographer Newsha Tavakolian illustrates the extent to which newer technologies such as camera phones are utilized in Iran noting; "everybody is taking pictures these days with their cellphones and amateur cameras [...] cameras play such a normal role in peoples lives here now that they are just user products - like a fridge or a stove" (Dunlap, 2009).

In the chaotic moments that succeeding the fatal shooting of Neda, it could be argued that Tavakolian's observations were precisely apt. Yet, rather than professional media sources representing the unfolding events, the 'watching and recording – the looking back' was undertaken instead by citizen journalists on the ground. It is therefore legitimate to argue that those involved in the production and initial dissemination of the footage had no professional sanction or code guiding their actions while, the subject's rights, it could be argued, are infringed upon as the last moments of her life are recorded and later exposed for a global audience to engage with. Decidedly critical regarding the actions of the citizen journalist who produced the video, together

with the invasion of privacy depicted in the footage, writer and media analyst Paul Carr notes;

> The cameraman was not a professional reporter, but rather an ordinary person, just like the victim. And what did he do when he saw a young girl bleeding to death? Did he run for help, or try to assist in stemming the bleeding? No he didn't. Instead he pointed his camera at her and recorded her suffering, moving in closer to her face for her agonizing final seconds. For all of our talk of citizen journalism, and getting the truth out, the last thing that terrified girl saw before she closed her eyes for the final time was some guy pointing a camera phone at her (Carr, 2009).

Carr was not alone is this criticism and the footage prompted endless ethical discussions both online and off regarding the need to respect Neda's dignity as she died under the glare of a camera on the streets of Tehran. Enabled by technology, citizen journalists in these chain of events appear to have broken all the rules and pushed the boundaries out on what those in professional spheres consider definitively 'taboo'.

In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (2008) Ariella Azoulay argues that digital imaging technologies have bought about conditions where more and more images are now created and photographs have increasingly become instruments of political power for those who are oppressed by nation state power structures. Within this context, she argues photography does not belong "to any milieu of professionals", rather, the uses of photography are part of the way in which all citizens actualize their duty towards one another and is a means in which "non citizens" become legitimized and visible in what she describes as "the civil contract of photography" (Azoulay, 2008:93). Rejecting the traditional notion of "professional versus amateur", Azoulay's reasoning suggests that citizens can be empowered by technology and are afforded a means in which to express themselves, evoking in a direct sense the manner in which citizen journalism is often advanced. Equally, her thesis resonates of

Benjamin's position who argued that new technologies such as photography could be posited as tools of enlightenment and progressive change. In particular Azoulay notes that photography is at times "the only civic refuge at the disposal of those robbed of citizenship" or for those subordinated by nation state powers (Azoulay, 2008: 121). Resulting imagery, which emerges from such contexts Azoulay argues, can be described as 'emergency claims' which demand urgency, and a call for action and reform.

Throughout photography's short history, many photographic incidents have arisen to illustrate that making appropriate moral choices is not always a clear-cut issue and to photograph the dead, or those who are dying is a sensitive matter, regardless of whether a professional framework guides the producer or not. Kevin Carter who took the Pulitzer Prize accolade for his image of a starving Sudanese toddler committed suicide two months after documenting the story. Carter's actions indicate that he was agonized by what Susan Sontag has chronicled as, the "non-interventionist" position, choosing to photograph, rather than to help the victim in a direct sense (Sontag, 1977:11-12). In a similar light, in response to sensitive imagery he produced during the Somalian conflict, Luc Delahaye remarked, " I don't think there is a lot to say, I just took [the] pictures because I thought it would have been immoral not to do it" (Kieran, 1997: 8). Delahaye's stance, and that of numerous other antecedents mirror in a direct sense, that the decision-making process at play for those involved in relaying images of conflicts is not always an easy trajectory. Their actions reinforce concepts that it is better to record the event, have 'evidence' as it were, rather than self-censor or help in a direct sense. Equally, their actions indicate that imagery produced will work to 'help' victims of such tragedies, subscribing to the notion that individuals "will not have died in vain" (Keith et al. 2006: 249).

The Neda footage therefore draws on the social documentary role of the photography which dates back almost to the invention of photography itself, when pioneers such Lewis Hine or Jacob Reiss were aspiring through their imagery, to bring about change and social reform in society. Or indeed, as Azoulay concisely frames it, photographs like these must act as "emergency claims", they are asking to be looked at, they are asking society to stop, to put a stop to - they are pleading with viewers of such imagery to be taken aback at the injustices portrayed within the frame (2008:28).

Despite the obvious privacy invasion illustrated in the Neda footage, where death and suffering are represented in a particularly graphic manner, it is evident that this hypothesis could be applied to the decision-making process undertaken by citizen journalists during this period. Both the producer and disseminator were motivated by the fact that this information was in the public's interest, and should be circulated to the public sphere. According to a Kantian model, privacy invasion by news media organisations may be justified by a demonstration of the publics need for such information. Equally, drawing on the Utilitarian moral doctrine makes ample provision for the consequences of an act, and focuses on the benefits and harms that are expected to result from an action (Spinello, 1995:14-26). If expected benefits are seen to outweigh the potential harms, then the act can be considered morally right and therefore justified. In the end, Kenneth Kobre argues "the photographer must balance the harm to the individual subject caught in the jaws of tragedy with the long-range needs of society to see an unvarnished picture of the world" (Kobre, 1991: 300).

Although the significance of this event was only fully framed in the days and weeks which followed, it is fair to surmise that both the recording and circulation of the footage did more good than harm. Despite all the censorship obstacles, a combination of personal perseverance, a sense that this murder was 'morally wrong' acted as the

motivational factors for its production. Equally, the footage exposed in a stark manner activities which were transpiring in Iran during this period, thereby undercutting the states message who had attempted through censorship tactics to manage and control their 'image' in the nation state as well as on the international stage. In a similar vain, images of tortured Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison which emerged in 2004 served a comparable function. Discussing the social and political effects of this imagery, David Levi Strauss noted that, three hours after these heinous acts had been committed, the images had circulated and spun around the globe at an alarming pace. Strauss argues "one of the reasons these ghastly images had such an effect in the U.S was that they broke the embargo that the Bush administration had put on images that show the daily carnage in Iraq" (Levi Strauss, 2006). Keith et al. (2006) aptly remarked that after their publication, U.S public satisfaction with the Bush administration dropped dramatically "and for the first time, a majority of Americans said the war was not going well" (247). Mirroring Strauss's analysis, Slavoj Žižek (2008) too underscores that this imagery most of all, exposed in a particularly stark manner those 'unknown knowns' – providing austere proof of events which were categorically taking place in Abu Ghraib prison during this period. Liam Kennedy also engages with the subject, pointing out that the images of maltreated Iraqi detainees, "visualized the war on terror as a spectacle of bare life, of bodies stripped of rights and liberties" (2008: 288).

The production and dissemination of the Neda footage illustrates then how this single event, recorded by citizen journalists on the ground in Tehran can rupture official lines of inquiry or representation. Indeed, without the ingenuity of those involved, it could be argued, that such injustices may never have been reported, never entered the public sphere - never entered the public psyche. Without question, the footage did

expose 'unknown knowns' for the entire world to bear witness - unreservedly. Nonetheless, it is evident that other ethical implications or 'complications' emerged as Neda moved in to the spheres of mainstream media broadcasting. In the critical hours and days succeeding the election results, a majority of media commentators exercised a general degree of caution regarding content provided by citizen journalists where the over all consensus regarding the Neda footage was that " the authenticity and circumstances behind the video could not be verified" (Tait & Weaver, 2009; Ledwith, 2009; Sullivan 2009).

3.4 - The Neda Footage – An Editorial Nightmare

When editors make decisions on image publication, "notions of professional ethics, public accountability, privacy and taste are all invoked" (Kennedy, 2008: 286). The editors' position predominantly yields the power to publish or revoke images at will, and editors have a long history of sanitising images of conflicts for ideological purposes or for pandering to audiences perceived tastes (Moeller, 1989, 1999). Arbitrarily editing out death or any other signs of violence has sizable moral implications as audiences are primarily presented with a distorted image of the world with many examples of such exploits evident in photographic discourses. For the most part, editorial censorship in one form or another has forbidden publicising photographs of dead bodies or soldiers killed in battle, chiefly to keep morale high on the home front, as well as for issues of privacy. Allan & Zelizer (2004) argue because editors and producers desire to avoid offending their audiences, new consumers globally see fewer gruesome images of war in recent years.

During the 1991 Gulf War a combination of censorship and military escorts prevented photojournalists from shooting images of the dead and wounded. Kennedy (2008)

argues that "it was a war in which visual production and representation was tightly controlled and choreographed [where] a significant concomitant of this control of imagery was the near invisibility of bodily violence" (282-283). Even as recently as September 2009, a sizable debate emerged on the *New York Times* blog regarding an image of a fatally injured American soldier which was eventually published by *Associated Press.* Rationalizing the final decision to publish the image Santiago Lyon, director of photography at the agency remarked, "it is our duty is to inform, and sometimes that can be shocking" (Dunlap, 2009).

In the global news media environment however, it is evident that Western or non-Western sensibilities no longer dictate what information makes its way in to the public sphere. Justus & Hess, (2006) shed light on this subject by exploring the global representation of Suddam Hussein, sons, Uday and Qusay Hussein who were captured and killed by American Intelligence in 2003. The justification for publishing the images of the dead bodies according to American government officials was "there was no other, less graphic way to prove to people that the potential heirs of Suddam's Baathist regime were gone", yet, before being photographed "debris and blood were removed to make the body more presentable and in the hope of not inflaming the Islamic World" (Hedges, 2003: 23). A different scenario transpired in December 2006 however when camera phone footage of Suddam's execution was leaked onto the Internet in a matter of the hours following the event. Fintan O' Toole noted that the footage "can be seen as the moment when the news media age moved definitively from shaping the reporting of events to shaping the nature of the events themselves (*The Irish Times*, 06-01-2007). Also evident is that while O' Toole's viewpoint may hold certain truths, it is apparent that issues of taste and decency are no longer 'contained' within a local context, and editorial decision-making a tightly controlled

appointment. While Justus & Hess (2006) argue for "images to be more carefully crafted to avoid cultural insensitivity", it is apparent that in the era of citizen journalism and UGC, such a stance is often unrealisable.

Once images of conflicts or violence have been produced and circulated, editors face the difficult task of deciding whether to use them. Within traditional circumstances, Keith et al. (2006), decree three determining factors surrounding publication including; the role played by government censorship, the tolerance of viewers and issues surrounding privacy. Reflecting the power of citizen journalists to define and shape information that circulates in the public sphere, the Neda footage had however bypassed official editorial processes and was already circulating online before mainstream media sources had any opportunity to employ traditional gate-keeping tactics. While government censorship may not have been an issue in the Western hemisphere in this instance, the tolerance of viewers, and questions of privacy still remained a thorny issue that needed to be accounted for. On one level, it is accessible to grapple with why the footage of Neda was ' not meant to be seen' in Iran, considering the political turmoil underway and censorship factors at play, yet, comprehending why such graphic imagery was permitted in mainstream broadcasting forums in the West necessitates some further enquiry.

Any reputable news organisation is aware that while images can perform a vital public service, the same images can do irreparable harm. If imagery or reports are fallacious, the onus lies firmly with the affiliated news organization, and the industry at large reasserts its position of governance if concepts of professionalism have been compromised. This point was clearly demonstrated when Brian Walski a *Los Angelus Times* staff photographer 'cobbled together' two images taken within close succession of a scene concerning American soldiers and Iraqi civilians in Basra, March, 2003

(Carlson, 2009). Once the fabrication had been discerned, Walski was immediately fired; his actions therefore acting as an advisory to other photographers globally that this conduct would not be tolerated and those responsible would be made accountable for their actions.

Beyond doubt, the same philosophy applies to images that are deemed inappropriate or surmised to raise ethical complexities within the realms of privacy invasion - the onus again lies with those who publish or host the material. Hayes et al. (2007) argue that mainstream media organizations have over time succeeded in gaining public trust as sources of credible information and actions or ethical decisions of those who might be seen to compromise this position are not treated with indifference. If things go right they note, then institutions take the credit, while if trust is undermined or compromised, mainstream media organizations must "take the hit "(Hayes et al. 2007: 268).

In so far as the Neda footage reflected issues of privacy invasion and represented suffering and death in a very graphic manner, it is evident that mainstream media organizations exerted their position of governance during this period as well as employing methods in which to avoid taking 'the hit'. Hamed Rad a member of the Iranian diaspora community who received the footage in the Netherlands argues that when he initially uploaded the footage to *Facebook* they proceeded to take it down almost immediately, illustrating the manner in which social media platforms asserted their position of governance in this scenario (Tait & Weaver, 23-06-09). *YouTube* the video sharing website that encourages users to 'broadcast yourself" employed a somewhat different strategy. Here too on this forum, the footage was the subject of heated debate where one viewer's response encapsulates the ethical dimensions that the footage raised;

Imagine if your loved one's tragic end was being posted for everyone to see over and over again how would that make you feel? I believe in freedom of speech and freedom of press BUT WITH DIGNITY & RESPECT! Out of compassion for Neda & her family YOU TUBE SHOULD REMOVE THIS TYPE OF VIDEO FOOTAGE.

Although *YouTube* did not remove the footage, they asserted their position of governance through labeling the video with a customary disclaimer, thus warning viewers of its graphic nature. *YouTube* describe it as "potentially offensive or inappropriate", while mainstream media spheres mirrored this analysis, but also framed the footage as an 'unconfirmed report' (**Fig. 3.1 – Fig 3.3**).

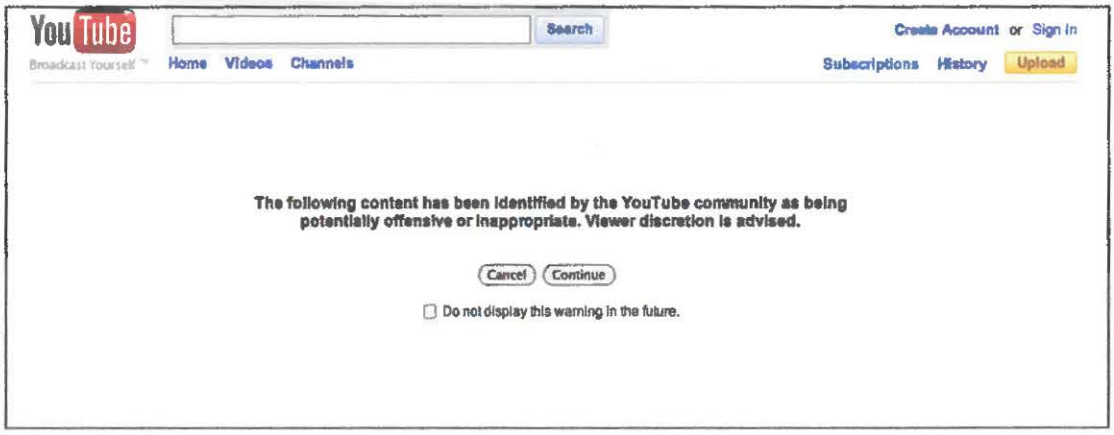

Figure 3.1- Screen Grab of disclaimer from *YouTube*

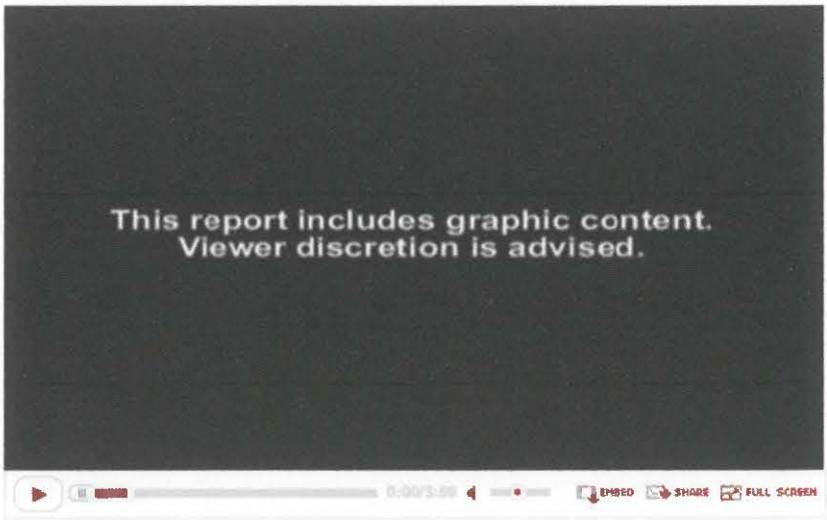

Figure 3.2 - Screen Grab of disclaimer from *CNN*

Figure 3.3 - Screen Grab of *Sky News* disclaimer outlining – '*Sky News* cannot confirm the time or place these pictures were filmed'

It is legitimate to reflect on the editorial reasoning behind describing a report as 'unconfirmed'. In theory, it would appear that this new climate of 'people power' has finally fractured hegemonic media power structures, the Neda footage in particular acting an exemplar and reinforcing such concepts. If, as a number of researchers have argued, that normative values are under threat in the current age of citizen journalism, what measures can be put in place in the absence of more stringent forms of governance *vis-à-vis*, codes of practice? A palpable way of vindicating UGC that may be ethically questionable is undeniably to integrate it, but negotiate liability exemption through the avenues of the 'unconfirmed report'. Additionally, such claims assist to eliminate audience misconceptions, minimize culpability from a mainstream perspective, whilst aiding to soften the blow regarding the contents of the footage in a direct sense.

On closer analysis, it is also apparent that editorial leverage did persist across the spectrum of UGC supplied by citizen journalists throughout this period of time, and the Neda footage was not exempt in this process. Julian Lass for the *British Journal of Photography* argued, "that many of the more shocking images are not being published in the mainstream media, or being used on the inside rather than on the front page" (Lass, 2009). Equally, Chris Weigant of *The Huffington Post* raises another interesting point - remarking;

> When the footage of a young woman on the streets of Tehran who had just been shot and died on camera hit the airwaves, the American media (at least the parts that I saw, admittedly a subset of the whole) did a curious thing. The clip was rolled, and at the beginning (when Neda's face wasn't bloody), they showed the whole thing without pixels. But then as blood began flowing on her face, the face was suddenly pixelated out. And her actual death was not shown, as most media froze the picture before this happened (Weigant, 2009).

Contrary to the notion that all publicity is good publicity, mainstream media organizations understood the broader implications of publishing the footage reflecting the notion that "if new consumers are shocked by images of injury and death, they may turn away permanently, thus effecting audience rating, page views and circulation" (Silcock et al. 2008: 47). The editorial leadership illustrated either cautiously by *YouTube* or more candidly in mainstream spheres definitively illuminates the political economy model at work.

As far back as 1991, Kenneth Kobre argued that "professional standards are changing, and so too are reader's expectations" (Kobre, 1991: 268). In current climate, as new technologies change the way we think about and interact with photography, the truth-values inherent in the medium no longer appear static, rather they are fluid and erratic, where multiple images from professional and non professional sources relay a series of truths and half-truths for audiences to engage with. In the absence of any

definitive way to make citizen journalists accountable for their actions, the only way to manage the situation Robert Herrscher, (2002) deduces is to turn to the news organizations that solicit for such material instead. Moreover, a number of contemporary researchers have argued, the need and focus for professional analysis increases in such circumstances, acting to strengthen editorial governance as opposed to weakening it (Deuze, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Singer, 2010).

Giving consideration to the current shape of photojournalism in the 21st century, Julianne H. Newton, (2009) surmises two important factors: the first, is like many other media commentators have argued, citizen journalism although a valuable asset, is above all, unreliable. Additionally, she argues that photographic representation has not escaped its sublimation to the established discourse of government leaders or the unyielding concerns of market forces. Getting the news first has been a longstanding high-stakes competition among traditional news market competitors, given the real-time nature and speed of Web publishing and more recently, the emergence of citizen journalism. While the commercial concerns inherent in the mainstream model make ample provision for understanding the popularity of citizen journalism in a broad sense, it is evident however that editorial governance continues to persist. As previously outlined however, the initial circulation of the footage in the public sphere without any mediation or editorial governance does suggest that, 'the genie is out of the bottle' and controlling situations of this nature is an ever more difficult task, particularly as mobile digital imaging technologies facilitate instant transmission. Kennedy deduces that in the contemporary globalised news media environment, "the image has even less time than before - time for the photographer's production, the editor's selection, or [time for] the reader's reflection" (Kennedy, 2008: 286).

3.5 – The Neda Footage – Response of a Global Order - We are all Neda

So far, this chapter has critically engaged with the Neda footage considering ethical reasons for production and exploring both the function of the editor, and the manner in which the Neda footage was subjected to more, rather than less editorial governance. Additionally, the chapter has argued that producers, whether operating in a professional capacity or within the arenas of citizen journalism are ultimately responsible to their audiences. This element of the chapter will be informed by two main themes, firstly, it will consider briefly what constitutes viewer morality when it comes to encountering images. The second segment of the chapter will ask the question - how could this footage, which was deemed to be 'inappropriate', 'potentially offensive' and 'unconfirmed' attract such global attention and response? It will deliberate a number of plausible reasons to this question by posing other questions. It asks if the particular mode and manner in which it was viewed by thousands of citizens across the globe impacted upon its popularity. In other words, did the fact that it was popular actually make it more desired? Or, did its popularity arise from the fact that the material itself manifested itself as wholly uncensored and taboo?

The capacity of images to affect viewers is largely dependent on the cultural meanings they invoke together with the social, political and cultural contexts in which they are viewed. Photographs connect viewers with 'what-has-been' and looking at images, although not always manifest, carries with it a degree of ethical responsibility (Sontag, 1977; Barthes, 1981, 1993; Taylor, 1998, 2000). Susan Sontag and other visual culture theorists have long argued that morality itself is conditioned by proximity and when faced by shocking imagery "audiences follow a well-worn track from emotion of shock to accommodation and finally to indifference" (Sontag, 1977).

Others write of image glut or compassion fatigue all prevalent in the current media environment; the all inclusive message pointing to the concept that documentary photography has lost its once critical function in society, serving mainly instead as a form of voyeurism and entertainment for audiences (Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Moeller, 1999; Taylor, 1998, 2000). Such gloomy prospects for photojournalism do not align appropriately however with the response the Neda footage has generated on a global scale. The recipient of the footage Hamed Rad remarked "it shocked me very very much and I was sure at that time that everyone in the world if they see this movie they'll be shocked, and I felt that I must broadcast it because I try to show the world what was going on in my country" (Tait & Weaver, 23-06-09).

Hamed was right - 'everyone in the world' who viewed the harrowing footage was shocked to see evidence of the violence and brutality depicted in the video. It is justifiable to contend that few images have in recent years been deemed so shocking or compelling, provoked intense media attention, mobilizing support of a global order. A search for the name Neda Agha Soltan on *Google* reveals that her name alone currently amasses more page results than an equally infamous image in photographic history – Tiananmen Square **(Fig 3.4 - Fig 3.5)**. *TIME Magazine* identified the man who stood in front of the tanks as one of the most influential leading revolutionaries of the twentieth century (Hariman & Lucaites 2007) while more recently, *Times Online* nominated Neda Agha - Soltan as *Times Person of the Year*, such was the power and potency initiated by her death (Fletcher, 2009).

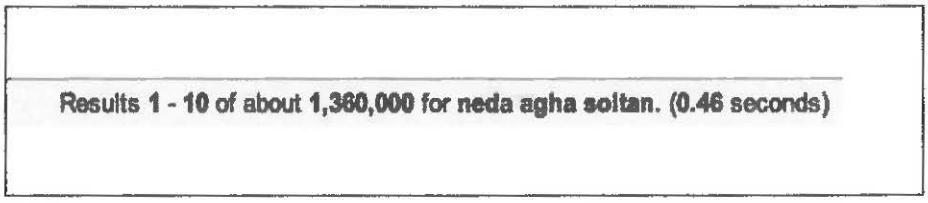

Figure 3.4 - Screen Grab of *Google* Search Results – Neda Agha Soltan

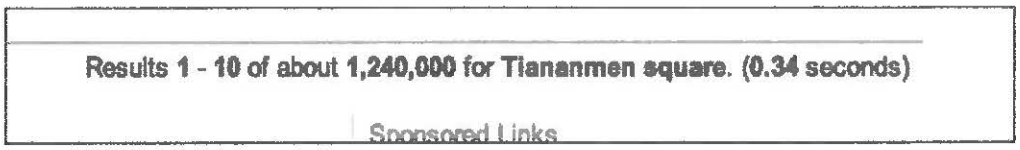

Figure 3.5 - Screen Grab of *Google* Search Results – Tiananmen Square

Documentary photography has long traded on the link between the witnessing photographer and whatever pictorial evidence is offered up as proof that an event took place at any given time (Taylor, 2000). Perhaps the clearest example of photography's power in contemporary society is the notion that it continues to connect viewers to significant events which have taken place across the globe. Arguing in opposition to Sontag and others who question photography's role to act as a powerful instrument for social reform, Azoulay notes that such critics "tend to forget that despite the fact that photography speaks falsely, it *also* speak the truth. Photography does in fact attests to what 'was there' although its evidence is partial, and only in this sense is it false" (Azoulay, 2008: 127). Adapting a similar approach regarding the role of photography in culture, John Keane argues that photographs should have four principle effects on audiences;

> they help to keep alive memories of times when terrible things were done to people, they heighten awareness of current cruelty, they canvas and circulate judgements about whether violence is justified, they encourage people to find remedies for savagery (Keane, 1996).

It is distinctly evident that Neda's footage fulfilled each of these primary functions, with political leaders, policy makers; NGO's, audiences and media critics alike all reacting with fervour and outrage. The impact of the footage is not least suggested by its proliferation and appropriation in global and cultural contexts. Joe Joseph argues "the footage is already among the most viewed clips on *YouTube*. Thousands have

written online tributes to Neda, songs, poems, dedicated websites, blogs and *Facebook* accounts in her honor" (Joseph, *Times Online*, 23-06-09).

Yet, this still does not account for the popularity of the footage in and of itself and as such raises numerous other questions. Why for example did citizens across the globe reacted in such a supportive and empathetic manner to the death of an unknown stranger? Did the fact that a citizen journalist recorded the footage lend more credence to the report perhaps? Did Neda embody a number of Western values that viewers identified with? Viewers ratings or the amount of 'hits' on *YouTube* don't actually account for its popularity, or do they? Is it possible that the answer lies in the fact that Neda become a trending topic on *Twitter*? Or maybe it is, as Fred Richin has argued that " amateur digital photographers and bloggers are often the ones who are manage to provoke the most surprises online, as professionals are frequently constrained by the limitations of their assignments "(Richin, 2009:130). Or perhaps, another thought too - was the utilization of a camera phone itself and the 'real-time' nature of its delivery a determinant in its popularity ratings?

In this capacity it is worth reengaging with Thomas Keenan's notion underscored earlier relating to the fact that watching people die "is quite unusual" (Keenan, (*Photography and International Conflict Conference, 26-06-09*). So thus - does the question become - did the fact that Neda 'was dying' work to affect its appeal and popularity *per se,* and indeed what role did the camera phone play in this trajectory? While it is true that the ubiquitous camera phone has fostered ideal conditions for endless 'still' image making practices (any place/any time scenario indeed), the video making facility too necessitates some inquiry at this juncture in order to deliberate its 'specialness' as it were. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1993) takes great pains to comprehend and reflect upon a similar preoccupation with the still photograph. In

making the photograph 'strange' in this particular text, Barthes defines its qualities: referring to its quintessential ability to connect viewers to 'what has been' (1993). Yet, notwithstanding this fact, Barthes additionally makes a further distinction between the layers of the photograph as it were, entitling them, 'the studium' and 'the punctum'. The 'punctum' for Barthes contains the 'wow factor' or in his terms - "the thing that pricks" or the thing that bruises you, while 'the studium' refers to the over all appeal and holds nothing special at all (1993: 26-27). Not many photographs for Barthes contain within them the punctum, but one such image does, that of a portrait of convicted criminal Lewis Payne reproduced within the text. Barthes in this instance acknowledges that the punctum here is the fact that Payne "is going to die" (1993:96).

As a viewer then, Barthes exclaims that he is looking at a man who is going to die, while at the same time, he is looking at a man who he already knows 'is dead' – "I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented, I entered crazily into the spectacle, into the image, taking into my arms what is dead, what is going to die" (117). Yet, Barthes can only imagine this death of course - he can only engage with this still image then at this denotative or connotative level. Not so, however with camera phone footage depicting the death of Neda Agha-Soltan. Here in this instance, those who engaged with the footage then, and those who will engage with it forevermore know too that she 'is dead', know too she 'is going to die', know that in the jerky camera phone footage itself, Neda can be observed dying 'over and over and over again'. This then, it could be argued is the punctum of the footage itself and indeed prevalent too in contemporary photographic practices, where the 'anywhere - everywhere' recording scenario conclusively prevails, while at the same time, illuminating that just about *anyone - anywhere* can be the producer of such still and moving potent imagery.

It is probable to argue thus, that here lies a chief determining factor for the popularity of this footage too, yet, it is evident that there are no definitive answers to this probing. Therefore it is palpable to argue that there are in fact numerous reasons that account for the viewer response to the tragic death of Neda. What the popularity does definitively attest to however is that compassion fatigue or indifference was not the moral response audiences displayed. Many writers in the field of visual culture argue that images like that of Neda are ultimately 'a call to action', and such a mindset subscribes directly to Keane's principle who argues that photographs should "encourage viewers to find remedies for savagery" (Keane, 1996). The Neda footage comes then from an inseparable part of historic legacy where images have served to modify the nature of politics and government abuse.

The value of the news image, Sturken & Cartwright note, lies not only in its capacity to be transmitted quickly and widely around the world, but is also derived from 'its specialness' or its ability to depict a key moment in any given event. This they argue, elevates the ordinary image in to one which is unforgettable and presents a scenario in which the 'image icon' emerges. In *No Caption Needed* Hariman & Lucaites (2007) define photo icons as;

> images appearing in print, electronic or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response and are represented across a wide range of media, genres and topics (2007:27).

Considering the impact of the image of the lone soldier who stood in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square on June 19th, 1989, the authors argue 'The Tank Man' image was the 'premier' one, an 'inspiring performance of democratic dissent' and one which came to represent months and months of political turmoil and government

abuse. It is evident that the Neda footage too ticked all of these boxes, and although numerous other protestors suffered a similar faith, on the global stage, all accounts that Iranians had used to substantiate these claims suddenly retreated to the background as the footage took centre stage and Neda was rapidly elevated to a 'tragic icon' of the political unrest (Tran, 2009; Joseph, 2009). Neda's footage came not only to represent the struggle for democracy in Iran but became a screen in which citizens across the globe could project their own aspirations, hopes and fears.

Leading writers in the field of visual culture frequently argue that images in and of themselves have little value *per se*, rather they are awarded different kinds of value within a variety of social, cultural or political contexts. Equally, viewer sensibilities and audience morality towards 'ethically questionable' imagery have the capacity to shift and alter too depending upon viewing context. A case in point here being the Abu Ghraib images which entered the echelons of the gallery space for public perusal five months after they made their first shocking appearance in 2004. At *The International Center of Photography* in New York, in an exhibition entitled *Inconvenient Evidence,* seventeen of the published pictures from the notorious prison were 'repositioned' as art. Michael Kimmelman, writing for *The New York Times* argues that "placing these atrocious pictures in a sleek white room and inviting us to cogitate on their visual properties raises some interesting ethical questions" (Kimmelman, 2004). Moreover, their deployment in the gallery space indicates that images which once provoked extreme moral outrage and horror, can swiftly become diffused and less unsettling. The 'shock value' dispersed as it were by the new context of viewing. It does raise the question even of, how long before the shocking camera phone video footage of Neda's death mutates into nothing more than one artful provocation?

In 2004, after the shocking imagery emerged of tortured detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, Dennis Dunleavy (2004) and Susan Sontag (2004) argued that the next revolution may not be televised or recorded by embedded photojournalists, but rather by an army of citizens or soldiers carrying inexpensive digital cameras that would represent "an important tool in keeping those in power honest about their actions"(Dunleavy, 2004). In the case of Iran, their forecasts were precisely apt, as state powers were abruptly made accountable in a novel way, held up to perusal, as the forty seconds of camera phone footage drew international moral outrage and anger, prompting renewed global attention on Iran's tyrannical regime and state sponsored violence. Equally within the nation state, authorities were made acutely aware of the threat posed to them by killing her. During the unrest that presaged the 1979 Islamic Revolution, similar processions became the landmarks that created the momentum to topple the Shah's regime. In a country where the concept of martyrdom is revered, *Associated Press* reported that the Iranian government forbade a memorial service for Neda, fearing further revolt and an intensified struggle for social change that might follow (Jafarzedeh, 2009). One year on, in a recent interview, Hajar Rostami, Neda's mother points out, " although Neda is murdered and is dead, they are still afraid of her, they come to the graveyard and want to kill her again. She's dead but her memory is getting brighter and brighter" (Dehghan, 2010).

Currently, it is difficult to find conclusive evidence that the iconic footage or indeed many of the other images that emerged from Iran around this time will have any immediate or long-lasting political effects as Ahmadinejad's authoritative reign conclusively persists. Neda's shock value may fade, but at the time, it demonstrated the importance of visual representations created by citizen journalist and illustrates their valuable contribution towards public sphere knowledge. Equally, the footage

continues to sends out a signal to others suffering at the faith of authoritarian governance that 'the genie' is out of the bottle, unleashed by an omnipresent 'global' citizen journalist (Kennedy, 2008; Burnett, 2009).

If a free and diverse media system is considered an indispensible part of the democratic process, then a multiplicity of views in theory should inform public knowledge of events. If the public are shielded from observing images of horror through a combination of photojournalist's self-censorship or editorial censorship, the process of democracy within the public sphere is therefore in jeopardy and democracy itself is compromised. Reaction to the Neda footage, it could be argued places the spot light once again on concepts of editorial governance and from a global audience aligns with Appadurai's, (1996) or Lister's (2007) themes of the local and the global colliding. In solidarity with Neda, a global audience chanted a repetitive eulogy, "We are all Neda – We are all Neda" (Joseph, 2009; Purcell, 2009).

3.6 - The Wrong Neda

The conclusion of this chapter serves as the impetus for the next and centres directly on another image purporting to be that of the deceased Neda Agha-Soltan which emerged during the Iranian electorate conflict. Since Neda's death, photographic stills from the camera phone footage and a number of other images of her which originated from the family album have been appropriated, remediated and circulated in posters, murals and advertisements online and elsewhere, each utilizing Neda's image to mobilize political campaigns and messages of their own (**See Fig 3.6**). More recently still, it has been decided by Britain's *Oxford University* to tender a scholarship program for prospective students in memory of Neda Agha-Soltan. Details of these developments were posted on *CNN* and in other news networks, along with a number

of images depicting Neda Agha-Soltan, by way of reminding audiences of her tragic circumstances and what she looked like. The difficulty with these images however is that they are not of the Neda who died, but of an Iranian woman with a similar name, Neda Soltani (**Fig 3.7**).

Figure 3.6 – Neda Agha Soltan's image is utilized in Advertising campaign. Image Sourced http://www.gooya.com

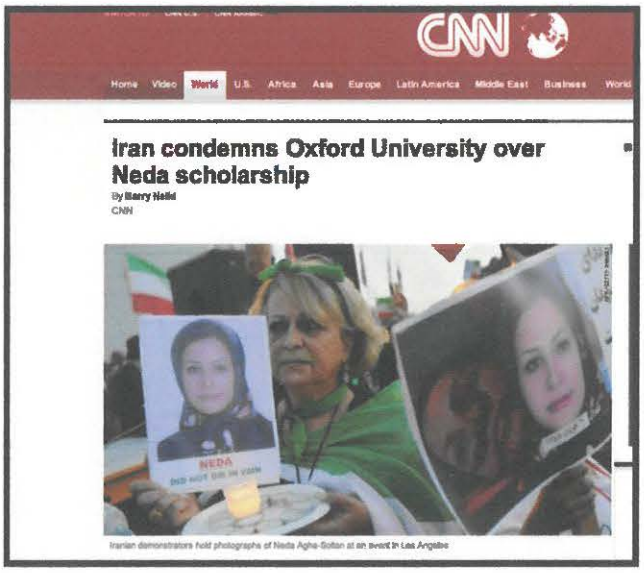

Figure 3.7 – The wrong Neda image is utilized by *CNN*

Just as the iconic image of Neda has continued to shape public opinion and understanding of events now past, the crisis continues in a differing way for a woman with a similar name. A search for the name Neda Agha-Soltan on *Google* images for

instance will display a mix of portraits, that of the deceased Neda, and the living Neda (**Fig 3.8**). Additionally, numerous mainstream broadsheets have been identified displaying the wrong portrait, or name of the deceased Neda.

Figure 3.8 – Search results from *Google* which illustrate two different images results for Neda

The ability of photographs to act as reminders of events in the past, as vehicles for what, how and 'who' we remember has particular resonance when considering the 'wrong Neda' image which emerged around this juncture. Online, or even in print format, will Neda always have two identities as the earlier example underscores? As far back as 1990, a number of media academics argued that another way in which a photograph can affect subjects are by the changes it can produce on the subsequent life of that person (Lester, 1990; Kobre, 1991). A number of online journalists who have been in direct contact it would seem, with the 'living' Neda reflect the difficulties which this erroneous image has caused. One such commentary encapsulates the degree of severity in terms of mistaken identity;

> Shortly after the living Neda Soltani's Facebook photo was mistakenly used as the photo of Neda Agha-Soltan who was killed, the LIVING Neda Soltani fled Iran for her safety and is seeking refugee status in another country which I am not free to reveal. She was a university English professor in Iran before her life was tragically disrupted. 19-01- 2010: 8:05 AM (Source – Researcher cannot outline source for privacy reasons).

It is difficult to grapple with the authenticity or conviction of this account but images permeating online of the wrong Neda are a testament to what John Berger describes by remarking, " the world has changed - information is being communicated differently. Misinformation is developing its techniques" (Berger, 2008). When Kari Andén-Papadopoulos was undertaking an inquiry into the Abu Ghraib torture photographs in 2008, she happened upon a website called *Doing a Lynndie*, a satirical yet perplexing website, but 'a take' nonetheless on Lynndie England's pose when she abused Iraqi prisoners. The discovery of *Doing a Lynndie* or, 'the wrong Neda' speak of images after-life, their 'currency' as it were (Tagg, 1988). Neda Soltani's portrait, through one form of another has been appropriated and reinscribed and now permeates the *Google* image archives and elsewhere. Internet users who followed this story are confused and want to know, 'which image is the correct one of Neda'. Meanwhile, the living Neda it would seem, has had to leave Iran for her own personal security as she is now targeted as a dissenter of the Iranian regime. A key question is how to interpret this 'reality' within the fragile frameworks of citizen journalism practice when no accountability measures prevail for a scenario of this nature. The next chapter of the thesis will extend a number of these themes, firstly by examining the manner and context in which these images were utilized in the weeks and months which succeeded the event. Moreover the enquiry will be informed by an examination of the environment in which the citizen journalist operates, thus illustrating the ease with which images so easily become 'unmoored' from their original context in an online environment more commonly known as Web 2.0.

Image Afterlife in the Web 2.0 Age

4.1 - Introduction

The chapters main concern or question is to deliberate upon what it means to be a citizen journalist operating in the 'digital age', and takes as its central theme the afterlife of images in an online environment. With a view to initiating this discussion, the case of the 'wrong Neda' is outlined in further detail, and attempts are made to establish a point of origin or original context for the erroneous image. The first point to note at this early stage is to consider how this image can be associated with, or considered a product of citizen journalism. It wasn't after all 'taken' by a citizen journalist; that is to say, no official claims have been orchestrated regarding ownership of the image in a direct sense. The image appeared almost out of nowhere, appropriated from an online archive perhaps, disconnected and estranged from its original context. What is of relevance regarding this image however is the news context from which it initially emerged. The image materialized at a time when citizen journalists were the only source of communication in a country that defied mainstream media access to cover events which were transpiring in Iran.

If the events in Iran are being heralded as a triumph for the era of citizen journalism, then this image needs further appraisal with such presuppositions in mind. As well as relaying this incident in further detail, the chapter engages with the new contexts where the image emerged, demonstrating the ease in which images can be "freed from their origin" in the latest phase of Internet technology known as Web 2.0 (Buck-Morss, 2004: 16). The nature of the digital image in the digital age is then discussed in further detail, illustrating that the environment in which the citizen journalist operates is already encumbered with ambiguity and burdened with a great deal of uncertainty in the age of Web 2.0.

4.2 - Internet Icons

In 2003, during what could be termed as the 'formative' years of citizen journalism, Larry Gross and colleagues in the fields of media, communication and ethics published *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*. At this juncture, the term 'citizen journalism' was an unknown concept, and had yet to be conjured up, or 'written in' to contemporary media discourses. In his contribution to the text, David Perlmutter argues that the Internet as a forum of communication continues to afford only limited agency to ordinary citizens in the shaping of 'the big pictures'. The mass media paradigm he insists continues to prevail as the modus operandi, even in online environment. To support his argument he affirms that for all the revolutionary rhetoric associated with the Internet " the World Wide Web has not yet itself produced an icon, or an icon of outrage" (2003: 4).

In the intervening years it could be argued that these conditions have shifted, and in the current climate ordinary citizens have begun to exert more control over shaping 'the big pictures' in a direct sense. The camera phone footage of Neda Agha-Soltan is indeed emblematic of such developments, and equally displays all the normative characteristics associated with iconic imagery. If the iconic image truly is a "moment of visual eloquence", then Perlmutter's stance in the text could well be challenged by developments in recent years (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). As demonstrated in the earlier chapter, the camera phone footage became both a visual and political icon of Iran's pro-democracy movement. The emergence of 'the wrong Neda' however as an iconic image affiliated with how these events may be remembered unquestionably represents a more troubling perspective with interactivity online in a direct sense. If the ease in which images can be created in public spaces has intensified with

omnipresence digital imaging technologies, the after-life of images on the World Wide Web has radically altered patterns of spectatorship in modern visual culture, with new configurations of reproduction definitively emerging.

4.3 - Tracing Neda Soltani - Right click 'Copy' - Right Click 'Paste'

Since its inception in the early 1990s the Internet has frequently been utilized by political activists and community groups alike to communicate, collaborate and organize campaigns both online and off. More recently, much of this communication has migrated to *Facebook*, and in a general sense, the site is fast becoming *the* collective stop off point for users journeying the boulevards of World Wide Web. Gladwell (2010) underscores this concept noting that where once activists were defined by their causes, "they are now defined by their tools – *Facebook* warriors go online to push for change (*The New Yorker*, 04-10-10). Assessing the sheer popularity of such social networking sites, Brian Boyd argues that *Facebook* campaigns are fast becoming the first port of call for anyone, anywhere, with a point to make (Boyd, 2010:5). With over 350 million users, and a figure that is arguably growing, Gavin Sheridan contends " if *Facebook* was a country, it would be the third largest in the world by population" (*The Irish Examiner*, 05-01-10).

Subsequently, it is hardly surprising that on June 23rd, 2009, three days after the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, "more than one hundred *Facebook* pages had already emerged in her honor" (*The LA Times). The Washington Post* adopting a different viewpoint remarked "*Facebook* activism, the trendy process by which we do good by clicking often, was in its full glory last week after the death of Iranian student Neda Agha -Soltan" (Hesse, 2009). Nevertheless, these pages it seemed, served as a portal where ordinary citizens could vocalize their outrage at her death, and a place in which

users could project direct criticism towards Iran's tyrannical regime. Moreover, these portals served too as 'virtual avenues' where users could extend sympathy to Neda and her family, thus showing solidarity and celebrating a life that was cut short in the post-election disputes.

In addition to the *Facebook* pages which emerged around this time, other users began to search for any supplementary information that could be discerned online about Neda Agha-Soltan. *Facebook* as Boyd notes, would invariably become the 'first port of call' (*The Irish Times*, 16-01-10). On the evening of June 20th 2009, Neda Soltani's life underwent a dramatic change with the simple click of a mouse when her *Facebook* profile image was assumed to be that of the Neda who had died. This incorrect profile image was then appropriated and inscribed in to subsequent *Facebook* pages created in her honor by unknown multiple actors on a global scale. According to a number of online reports, Neda Soltani was a professor of English in a university in Iran, and subsequently had to leave the nation state as she unwittingly became embroiled and positioned as a dissenter of the regime. On the 'Neda Soltani RIP' *Facebook* page, which is still active and accepting new members, the incorrect image is displayed and one contributor has noted, "Let the world know! Invite your friends, It's very important. Neda is the face of the freedom!!" **(Fig 4.1)**.

Figure 4.1 – Neda Soltani RIP *Facebook* Page.

Throughout this period, it has also been discerned that a number of journalists initiated an online campaign in an attempt to rectify this issue, categorically hoping to put a stop to the charade of mistaken identity. The central function of the campaign was to prevent further utilization of the image primarily, and in this regard, a collage depicting images of the 'living' Neda verses the 'deceased' Neda also began to circulate online (See. **Fig 4.2**).

It is evident however that those involved in attempting to stem the dissemination of the image by this time were already too late as the copy and paste process was already underway in earnest. Assessing the nature and speed in which in images become dislodged from their the original context in an online environment, Buck-Morss (2004) remark "an image is stumbled upon, found without being lost, arguably most at home when it knocks around the world" adding that, nothing gives a stronger sense

of this promiscuity than the "dragging and clicking" of an image from a *Google* search engine onto a desktop (Buck-Morss, 2004: 16-18). Mirroring the speed and force in which camera phone footage depicting the death of Neda had crisscrossed the globe, the wrong image of Neda spread also in a similar fashion, and subsequently was appropriated and reproduced in innumerable locations, by a legion of undetectable actors, on a global scale.

Figure 4.2 - Campaign poster asking Internet Users to Stop posting Neda Soltani's Picture

4.4 - From Online Streams to Mainstream Spheres

The 'after life' that the image of Neda Soltani took on around this time, is best summarized by Mark Deuze and Daphna Yeshua (2001) who aptly noted that on the Internet it seems - 'rumor is King'. To borrow this analogy, it is evident that the image of Neda Soltani once appropriated, spread across globalised computer networks at an alarming rate. It was quickly adopted as visual proof that a bloody and needless

murder had taken place on the streets of Tehran, and deployed most prominently by protestors who took part in rallies and marches across the globe (See **Fig 4.3 - Fig 4.5**).

Photomontage, famed as an effective photographic method for conveying political messages was enthusiastically deployed as the image was cut and pasted in to an unending series of home grown montages, where a repeated mantra called out – 'Neda we will never forget you' - 'Neda did not die in vain' (**Fig 4.6 - Fig 4.8**). One of the most peculiar advantages of photomontage John Berger once remarked, "is the fact that everything which has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic appearance", and so too this scenario persisted with Neda's erroneous image (1982: 185). If John Heartfield's photomontages of confrontation and opposition sought to expose Nazi representation in the 1930s, protestors employed the montage technique in this context to lay bare the corruptive nature of the Iranian regime. To this end, the 'passport-like' inaccurate image of Neda Soltani was frequently juxtaposed with an 'image still' extracted from the camera phone footage itself, where Neda's face is represented in a 'bloodied' context. This 'bloodied' portrait of Neda became, as Susan Sontag has remarked, "something directly stenciled off the real", while at the same time, within its new photomontaged context, a type of terminal "death mask" (1977: 154). Indeed as Chris Weigant has underscored, "here the bloodied face turned into a powerful political poster " and much of the imagery represented here concurs with Weigants' analysis (*The Huffington Post*, 24-06-2009. The juxtaposition of these two binaries then, 'the real' and 'the fake' images set out to re-establish Neda Agha-Soltans condition of innocence - starkly exposing the injustices conferred upon her. Moreover, it is assumed also those who utilized this mistaken image were not aware of its erroneous nature, for unquestionably - there is no way of knowing.

Figure 4.3 - Neda Soltani's image used in protest march. Image Source: http://www.ibtimes.co.in/data/articleimgs/10019-people-of-iranian-origin-hold-images-purporting-to-show-neda-agha-soltan-allegedly-killed-during-a.jpg

Figure 4.4 - Neda Soltani's image used in protest march. Image Source http://i.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2009/WORLD/europe/11/11/iran.uk.neda/t1larg.neda.afp.gi.jpg

Figure 4.5 - Neda Soltani's image used in protest march. Image Source: http://www.maryamwebster.com/wp-content/uploads/neda-protest.jpg

Figure 4.6 - Neda Soltani's image used in montage fashion in posters. Image Source: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3369/3649776472_e39cffb15e.jpg

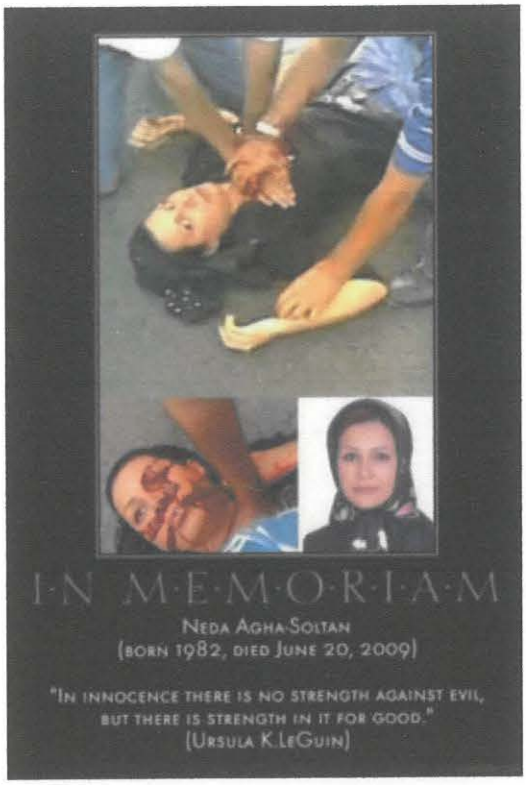

Figure 4.7 - Neda Soltani's image used in montage fashion in posters. Image Source: http://www.motifake.com/image/demotivational-poster/small/0906/in-memoriam-life-time-death-neda-innocence-student-teheran-w-demotivational-poster-1245780703.jpg

Figure 4.8 - Neda Soltani's image used in montage fashion in posters. Image Source: http://www.divatomboy.com/Blogservations/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Neda_theSymbol1.jpg

The repeated use of the image however worked to make the subject immediately recognizable and this process was finally assured when Neda Soltani's image entered the spheres of mainstream print media outlets who harnessed it in their reports, and identified her as the woman who had died in the political unrest. If, as number of writers in the field of visual culture have argued, the meaning of any photograph is context determined, the new contexts that Neda Soltani found herself in undoubtedly had a global reach (Berger 1972; Tagg, 1988; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Moreover, images when viewed in the domains of mainstream media are often conferred with a renewed sense of authority, working to convince audiences on the veracity of any given event. Five days after the event, the image was still in circulation in the spheres of mainstream media, where it was identified in a report that outlined 'Iran's Dead and Missing', published in *The Guardian*. (See **Fig 4.9, Fig 4.10**)

Figure 4.9 - Neda Soltani's image in mainstream reports. Image Source: *The Guardian*. Published 25-06-09

Figure 4.10 - Neda Soltani's image in mainstream reports. Image Source: *The Guardian.* Published 25-06-09

In 2007, on a talk show informed by the theme of 'Who owns your image on the Internet?' Brian Rather debated one of the many contentious issues regarding imagery in an online environment (*NRP Radio*). To this end, Rather interviewed a number of individuals who had their images or video clips appropriated or parodied by others on *YouTube.* Providing no definitive solutions to the question, Rather argues that the architecture of the World Wide Web unequivocally makes private infringement of intellectual property vastly easier to execute, and extremely difficult to detect or prevent. Moreover, a number of participants interviewed emphasized another antagonizing factor with images and videos online, that is to say, "they never go away" (05-03-07).

The power of a single image to be informative and evocative at the same time confers on it a special symbolic quality. Photo icons in particular are famed for this symbolic quality, for long after a crisis has passed, the iconic image continues to shape public

opinion and understanding of the event (Sontag, 1977; Perlmutter, 2003; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Equally, the iconic image continues to be *the* image that is 'called up' or 'called upon' when we remember, recall or commemorate the event. A 'passport-like' image unmoored from its original context has thus become the image that identifies Neda Soltani and associates her with the pro-democracy movement in Iran. An online search for the name 'Neda' will yield a combination of both portraits, illustrating that in an online environment, as Rather affirms, images "never really do go away" (Rather, 2007).

It is not the intention of this study to trace who was responsible for appropriating 'the wrong image' of Neda for this would be an impossible task. Neither is the sole purpose of this exploration an avenue in which to extrapolate the multiple places where the image was used. The continued survival of these images online, is in any case a testament to their existence. The focus for the remainder of the chapter will instead will be informed by two primary concerns. The first of these inquiries charts the nature of the contemporary Internet experience, also understood as 'Web 2.0'. This review will then form the basis in which a further analysis is undertaken regarding, 'the digital image' within this environment. Common to these two environments what emerges could be best described as 'an attitude' where users are actively encouraged to consume, create, share and update all manner of media content. This 'attitude' to create and share media content is significant to consider as it relays a keener sense of the environment in which the citizen journalists operates, where production and distribution of content is considered as both a common place pursuit and actively encouraged by Web 2.0 actors.

4.5 - Web 2.0 - An Attitude and a Technology

In recent years a cluster of online technologies and services have enabled computer literate citizens to exert greater command over the flow of media in their lives and more importantly, play an active role in its creation and development. The term Web 2.0 "is variously understood as new forms of website development and delivery technology, changing uses of the Internet to emphasize sociability over consumption and more broadly, a new way of thinking about the Internet as a whole" (Allen, 2004). Although an ambiguous and sometimes fuzzy concept, Lawrence Lessng distinguishes Web 2.0 from the top-down Internet of the late 1990's, and unlike Web 1.0, this newer framework is eulogized as one which embodies concepts that users are co-developers rather than consumers alone in the media chain (O'Reilly, 2005; Lessng, 2005). Anthony & Thomas (2010) and others conclude that, Web 2.0 essentially subverts the vertical, top-down, one-way flow of information, characteristic of conventional media, resulting in a democratization of the tools of media production and a paradigm shift away from the passive consumption model (Allen, 2008; Lee-Wright, 2008; Harrison & Barthel, 2009; Anthony & Thomas, 2010). The term itself was coined by technology publisher, Tim O' Reilly in 2004 who describes Web 2.0 as the concept of "harnessing collective intelligence turning the Web in to a kind of global brain [that] reflects an attitude rather than a technology", but is inextricably linked with expanding technical capabilities available on the Internet (Lee-Wright, 2008: 257).

Housed and woven into the Web 2.0 arsenal are prominent players such as *Flickr*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, *MySpace*, *Bebo* and *Wikipedia*, as well as blogging, podcasting, virtual reality initiatives such as *Second Life*, and peer-to-peer file sharing. The main players as outlined, best emphasize the 'sociable aspects' to Web

2.0 - thus the term social media emerges. Harrison & Barthel, (2009) note that what is most surprising about the succession of these new technologies is not so much the innovations themselves *per se*, rather the willingness of users to interact and co-create material, "pooling knowledge and constructing content that they share with each other, which is subsequently remixed, redistributed, and reconsumed" often with unknown actors, on a world-wide stage (2009: 161).

Central also in the Web 2.0 chain is users basic familiarity with, and knowledge of an endless list of instructive adjectives and verbs. These include taxonomies such as - sign in, upload, update, publish, refresh, organize, browse, search, view, post, list, find, add, tag, move, click, tick, like, rate, rank, flag, favor, comment, reply, link, share, forward, block, download, edit, copy, cut, paste, save, hide, bin, delete, quit, home (See Examples in **Fig 4.11 – Fig 4.14**). Information flowing in the chain often follows an erratic and rollercoaster journey, crisscrossing globalised networks, while pausing often only for approval, relegation, or sometimes, downright rejection. Relegation or rejection becomes apparent when other users fail to acknowledge or respond to the content published by another within the user chain. In a broad sense, Web 2.0 makes it possible for those who have little technical knowledge of the Internet to construct and share their own media content.

Figure 4.11 - User response options to material posted on *YouTube*

Figure 4.12 - User response options to material posted on *MySpace*

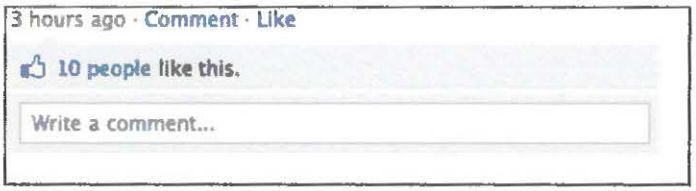

Figure 4.13 - User response options to material posted on *Facebook*

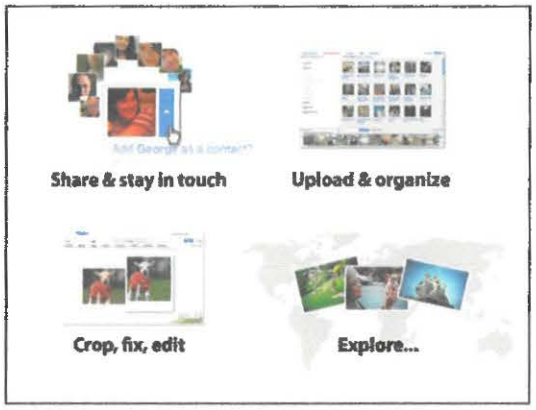

Figure 4.14 - User options on the homepage of photo sharing website *Flickr*

Marshall McLuhan's familiar claim that we live in a global village was particularly insightful when he accurately predicted that the sharing of messages and information on a global scale was about to evolve though technology, shrinking concepts of time and space, radically changing society (McLuhan, 1964). Assessing the nature of the contemporary new media culture, Len Manovich remarks;

> Just as the printing press in the fourteenth century and photography in the nineteenth century had a revolutionary impact on the development of modern society and culture, today we are in the middle of a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer mediated forms of productions, distribution, and communication (Manovich, 2006: 5)

With the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, cultural theorist Henry Jenkins mirrors this analysis and argues that a definitive shift in the way media content is produced and circulated now prevails. Furthermore Jenkins argues that audiences are "empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old media and new media [and] are demanding the right to participate within the culture" (Jenkins, 2006: 24). Others too revel in the revolutionary freshness that Web 2.0 engenders, and argue that our newfound subjectivity in these environs helps us to represent ourselves as individuals rather than simply succumbing to the generalization strategies of mass media communication paradigms (Luders, 2008; Walker Rettberg 2009). Marika Luders coined the term 'personal media' in opposition to 'mass media' to best describe the social networking processes at play in this environment. Moreover, the force and popularity of Web 2.0 infrastructures was famously illustrated in 2006 when *TIME* magazine designated 'You' as 'Time Person Of The Year', (**Fig 4.15**) thus paying tribute to the millions of anonymous web users who had dedicated their creative energies to a booming web culture (Grossmans, 2006; Luders, 2008).

Figure 4.15 - *TIME* - Person of the Year, 2006 - 'You'

In so far as Web 2.0 has been subject to ample optimistic critique in recent years, others have been less sanguine in their analysis (Fuchs, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009; Keen, 2008). Christian Fuch's research reflects the ideological workings and commodity form of Web 2.0 environments and contends that it represents nothing more that the total commoditization of all human creativity. Fuch's points out that Web 2.0 gives the illusionary impression that citizens today can make a difference, but argues that "the ideology of individualization drives user demand which allows the commodification of audiences that yield profit" (2009: 84). Others too have adopted Fuch's approach reaffirming the political economy model at work, as well as outlining that "fame only counts after its picked up by traditional mass media" at any rate (Van Dijck, 2009).

Much of this research however acknowledges that Web 2.0 frameworks engender greater opportunities for audiences to 'talk back' to long established media organizations, while the process itself fosters a newly empowered citizenry and the promise for a more transparent public sphere to emerge. It is probable to argue that much of this rhetoric can easily be discerned or detected in discourses which surrounded the emergence of the Internet in the early 1990's, and again more recently, in dialogue by those who support the practice of citizen journalism in a broad sense. In the same light, as Web 2.0 continues to advance its operating infrastructures online, the manner in which users navigate, remix and redirect any amount of content has intensified. Considering the digital image in particular, the study now reengages with Tim O' Reilly's concept that situates Web 2.0 as 'an attitude' as well as a technology and considers how continued advances in online technology have influenced patterns of image production in modern visual culture where new configurations of reproduction are definitively emerging.

4.6 - The Digital Image in Web 2.0 Age

All images created by the camera bear the cultural legacy of photography's ability to represent the truth. With its origins in policing and science, the early positivist model situated photography as a means of representing the world in an accurate, objective and truthful manner. With the invention of the digital camera in the 1980s, a corpus of inquires ensued, trying as it were, to grapple with this new phenomenon from a number of perspectives. It was proposed and feared that the death of photography was imminent any time soon, but more, rather less images were produced and consumed (Mirzoeff, 2005; Lister, 2007; Azoulay, 2008). These debates took on renewed fervour when image-editing programs such as *Photoshop*, which offered unrivaled creativity 'after the event', emerged in the 1990's, challenging again the tenuous nature of image veracity and photographic truth in the digital age.

Another familiar consequence of the digital era has at its nucleus the vexed nature of reproduction, as images now transformed in to a set of encoded 'bits' can be stored, manipulated, reproduced and appropriated with the click of a mouse - in no time at all. If Walter Benjamin and other critics lamented the loss of the 'aura' and 'authorship' in art with the emergence of the camera in the nineteenth century, the nature of digital image reproduction undoubtedly raises a unique set of complications. The digital copy as Halpren outlines, is also "a perfect replica" (In Gross et al. 2003: 145), each copy acting as an agent for further replication, each copy, for the sake of argument, the spitting image of the original. Although image appropriation has a long history in photographic practice from advertising photography, to photomontage, the speed at which information now moves from its original context has intensified in recent times. Indeed, the value of a digital image is now in part derived from its role as information that can be accessed seamlessly by multiple users on a global stage at

any given time. Martin Lister surmises this phenomenon by noting that in the current climate all information is now measured in Kilobytes (2007). Equally, in *Constant Touch*, Jon Agar singles out a similar analogy by stating that we now live in a world where all information is 'weightless' (2003).

The omnipresence of photography into every facet of the human experience has also prompted the emergence of a recently new academic discipline, the study of visual culture. Mirzoeff rationalizes this emerging field of study by remarking that human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before adding that "while the different visual media have usually been studied independently, there is now a need to interpret the postmodern globalization of the visual as everyday life" (1999: 3). One of the most striking features of visual culture is the tendency to visualize things that are not visual in themselves, and additionally addresses the concept that "our values, opinions, and beliefs have increasingly come to be shaped in powerful ways by the many forms of visual culture that we encounter in our daily lives" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 1)

The proliferation of technologies that assist in image making and image viewing in recent times have made possible the movement of images across geographic boundaries more smoothly and effortlessly than ever before. If, as Paul Virilio has described, modernity was 'the vision machine', the postmodern equivalent has reached unprecedented heights (Jenks, 1995). Discussions on the global reach of imagery often address modes of transmission such as the Internet, or how images are interpreted across cultural divides and in different contexts, but places less emphasis on contemporary technologies of image production such as the camera phone which is now an omnipresent device in our daily lives. As previously outlined, the technological Internet shift towards Web 2.0 is advanced as an infrastructure which

empowers individual users in the creation and sharing of their own media content. While the inclusion of a camera in a phone may initially have been designed as a gimmick or marketing strategy (Bate, 2005), recent technological developments suggest that mobile phones too are also marketed with similar suppositions in mind.

Jon Agar acknowledges this growing phenomenon by noting that you can tell a lot about a culture "by what it has in its bags and pockets" but equally ponders on a 21st century trend that has created a desire to be in 'constant touch' (2003:3). As cameras get smaller and smaller with technological progress, camera phones are fast becoming the common device that aid in ultimately "capturing your every move", subscribing directly to the notion of being in constant touch. Similar to Web 2.0 discourses, the capacity of the camera phone to empower the user is a persistent theme in the way mobile phones are marketed to audiences. To cite a number of examples mobile phone giant *Vodafone* recently changed their marketing slogan from "Make the most of now" to "Power to You"(See **Fig 4.16**). Additionally, in a recent ad campaign launched by *Sony Ericsson* for the *Satio* phone model, it is difficult to decipher if the advertisement is for the phone or for a camera. A screen grab from the campaign outlined in **Fig 4.17** illustrates such ambiguities at play.

Figure 4.16 - *Vodafone* Marketing Slogan - 'Power to you'. Image Source: http://www.vodafone.ie/

Figure 4.17 - *Sony Ericsson* Phone 'Satio' Advertising Campaign Image Source: http://www.sonyericsson.com/cws/products/mobilephones/overview/satio?cc=ie&lc=en

As well as the image and video making capabilities inherent in evolving camera phone technology, a common marketing strategy detected also is the ability for users to share their experiences immediately, thus staying in touch with 'your entire social universe'. The concept of time itself equally plays a pivotal role in this process, where 'real time' and 'most recent' are the favored timelines. Harvey's 'ravages of time-space compression', and the 'twinkling of an eye' all worthy expressions in this contemporary social media environment – here, come what may, time must be 'prized back', rescued from the ravages – somehow (Harvey, 1990: 288-292). Take for example the text which accompanies a recent advertisement for the *Sony Ericson*'s *XPERIA X10* phone (**Fig 4.18**).

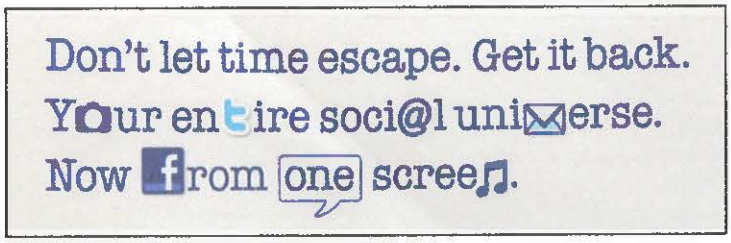

Figure 4.18 - Advertisement Excerpt - *Sony Ericson XPERIA X10*

Here, the notion of 'time' is an important signifier and selling feature, where the model is advertised to enable users to "get time back". Of relevance too is the notion that the content users create can be shared and immediately uploaded via embedded applications to sites such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* as the famed visual motifs are literally embedded into the advertisement text. On the receiving end, the Web 2.0 actors are too fixated with time, cursor's pulsating - ever so restless, they ask over and over again 'what's happening? or 'what's on your mind?' (See **Fig 4.19 & Fig 4.20**). Here again, in the general rush of things over at the Web 2.0 terminals, language itself is shredded up in to snappy particles - where choice acronyms, such as OMG (Oh my God), BTW (By the way), or LOL (Laugh out loud) persistently reoccur - such is the postmodern scurry to 'win time back'.

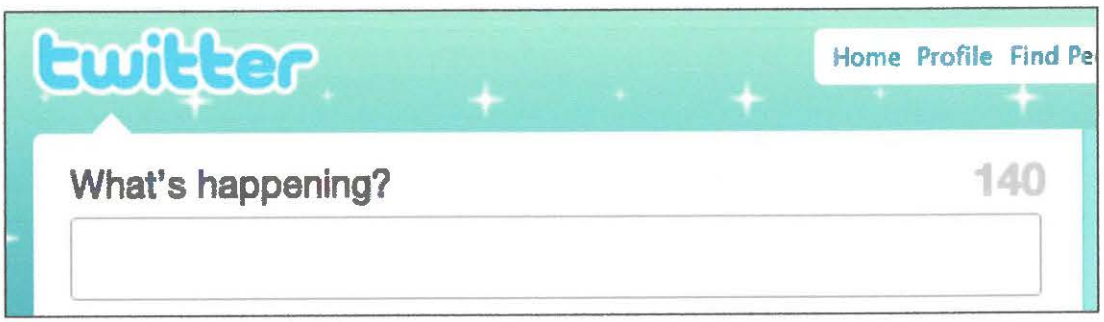

Figure 4.19 - *Twitter*'s Tag Line Question - What's Happening?

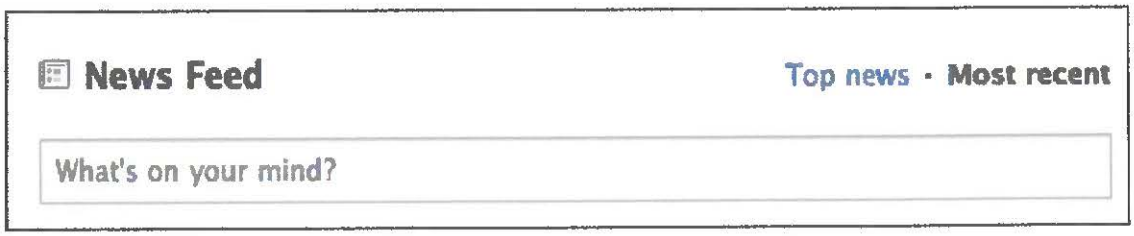

Figure 4.20 - *Facebook*'s Tag Line question - What's on your mind?

In so far as the contemporary Internet experience has evolved to reflect a growing need to create and share media content, more than anything else as O' Reilly's concept affirms - Web 2.0 is an attitude that welcomes the creation and sharing of content by individual users on a persistent basis. Kris Cohen is his insightful research regarding photoblogs asks the thorny question of just 'what does the photoblog want?' A number of answers emerge, where it was identified that photobloggers want "most of all, to make photographs of what they call the everyday, the banal or the mundane [...] they want pictures of life as it happens, as they experience it" (2005: 887). Equally, the photoblog motivates and requires the making of more photographs, for as Cohen affirms, "the photoblog gives photographs something to do". (2005: 893). Just like the photobloggers in Cohen's essay attest, representing 'the banal', 'the everyday' - 'real life' as it were, has been embarked upon with renewed fervor in the Web 2.0 era. In this new digital environment, Lister argues "photography will bend to new ends, while it struggles to retain its historically defined purposes"(Lister, 2007: 255).

Here then, in this unending struggle, as photography attempts to retains it historical claims in the Web 2.0 age, the skills of the citizen journalists are enlisted and welcomed by mainstream media organizations. As news media organizations follow a continued trend of tapping in to such resources, Terry Heaton contends, "we have to assume that mistakes and errors will be part of this process"(*The Digital Journalist*, May 2008). This he argues is the ultimate 'new' in the contemporary news media climate. Many commentators have argued that the demands of 24/7 news coverage makes ample provision for material produced by the citizen journalist, for the Internet as Larry Gross contends is a forum where "there is no publication date, only a constantly evolving deadline" (Gross et al. 2003: x).

As the case of the 'wrong Neda' illustrates, in the current climate it is apparent that once online, photographs lack any predictable end. From the arsenal of adjectives described earlier the following variables 'link, share, forward, download, edit, move, copy, cut, paste, save, hide, bin, delete', all prove the most problematic to resolve, and illustrate innate difficulties associated with veracity, accountability and trust in the digital age.

In so far as the Internet and its newer counterpart Web 2.0, confer a greater degree of control for individual users, or even engender conditions for a more democratic public sphere to emerge, it is apparent also that such flexibility has fostered a climate of renewed uncertainty and ambiguity as users navigate, remix and redirect any amount of online communication on a global scale. At the same time then, as individuals are embracing new technologies and the opportunities for participation and expression that they provide, others are raising questions about what counts as truth and asking where responsibility lies for actions and consequences in this environment. The 'wrong Neda incident' as profiled went quietly unnoticed to a large degree aside from a number of users online who attempted to resolve the issue via the online campaign. Equally, the case illustrates that the architecture of a Web 2.0 makes it practically impossible to determine who might have been responsible for this incident. It could be argued that this very architecture gives sanctuary to individuals and undetectable actors in so far as detecting infringements or irregularities is wholly difficult to prevent, detect or control.

Throughout its relatively short history, the ethics of photojournalism continues to raise relentless debate and heated discussion in the fields of academia and professional practice. In many cases 'professional standards' and ways of working 'older media' serve as the benchmarks, or the way forward for much of this

discussion, regardless of the medium of delivery. As far back as 1990, contributors to Paul Lesters', *NPPA Special Report: The Ethics of Photojournalism* argued that newer technologies do not call for a new 'ethics' for image making, rather an application of longstanding standards should apply to newer models. While it is important to acknowledge that ethics in the field of journalism and photojournalism are, as Lester outlines, constructed - "a set of written or unwritten rules governing behavior for individual and social morals" (1990, 16), a commitment to truth telling should act as their primary function. Moreover Lester argues "the whole trust of human communication is a dedication to truth [...] if we do not tell the truth or do not tell things truthfully, we simply are not communicating" (1990: 5).

The degree to which citizen journalistic content adheres to professional standards is therefore an ongoing issue, of concern to those who subsume this material, as well as media professionals who manifest reservations about the practice of citizen journalism in a general sense. Peter Allen (2009) argues for a 'rational choice paradigm' in relation to what he describes as the 'rip, mix, burn' culture that has recently emerged. The rational choice paradigm assumes that if the perceived risks of being 'caught' are made more visible, rational behavior may instead prevail. The next chapter of the dissertation will engage further with this 'rational choice' decision making process, by attempting to consult directly with citizen journalists. The expanding corpus of research in the field suggests that while citizen journalism is without question a topic *de jour*, garnering it's fair share of academic and scholarly inquiry, less emphasis is placed on consulting directly with citizen journalists who engage directly in this activity. Consulting directly with citizen journalists then seems like a particularly obvious departure, and a means too in which the existing body of research in the field can be developed or expanded upon.

Everyone's a citizen journalist

5.1 - Introduction

From research to date in the field, it is commonly acknowledged that with the right tools, an internet connection, and a desire to publish news orientated material – everyone can be a citizen journalist (Robinson, 2009, 2009(b); Spicer, 2009; Luckhurst, 2007: Rosen, 2008; Gillmor, 2006). As the practice continues to gain prominence and influence, debates about citizen journalists' ethical responsibilities continue unabated. Common themes advanced from emerging research argue that citizen journalism challenges professional journalistic values, reflects the concept that media professionals are struggling to ethically accommodate the practice, while simultaneously safeguarding their own credibility and sense of responsibility to their audiences. This final chapter aims to explore what have been commonly cited as the key ethical loopholes or failures of the practice - responsibility and accountability.

While a number of researchers have approached journalists, editors or newsrooms regarding the perceived effects and uses of citizen journalism, or examined the manner in which mainstream media organizations are integrating UGC into their daily routines, 'the voice' of the citizen journalist fails to be articulated in the majority of this discourse. The dearth of existing research in this area was undoubtedly a source of curiosity, and simultaneously illustrated that no quantitative or qualitative study had been undertaken in this field. The realization of this lacuna prompted the researcher to contemplate seeking out citizen journalists in a bid to involve them thus in 'the conversation'. In an online article entitled, *Are Ethics Missing in Citizen Journalism?* Pam Gaulin argues that "the problem is some citizen journalists do not realize that the have that responsibility, because they do not even know it exists" (Gaulin, 2007). If contact could be secured with citizen journalists, perhaps they could respond to commentary of this nature and defend their position as it were. Moreover,

it was hoped that this method would provide an opportunity in which citizen journalists could consider ethical issues and concerns which they have experienced in the creation of UGC for the news media industries. Mark Cenite and colleagues had undertaken a research study of this nature in 2009 where the focus had been on exploring the practices and ethical beliefs of online bloggers. Due to global scope and reach of this online community, bloggers were located using blog tracking websites, blogging forums and groups, and it was perceived that a similar method would be employed to reach out to citizen journalists who by nature also have a global presence.

5.2 - Method - Addressing the Citizen Journalist- The Selection Process

A web survey was chosen for the study because it was deemed the most appropriate method in which to reach out citizen journalists, who are by definition regular web users and decidedly global in reach. The speed, low cost and overall efficiently of this method were also determining factors. In addition, it was discerned that a web survey would ensure confidentially which was considered an important issue when discussing sensitive topics such as ethics. Unlike professional media organizations which are easily identifiable and relatively easy to communicate with, locating citizen journalists transpired to be a particularly complex task. In a bid to do so, the researcher joined numerous citizen journalism groups on *Facebook* with a view to purposively selecting an appropriate audience base for the questionnaire. On the *National Association of Citizen Journalists*, (NACJ), a US based initiative that sets out to "train and empower citizen journalists" for the task of discovering, writing and reporting news, a number of impressive statistics are outlined regarding the amount of

citizen journalists working for various incentives across the globe. The preamble to the site argues;

> One US website reports having more than 12,000 citizen journalists scouring the landscape for news. A South Korean website declares it has 50,000 registered citizen journalists keeping watch over news events throughout the country. Millions of other citizen-produced blogs and websites provide news of the people, by the people and for the people. (NACJ, 2010)

It was hoped that this association would act as an ideal base in which to administer the questionnaire; yet, an attempt to make contact with representatives from this organization yielded no reply. Due to the difficult nature in locating individual citizen journalists, it was discerned that a reasonable representation could only be captured by approaching larger media organizations that engage in circulating media content produced by citizen journalists. Subsequently, media organizations that actively seek out contributions from citizen journalists were notified regarding the research topic and questionnaire, and asked if they would be willing to circulate it to their database of citizen journalists via a web link provided. In total, eleven media organizations were approached, including - *CNN iReport*, *BBC HaveYourSay*, *Sky News*, *Demotix*, *Ground Report*, *OhmyNews*, *Global Voices*, *NowPublic*, *Citizenside* and *The National Association of Citizen Journalists*. This initial contact took place by email and media organizations that eventually responded were given the task of circulating a web link to the survey. These included, *Demotix*, *Citizenside, Global Voices* and Trushar Barot, the *BBC*'s Assistant Editor of UGC. Turi Munthe, the CEO of *Demotix* also circulated the survey to his own personal database of followers on *Twitter*. In addition, the researchers own database on *Twitter* was utilized as a forum in which to distribute the questionnaire, while requests for cooperation were posted to *CNN*'s *iReport* page on

Facebook as well as to a number of other *Facebook* groups dedicated specifically to the practice of citizen journalism.

In theory, with the cooperation the mainstream outlets who had agreed to circulate the questionnaire to their databases, as well as the requests posted by the researcher to various groups and forums on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, a total of 33,775 viewers potentially encountered the survey which was administered between June 03rd – June 09th 2009. Before exploring how many citizen journalists engaged with and responded to the questionnaire, an overview of the media organizations who circulated the study will be briefly outlined.

Demotix

Founded in 2008, *Demotix* is a citizen-journalism website and photo agency and described as the 'multi-award winning home of Street Journalism - the newswire where YOU tell the stories'. *Demotix* claim to have a 15,000 stronghold community located in 190 countries across the globe. The primary mission of *Demotix* underscored by Turi Munthe and colleagues is " to give the man and (often more importantly) woman on the street a voice" providing a forum in which their views can be represented and expressed (2009). The company functions as a broker for images submitted by citizen journalists thereby forwarding on material received to a variety of media buyers internationally from newspapers, magazines, TV channels to websites and publishers. In addition to the website, *Demotix* also have a presence on *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Citizenside

Launched in 2006, *Citizenside* agency functions as an online base for "amateur and independent citizen reporters" from around the world. In November 2007, *Agence*

France-Presse (AFP), the third largest news agency in the world, and the *IAM Company* became shareholders in *Citizenside* agency. The agency facilitates contributions from "pro and amateur photographers and videographers" to share their news-related images. If a citizen journalist submits material to this agency, *Citizenside* will circulate it to other media outlets taking a 45% share of the sale price should the image or video clip sell in mainstream spheres. The editorial team verifies and vets all contributions before posting them to the *Citizenside* website. In addition to the website, *Citizenside* also have a presence on *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Global Voices

Founded in 2005 *Global Voices* is a community of more than 300 bloggers and translators around the world who work together to bring reports from blogs and citizen media where the emphasis rests on "voices that are not ordinarily heard in international mainstream media". *Global Voices* advocates for freedom of expression and aim to protect the rights of citizen journalists to report on events and opinions without fear of censorship or persecution. The company is a non-profit foundation and relies on grants, sponsorship, editorial commissions and donations to cover company costs. In addition to the website, *Global Voices* also have a presence on *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Trushar Barot - Assistant Editor of *BBC News* and UGC

Trushar Barot is the assistant editor for *BBC News* and UGC. Although a direct request was sent to the *BBC_HaveYourSay* website to circulate the questionnaire, no response was received. The researcher instead approached Mr. Barot as this contact had been secured in the earlier stages of research, who subsequently agreed to circulate the questionnaire link from his own personal *Twitter* account.

5.3 - Questionnaire Design

The function of a question in a questionnaire is to elicit a particular communication or a specific response from any given individual. A.N. Oppenheim argues that when a questionnaire is addressed to both individuals and groups, "we hope that our respondents have certain information, ideas or attitudes on the subject of our enquiry, and we want to get these from them with a minimum of distortion" (1996: 121). Ten open-ended questions were crafted as a method in which to gain insights from citizen journalists about their experiences and habits, as well as a method in which to explore ethical beliefs and practices. The chief advantage of open-ended questions is the freedom it gives to the individuals to respond frankly and "once they have understood the intent of the question, they can let their thoughts roam freely, unencumbered by a prepared set of replies" (Oppenheim, 1996: 113-114). Additionally, the open-ended questions engendered a framework for potential participants to "explain and contextualize their answers", providing an adequate timeframe in which respondents could organize their thoughts about the topics which informed the questionnaire (Singer, 2010:132). Potential respondents were also made aware of the purpose of the questionnaire and advised that all information would be treated in a confidential manner. An additional contact email address was made available for any respondents who wished to make direct contact with the researcher with further questions or queries.

No specific classification or definition of citizen journalism was advanced for potential respondents as the researcher did not wish to impose strict restrictions on the term itself, and equally, was curious about how potential respondents might interpret or define the practice, or their practice in an over all sense. The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with demographic variables, and sought to discern how

long respondents had been involved in the practice as well as disclosing motivations and reasons for engaging in citizen journalism. In an attempt to identify an audience base for material produced, a number of other questions sought to discern what type of media content respondents were producing, where this material was published and questioned contribution frequency. Potential respondents were asked if they felt the practice of citizen journalism engendered a more democratic and inclusive media environment and to outline reasons for their answer. The final four questions were concerned with ethical beliefs and practices and sought to explore ethical values that users considered when creating work, and questioned respondents if any ethical issues had arisen regarding work they had produced and published. Respondents were also asked if they thought a code of ethics should be crafted to guide those involved in citizen journalism practice. The final question in the study asked respondents if they could recall an event where material produced by citizen journalists had aided in a greater understanding of a news event.

5.4 - Questionnaire Response

Once published and circulated by the media organizations as outlined, as well as to forums and groups on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, there was no way of knowing the percentage of respondents who may have encountered the survey. Equally, for those who did encounter the survey, there was little way of discerning if they were involved directly in citizen journalism practice, although specific 'locations' and media organizations online where citizen journalists were likely to converge were targeted. In an overall sense, it was perceived that although the response rate might be low, the relatively large distribution base would warrant a reasonable amount of responses for potential evaluation. Although still active and open to replies from respondents, the

questionnaire has to date only warranted eight replies, all of which were received between June 03rd and June 16th, 2009.

It was never the intention of the researcher to quantitatively analyze the questionnaire responses, but it was hoped that a discourse analysis of the responses received might exhibit particular themes or trends about those engaged in the practice, or indeed, offer some additional insight or information unanticipated by the researcher. As a result of the poor feedback and overall low response rate, it was thus perceived that the material accumulated did not extend and encompass a broad sample capable of analysis or for identifying any general trends among the responses received.

5.5 - Rationale for Low Response Rate

The researcher did consider omitting the questionnaire entirely from the study but felt that the lack of responses was insightful and reflected wider concerns that were raised in the earlier case study analysis regarding citizen journalism ethics. Equally, as a number of writers have argued 'don't know' responses or 'lack of responses' can sometimes be important when evaluating survey results and should not always be discounted as they may reflect wider trends and attitudes (Silverman, 2005; Oppenheim, 1996). The 'lack of responses' was therefore utilized as a method in which to explore a key theme that is frequently highlighted when the practice is debated upon in professional and academic spheres, that is to say - the contentious notion of citizen journalism accountability. Before opening up this discussion, a number of logistical issues and shortcomings associated with questionnaire distribution will briefly be profiled.

As outlined, *Twitter* and *Facebook* forums acted as the primary avenues for questionnaire circulation, although *Global Voices* did distribute it to citizen journalists

registered on their mailing list. The difficulties with circulating information through *Facebook* and *Twitter* frameworks does warrant consideration however, as both of these mediums work on a 'news feed' basis where the feed is constantly shifting as new messages are posted by users. While this fact denotes that the 'shelf life' of any given post is a short-lived experience, it is perceived that this scenario may have directly impacted on the low response rate. In addition, although those who did administer the questionnaire had a potentially wide spectrum of followers, (Collectively - 33,775 at the time of posting), it is highly unlikely that these members or followers were all logged in to *Facebook* or *Twitter* on the respective day and time that the questionnaire was circulated. In this regard, requesting that the questionnaire was administered or circulated via mailing lists may have been a more appropriate avenue for distribution. Securing contacts however with mainstream media outlets proved to be both problematic and a time-consuming activity. When contacts had been secured the researcher has little choice but to agree to the method in which *they* choose to distribute the questionnaire link. This distribution method also presented a situation where reminder emails could not be administered to potential respondents.

Another important element to acknowledge is the concept of 'survey fatigue', as *Twitter* and *Facebook* are increasingly utilized as forums in which to circulate surveys and questionnaires. In addition to the already prevalent 'information overload' permeating in these spheres, it is probable to argue that citizen journalists who did encounter this questionnaire failed to examine the link in any detail. For those who did, language barriers, survey design or time factors may have dissuaded others from engaging with the questions outlined. With regard to the questionnaire design, it is probable to argue that the open-ended questions may have been unappealing to respondents, yet, as Oppenheim argues, "long and complex questionnaires will often

be completed successfully if the topic is of intrinsic interest to the respondents" (Oppenheim, 1996: 105). Again, the researcher felt that the topic would have been of 'intrinsic interest' to citizen journalists, for as emerging research has indicated; the voice of the citizen journalist has not been articulated in much recent research and discussion.

In theory, the eight replies that were received denote that a number of citizen journalists did both encounter and respond to the questionnaire, while screen grabs of the questionnaire in circulation also prove that those who had agreed to circulate the questionnaire did indeed do so. The overall low response rate to the questionnaire prompted the researcher to reflect on how can citizen journalists be made accountable for their actions in any meaningful way, if when deliberately sought out, they are no where to be found collectively, or equally, they are unwilling to discuss their practice in a broad sense. While the mantra of "everyone is a citizen journalist" resonates loud and clear, the difficulties encountered with locating and identifying citizen journalist undoubtedly exposes an alternative and somewhat contradictory narrative. In a bid to probe the hypothesis of 'everyone is a citizen journalist' somewhat further, and examine the precarious nature of accountability in this field, the researcher decided to undertake a short experiment, and contribute some material to a citizen journalism forum.

5.6 - Joe Blogger on *CNN* iReport

Luke Goode's 2009 research on the subject of citizen journalism argued that *CNN* and the *BBC* are now the main players in this field. Subsequently, it was decided that the *CNN* platform would be utilized in order to explore the ease with which any media content can be uploaded to this website, and utilized as a method in which to examine editorial and accountability processes prevalent on this forum. Before any media content could be uploaded to *iReport*, an account and contact email address are two primary requirements. The account serves as a way in which to identify users, and the email address functions to help *CNN* "verify your stories to include in *CNN* coverage". Disclosing the real name and contact number of a potential reporter are listed as "optional" requirements on the site.

In order to get the process underway, a new email account was subsequently fabricated (jb56335@gmail.com) and an account setup under the username of *joeblogger* (See **Fig 5.1**). The last requirement for creating an account requires users to tick on the 'Sign In' button which denotes that "*CNN*'s Terms of Service, *iReport*'s Terms of Service and *CNN*'s Privacy Policy" have been read and agreed to. With these administrative matters finalized, the *iReport* account was complete and an image under the category of 'Wintery weather near you' was uploaded to the platform. The image itself was automatically archived in this section, while the entire process took approximately ten minutes to undertake (See **Fig 5.2 - Fig 5.3**).

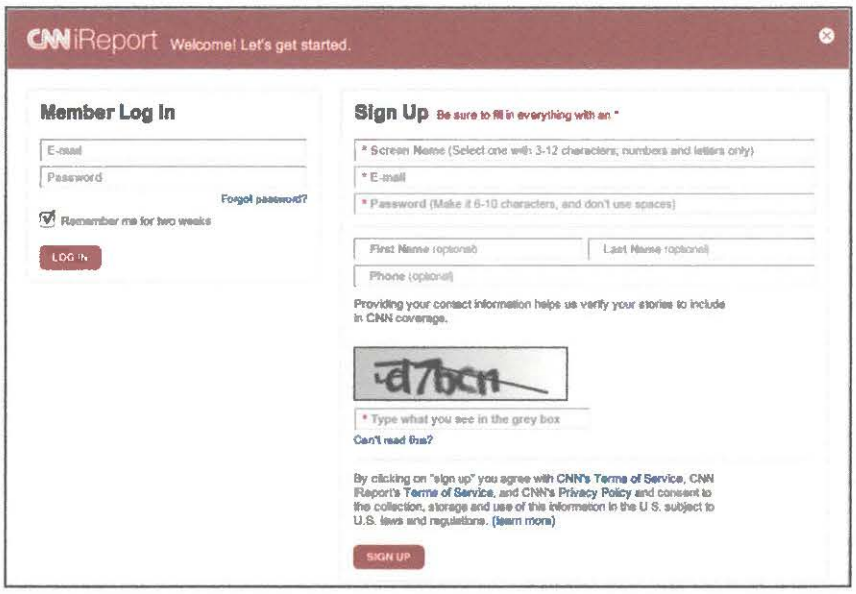

Figure 5.1 - Requirements for creating a *CNN iReport* Account

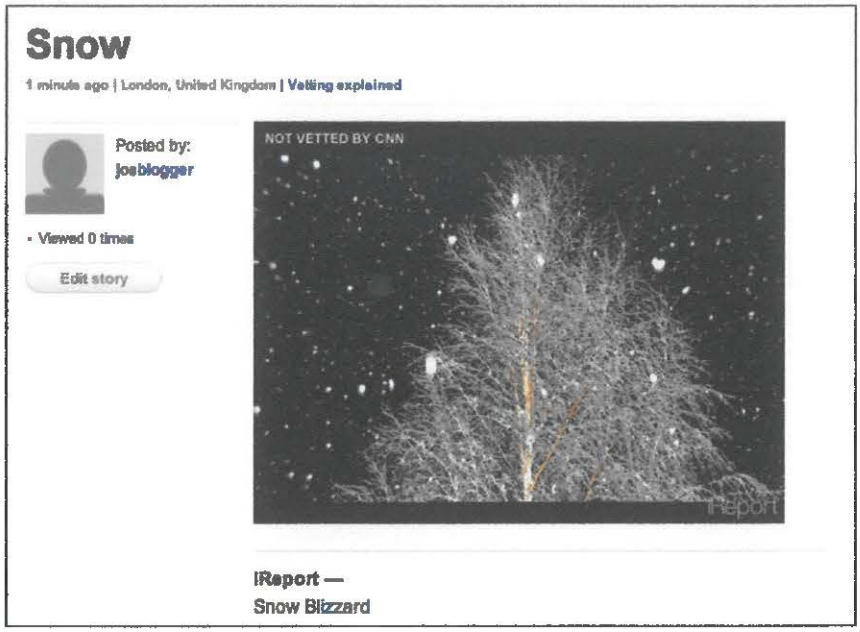

Figure 5.2 - The image uploaded to *CNN*'s *iReport* platform

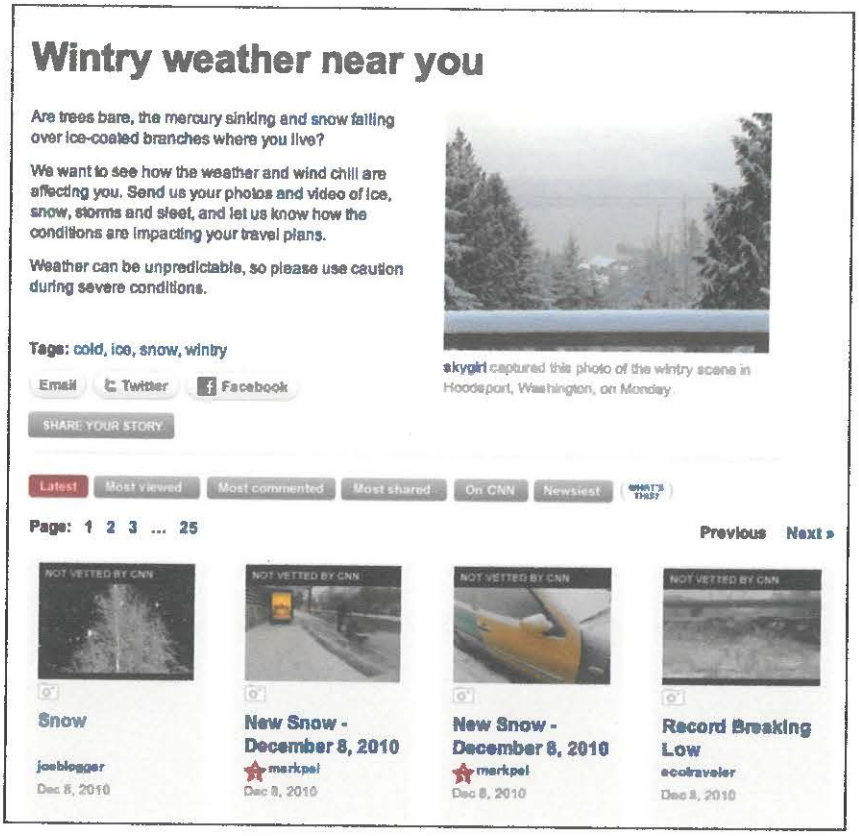

Figure 5.3- My *iReport* on *CNN*

Practically, any story, image or video clip could have been uploaded to the numerous preexisting categories provided by *CNN*'s *iReport* framework, while the website itself distinctively outlines that the material is "not vetted by *CNN*'". For the purposes of brevity however, it was decided that creating a fictitious email account, utilizing a clearly dubious username, and providing incorrect details regarding the photograph would suffice for the researchers brief experiment to outline just how simple it is to publish any media content under the umbrella of citizen journalism on this site. On the 'about' section of this forum, it is clearly stated that "the stories here are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post [and that] *CNN*'s producers will check out some of the most compelling, important and urgent *iReport*s and, once they're cleared for *CNN*, make them a part of *CNN*'s news coverage"(*iReport*, 2010).

On October 3, 2008, an unidentified citizen journalists utilized this very same forum to upload a story announcing that Steve Jobs, CEO of *Apple* had suffered a heart attack. In this instance however, *CNN* did finally have to vet the fallacious report, as rumors of this unexpected news spread swiftly on *Twitter*, *Facebook* and through various mainstream news media networks. Although the report was proved to be unfounded, Sarah Perez argues "because *iReport* is associated with *CNN*, and because of the context in which the UGC was presented, other news outlets afforded the post the credibility that comes with being associated with *CNN* (Perez, 2008). In response to the same misguided news story Michelle Leibowitz argues that citizen journalism should be held to the same standards as professional news organizations outlining that "if citizen journalism cannot realistically meet professional standards of transparency, then what? "(Leibowitz, 2010).

Considering the role of ethics and journalism, media scholars Glasser & Ettema (2008) outline that the aim of ethics in journalism is primarily encapsulated by and through processes of accountability. To be accountable they point out, "means that one can be constrained to reveal what one has done and why one has done it; thus, the action and the reasons for it are open to a critique by strangers who have few inhibitions about demanding justification and reasonable grounds" (Glasser & Ettema, 2008: 513). Applying this rationale to the Steve Jobs incident is however a futile endeavor, as no one has naturally come forward to admit liability, while the only information to be gleaned regarding this users identity is a fabricated user name, '*johntw*' together with an *iReport* account that is no longer accessible.

In the intervening years since this scenario transpired, it appears that little has changed in relation to uploading media content to *CNN*'s *iReport* platform where conditions continue to be particularly lenient. In their study of bloggers ethical beliefs

and practices, Cenite and colleagues identified that the freedom of anonymity facilitated by the Internet means that "bloggers sense of accountability may be low" (Cenite et al, 2009: 579). Singer (2010) also earmarks the use of pseudonyms as problematic, remarking that they foster an environment where "users are not accountable for what they write" (133). Equally, Antony & Thomas (2010), underscore similar concerns remarking that "anonymity in an online discourse may give some users the licensee to engage in otherwise socially unacceptable behavior without having to account for their actions" (1293). While submitting media content to *CNN*'s *iReport* platform may not be representative of all citizen journalism forums and initiatives, similar analogies can be drawn here. The short study exposes the ease with which real identities can be seamlessly concealed, email address fabricated, accountability thus eluded, and illustrates that practically any material can be hosted on this platform under the umbrella of citizen journalism, regardless of its veracity or validity.

5.7 - Mechanisms of Accountability for Professionals

In most professional occupations, including law, medicine, or accounting the instruments of professional regulation and accountability are orchestrated through a combination of professional societies, associations or government agencies. While laws are the most obvious ways in which the boundaries of behaviour and practice can be established, in professional media spheres, self-regulation, through codes of conduct have triumphed over the heavy hand of legislation. These codes demonstrate the need for a general moral framework that journalists, editors, and news organizations should adhere in order that citizens are informed in a non-biased manner and where "members of the public do not have to expend the cognitive energy to assess the work of each individual reporter or photographer" (Hayes et al: 2007:

268-269). On a collective scale, codes of ethics are expected to reflect the geo-political characteristics of societies in which they are formulated where a commitment to truth telling should prevail regardless of audiences' cultural backgrounds or ethnicity.

Habitually, those who service the news media industries are also often members of countless organizations such as *The Society of Professional Journalists* (SPJ), *National Press Photographers Association* (NPPA), *The National Union of Journalists* (NUJ), The *International Federation of Journalists* (IFJ), *The International Press Association*, (IPPA), *The National Association of Broadcasters* (NAB) to list but a few. Again, these organizations serve as important frameworks in which standards of excellence are outlined, thus serving to stimulate high standards of ethical behavior in the practice of journalism, photojournalism and in the spheres broadcast media. While it is true that no finalities can ever be arrived at in the field of ethics, or no code is capable of anticipating ever situation, they do nonetheless act as a guide and a moral framework for those serving the media industries. Equally, these bodies function to put a collective face to those who work in the news media industries, while individuals who are members go through stringent selection processes determined by previously produced and published work. Where normative standards are not upheld, external bodies such as the *Press Complaints Commission* (PCC), or *Ofcom*, (the independent regulator and competition communications authority) monitor the activities of those who service the news media industries, and evaluate complaints made by members of the public regarding perceived intrusive or inaccurate coverage. Additionally, print publications carry daily Correction & Clarifications Subsections in their newspapers, while similar frameworks lie in place for those serving the broadcast media industries. If accountability above all involves,

being answerable to the public, bearing the consequences of one's actions where professionals are expected to admit and correct mistakes promptly, it is evident that no such frameworks lie in place for citizen journalists. Moreover, while there have been many claims made of irresponsible citizen journalism during its short history, no citizen journalist has ever come forward to defend these accusations. Equally as the attempted questionnaire demonstrates, locating citizen journalists either individually or collectively is particularly problematic issue.

Acknowledging the fact that codes of ethics and ombudsmen are not always ideal or wholly effective, Newton et al. point out that the possibility of sanctions does encourage responsible conduct where "the greater the certainty of being exposed for misconduct, the greater the likelihood of careful moral choice." (Newton et al. 2004:178). In an ethnographic study undertaken by Singer & Ashman (2009) with journalists and editors from *The Guardian* regarding UGC one journalist commented, "with citizen journalists, its all about rights and no responsibility" (2009:19). What is apparent then from this inquiry then is that those who 'service' the media industries in a professional capacity must at least navigate regulatory and ethical constraints on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, such professional organizations have mechanisms in place for addressing and surviving ethical lapses of individual employees. In contrast, little structures or no procedures lie in place for those involved in citizen journalism, aside from tentative and frequently erratic editorial measures which are implemented when material produced and disseminated by citizen journalists is channeled through mainstream media spheres; in broadcast reports, online or even in print media formats. Moreover, in the contemporary media environment, material is often already circulating in the public sphere, 'public knowledge' well before long established media organizations have even had an opportunity to engage with it.

5.8 - Ethical Afterthoughts

Considering the concept of the credible journalist in the digital age, Hayes et al. argue that trying to define who is a professional journalists will invariably only "lead in circles" but argue that definitions usually begin with professional ethics and standards" (2007: 265). Like blogging, there is no widely accepted rules or ethical codes of conduct for those involved in citizen journalism practice although most hosting sites and individual media organizations outline ethical considerations or address the subject through the FAQ's sections on their websites. As illustrated with the 'joeblogger' *iReport* account on *CNN*, typically citizen journalists must simply accept the 'terms of use' in order to submit material, but this process can often be achieved by simply 'ticking a box'. Consequently, the ease with which any media content can be uploaded to citizen journalism sites does indicate the lax regulatory nature of these frameworks.

Recent research reflects the concept that while no strict accountability measures lie in place, it is the responsibility of editors to determine the validity of, and stand over media content supplied by citizen journalists (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Harrison, 2010). In consultation with William Gore, the Public Affairs Director for the *Press Complaints Commission*, Gore fortified this position noting that editors of individual media organizations are ultimately "responsible for material supplied by members of the public"(Gore, 2010). When Jane Singer undertook research around the perceived effects of UGC on newsroom norms and routines, one journalist interviewed for the study commented " the day will come when a major legal cock-up is caused by uncontrolled unsupervised use of UGC" (Singer, 2010: 133). While this scenario may or may not transpire, the comment does encapsulate to a large degree the difficulties that remain with monitoring content created by citizen journalists, and suggests that

only in the event of a "cock-up" are ethical issues afforded any gravity, and by then, the information is already circulating in the public sphere. In professional media spheres Karen Sanders presents a corresponding analysis noting "often it seems that the industry has seen ethics as a public relations problem upon which action need only be taken when problems arise" (Sanders, 2003:137).

With this supposition in mind, consider again the footage of Neda Agha Soltan which led to endless debate, prompting media professionals to reflect on the ethical shortcomings regarding the practice. Comparable concerns were raised over media content that citizen journalists produced and circulated during the Mumbai terrorist attacks in December, 2008, and again during the London Underground bombings in July 2005. Additionally, many of these conversations are preoccupied with 'blaming citizen journalists' or questioning the ethical actions of individuals involved, often proving to be reductive then rather than productive. As citizen journalism gains prominence in mainstream and alternative media spheres, and at the same time, other individuals are operating independently outside these frameworks, a uniformed ethical approach to the practice may need appraisal and inquiry in the future.

Throughout this study period, the researcher made contact with the *PCC* on a number of occasions to assess if any discussion or developments were emerging regarding ethical guidelines for citizen journalism. Gore remarked that the current *PPC* "code of practice is sufficient to deal with issues raised by the advent of citizen journalism" remarking that, "oddly, this area has not troubled us as much as we might have anticipated" (Gore, 2009, 2010). During further email communication, Gore remarked "that to be honest, I'm not a big fan of the phrase (citizen journalism) precisely because I don't really know what it means" (Gore, 2010).

Along with Gore, numerous other research scholars, academics and media professionals alike have acknowledged the struggle with how to define or determine what is citizen journalism, while recent examples reflect that more than one type prevails (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Kovačič & Erjavec, 2008; Goode, 2009; Harrison, 2010; Lewis et al. 2010). The citizen journalism activity witnessed in Iran in June of 2009 indicates one permutation of the practice, while the bystander who witnessed the plane that crash-landed on the Hudson River in January 2009, represents another form of the practice in operation. Outside of these parameters, citizen journalists work on a consistent basis with alternative initiatives such as *OhmyNews*, *Demotix* or *The Huffington Post*. Concurrently, within the parameters of mainstream media, *CNN iReport*, *BBC Have Your Say* and *Sky News* frequently integrate UGC created by citizen journalists into mainstream reportage. The reality of these diverse permutations implies that conjuring up any uniformed ethical approach in terms of guidelines or a code of conduct would be a particularly complex task.

Whether a uniformed approach or ethical code is necessary, desirable or feasible for such a large heterogeneous group as citizen journalists is a matter of continuing debate. In their study of bloggers ethical beliefs and practices, Cenite and colleagues acknowledged that, bloggers themselves supported the introduction of a code of ethics arguing that such a code would lend a degree of credibility to their work (Cenite et al, 2009: 575). Professor Ivor Gaber argues that while "some citizen journalists or social networkers do not acknowledge, or follow, ethical precepts does not validate the fact that they should exist" (2009:46). If, as emerging research has acknowledged, that citizen journalist do rely heavily on mainstream spheres in order to reach out to a wider audience base, then conditions for accepting and vetting material produced needs to be afforded continued gravity (Deuze et al. 2007: Bivens, 2008;Hermida &

Thurman, 2008; Reich, 2008; Reese et al, 2008; Thorsen, 2008; Messner & Watson Distaso, 2008). Rather than wait for the "publish and be damned" scenario to materialize Gaber argues instead for ethical sensibilities to be orchestrated through mainstream forums as they might at least "provide a set of benchmarks for what is to be regarded as acceptable behavior" (2009: 46).

While professionals media organizations are only beginning to navigate this new terrain of audience interactivity in the news flow process, many realize that this is the way forward for the news media industries at large (Singer, 2010). Subsequently, eluding accountability through the caveat of "unconfirmed reports" or "non vetted material" may soon become thing of the past, as UGC continues to come under editorial scrutiny. The problematic questionnaire distribution method, resulting in an inability to draw a viable sample of responses from citizen journalists regarding their ethical beliefs and practices denotes that future research might continue on in this area. While time constraints primarily hampered the development of a new research method, fresh attempts should be made to engage with citizen journalists through the development of online focus groups or blogging forums. Additionally, a body or organization set up by citizen journalists, similar in form to *IndyMedia*, might serve as a useful platform in which the ethical dimensions to the practice could be discussed and measures of accountability afforded more meaningful discourse. Equally, such a forum would function as a platform in which citizen journalists could respond to sweeping statements such as those as raised in Singer & Ashman's research where one journalist remarked "with citizen journalists, its all about rights and no responsibility"(2009:19). Realistically, it is relatively easy to utter such remarks if the probability of being challenged is currently non-existent. Moreover, an organization of this nature could equally serve as a central platform where UGC for the news

media industries is subsumed, filtered and redistributed. Currently, the endless amount of citizen journalism and UGC initiatives reflect that while ordinary citizens have been afforded opportunities to contribute to public sphere discourse, these contributions are often tainted as unreliable or untrustworthy and individuals involved subsequently unaccountable.

Appendix

Survey Details and Intent

My name is Miriam O' Connor and I am currently undertaking a Research Masters through the School of Creative Arts at the Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dublin. (IADT (http://www.iadt.ie/en/). My research topic is entitled "Digital Ethics: Photojournalism and the public sphere in the age of citizen journalism and the camera phone". From research to date in the field, I have discerned that mainstream media are frequently consulted regarding the practice of citizen journalism, and to date, no research reflects how citizen journalists themselves feel about their role in the current media landscape.

This pilot survey is being undertaken as part of the research and questions are directed specifically towards those involved in citizen journalism practice. The survey has a number of aims, all of which are intended to give citizen journalists a forum in which to discuss their motivations for involving themselves in citizen journalist practice, as well as exploring ethical beliefs, practices and habits. Of wider relevance also to the study are questions surrounding how citizen journalism can contribute to public sphere knowledge. The responses gathered from the questionnaire will inform a chapter of the dissertation which aims to reflect the views of citizen journalists regarding the themes as set out.

Citizen Journalists are invited to answer the following questions and encouraged to provide as much detail as possible. User confidentiality is assured and results of the questionnaire will not be used for commercial purposes or disclosed to any third party. The researcher can also be contacted at Miriam.O'Connor@iadt.ie

Survey Questions

1. Gender, Age, Nationality, Location, Email (Email address is optional)

2. How long have you being involved in citizen journalism practice and how often would you contribute articles, photographs or videos?

3. What motivated you to become involved in citizen journalism practice?

4. Which websites or news organizations would you normally submit work to and what kind of media content do you contribute?

5. Has any work you produced as a citizen journalist been circulated in mainstream media organizations such as *Sky News*, *CNN* or the *BBC*? If other, please specify (Please outline the type of media content, such as photographs or video)

6. In your opinion, has the practice of citizen journalism democratised the media landscape and why?

7. What ethical values do you consider when creating work as a citizen journalist?

8. Have any ethical issues or debates arisen around work which you have publicized?

9. Do you think there should be a code of practice formulated to guide citizen journalists in their practice and why?

10. Can you recall or identify an event where contributions by citizen journalists aided in a greater public understanding of a news story or event?

Thank you.

Conclusion

6.1 - Introduction

Recently, when journeying across the boulevards of *YouTube* on the World Wide Web, a short video clip petitioned quietly for attention, such as it often does on this site, *vis-à-vis*, videos 'Recommended for You' section. The video in question urging for such approval - none other than *Jacques Derrida On Photography*. On further reflection the researcher reasoned with this temptation, concluding that, yes, certainly - five minutes could indeed be spared to listen and watch this French philosopher and thinker 'talk photography'. In the clip, Derrida speaks candidly to an unseen interviewer regarding the innate difficulties incurred since the 1970's with controlling his public image and indeed his image publicly. Displaying a certain distain for 'seeing' his own portrait in particular, Derrida exclaims, "I absolutely forbade all public photographs of myself [...] and forbade the publication of any kind of image of myself". Spirited words and determination from a public figure one might add. Yet, towards the conclusion of the clip, Derrida surrenders to 'the savage public eye' and omnipresent camera. Here then he references the impracticalities of this endeavor, pronouncing finally, "I gradually let it go [as] it was impossible to enforce this interdiction" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RjLOxrloJ0).

As far back as 1977 Barthes noted that "the age of photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly" (1977: 98). Considering Derrida's and Barthes positions in light of the contemporary 'constant touch' climate, it's hard to imagine how these literary giants would have 'coped' with today's all-seeing, all-knowing camera phones, pulsating Web 2.0 technologies, and omnipresent citizen journalists. Indeed Barthes himself - 'camera shy' too. Worthy too then to reflect upon how a citizen journalist, (had they

existed at this phase of course), would have engaged with Derrida's somewhat unreasonable demands of 'no pictures please' - circa the 1970's. Would the taking and sharing of his image on a global stage have been framed as a democratic performance or an act of downright privacy invasion? Fitting then in some respects to utilize Derrida's musings on his 'public image' and his attempts to control it, as a springboard in which to reflect upon a salient matter underscored throughout this dissertation. That is to say - Derrida's request it seems, would never be upheld in today's contemporary media climate where images are published in real time, with or without the knowledge of those who might resist – if only they had half the chance to intervene. If only.

With this in mind, the conclusion to this exploratory study will now reflect upon the primary themes raised over the previous chapters regarding the practice of citizen journalism. A number of concerns will inform this discussion, the first of which relates to the democratic nature of citizen journalism and the manner in which this appears compromised as economic matters have begun to 'take over' as the practice gathers continued momentum. In this capacity, the political economy 'turn' of citizen journalism needs some further appraisal. Another matter for debate revisits the ethical and often difficult dimensions to the practice as underscored throughout the previous chapters. In order to commence this debate, it is appropriate at this juncture to reflect again on the main research question that this study sought to explore and turn to the manner in which citizen journalism can be seen to advance the democratic project. In short then, has citizen journalism really created conditions for a more democratic public sphere to emerge? Moreover, how democratic is the act itself when as recent examples outline, it is so often subsumed by mainstream spheres in a bid for the citizen journalist to reach out to a global audience?

6.2 - Citizen Journalism's possibilities and limitations

A principle outcome or point of discussion regarding the advent of the Internet in the early 1990's admittedly had at its nucleus the notion that this new medium of communication could, or at least had the potential to level the playing field of one-way communication that had for so long restricted any meaningful exchange between media producers and their audiences. As underscored in the literature, emerging narratives were of both a utopian and dystopian nature. From the utopian camp, a reinvigorated public sphere would soon emerge, while polar narratives were informed by the 'naysayers' and overwhelming pessimism in a general sense. In this capacity, the Internet would do little else but reinforce dominant values; 'older orders and ideologies' held by those in already powerful positions in society. The nature of Marx's economic determinism going nowhere fast then as it were.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that the Internet did without question challenge the dominant order of things, and none more so than in the processes of news production and distribution. In light of this analysis, similar optimistic discourses regarding the practice of citizen journalism without doubt exhibit familiar themes - the traditional dichotomy of producer/consumer gone, done away with forevermore - it would seem. As underscored in the case studies, it is evident that new media technologies are playing a primary role too in this process and indeed continue to shape the uptake, participation and implementation of the practice in a broad sense. The consequences of which are most aptly embodied by Colin Spark's who argues rightly that nation states *can no longer* put definitive boundaries around a territory and regulate all that they can do and watch (Sparks, 2007:137). Moreover, the case studies illuminate conclusively the impossible nature of controlling the image, indeed any imagery, moving or still, in this early juncture of the 21st century, the Neda footage in particular

an exemplary example here. Equally, without the ingenuity of those involved in its production and distribution it is probable to argue that this same event may never have entered public sphere knowledge. While the 'shock value' of the footage might fade over time, it unquestionably demonstrated the value of visual representations created by citizen journalists during this phase. Furthermore, the production and distribution of the footage subscribes to the notion that the practice *can* contribute in a very real sense to public sphere understanding. More recently still, similar parallels can be drawn between the manner in which new media technologies were enlisted during the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in January 2011, or during Japan's earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. In this capacity then - certain characteristics and examples of citizen journalism appear to definitively present new possibilities for a reinvigorated public sphere to emerge, changing the manner in which we see and come to know, and indeed how quickly we come to know in present times. Moreover the role of new media technologies such as the camera phone playing a most meaningful part in this trajectory.

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), Ariela Azoulays draws attention to the manner in which photography in particular can invoke new patterns of citizenship in the globalised media environment, enabling frequently unheard 'Palestinian voices' to be seen and heard. Here then, 21st century photographic technologies and practices subscribe to Azoulay's thought set and indeed reflect the notion that technology can help support the democratic cause, enabling marginalized voices to be seen and heard. Not unlike the optimistic discourses that surround citizen journalism however, it most be noted that the Palestinians 'cause' often only becomes apparent on a global stage when the State of Israel has come under siege from Hamas insurgents. Subsequently, similar analogies cannot be ignored when assessing the 'power' of citizen journalism

to direct and shape the news media agenda on a day-to-day basis. As previously underscored the Iranian State always an important player on the international 'energy and arms' sector stage to say the least – always then a case for a global inquiry, regardless of the 'sources' of information. Indeed all the more interesting if censorship tactics are at play. Ron Steinman, less than sanguine in his analysis on the practice argues, "Citizen journalism, a serious attempt to complement traditional news, does not work unless there is a crisis such as the Iranian election. News cannot live on the work of amateurs or a lucky photo of an event snapped with a cell phone" (*The Digital Journalist*: 2009).

In this regard then, citizen journalism must be conceptualized as a practice that has at its nucleus too the notion of possibilities and limitations. The possibilities very much embedded in optimistic discourses that surround new media technologies and the manner in which they can be enlisted by ordinary citizens, 'citizen journalist if you will' to participate and directly influence the 'turn of events' regarding information and imagery that circulates in the public sphere. At the other end of the spectrum the limitations of the practice are equally *as* important to acknowledge. What factors then ultimately determine that material created by citizen journalism becomes part of public sphere knowledge? Here, Martin Lister's comments come to mind where he aptly remarks, that we must be careful of the "ideological connotations of the new" (Lister, 2003: 11). While it may be the case that citizen journalists can and do harness technologies in an attempt to draw attention to salient, noteworthy or even newsworthy issues, such issues too it seems, must be deemed important enough to warrant mainstream media attention in the overall scheme of things. The topic is best surmised by Goode, (2009), who remarks, "what blogging, citizen journalism and social news sites yield are new *possibilities* for citizen participation at various points

along those chains of sense-making that shape news - not only new possibilities for citizens to break news" (Goode, 2009: 1291).

Citizen journalism then must be appraised to some extent as an extension of this active-audience engagement as opposed to a sudden or overwhelming rupture of the previously settled producer-consumer dichotomy. Moreover, the practice does not signal the end of agenda setting by professionals or large-scale media organizations. In this regard, it remains the case that dominant media institutions continue to break frame and edit news stories worthy of attention, while this scenario is unlikely to alter dramatically in the foreseeable future. Here then, much like emerging research in the field acknowledges, citizen journalism complements rather than replaces a 'main stream' public sphere and is characterized by both its possibilities and limitations. While it's vision may be embedded in concepts that a more democratic media environment might emerge, an even playing field if you will, between those who produce and those who consume news - the potential of citizen journalism is antagonistically entangled in dominant structures, and it is unclear if this capitalist integument can be stripped any time soon.

This scenario is overwhelmingly accentuated too by the myriad of citizen journalism initiatives that have emerged post 2005 within mainstream spheres. From the *BBC*, to *Sky News*, to *CNN*'s *iReport* - the list continues to expand. It must therefore be acknowledged that such institutions are capitalizing on the 'global army' and resource of citizen journalists' for fear of being left behind (Deuze, 2007; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Singer 2010). Additionally, outside of these parameters other independent models such as *Demotix*, *Citizenside*, *OhMyNews*, or *NowPublic* are all based on a 'for profit' business model (Goode, 2009). Here then it seems that the skills of citizen journalists are enlisted as a means in which to cut costs in the global

economic turndown evidenced across the news media industries in a broad sense. Acknowledging the renewed focus on economics in today's 'cash strapped' media environment, a journalist in Jane Singers research surmises aptly that "with the best will in the world, we cannot produce anything like the amount of content we need for our sites. Citizen Journalism in some form or another is the only way forward" (Singer, 2010: 135)

Moreover, as the practice continues to become a commonplace activity, citizen journalists frequently migrate to these 'well known' organizations in a bid to advance their cause to a global audience. In this regard, noteworthy too perhaps to draw again on Dueze et al, (2007) who remark "for all its success, citizen journalism remains dependent to a significant extent on mainstream news organizations, whose output it debates, critiques, recombines, and debunks" (335). In this context then, the practice while still in its infancy stages has still along way to go before becoming a mass reality capable of transforming the media landscape and information that circulates in the public sphere.

6.3 – A global army of 'unidentifiable' citizen journalists'

And so too at this final juncture, fitting and relevant again to reflect upon the ethical turn of citizen journalism or indeed the perceived lack of a common approach in terms of how to 'deal with' the ethical dimensions to the practice. On one hand, material produced by citizen journalist is frequently leveled as lacking an 'ethical drive', while on the other hand, is so readily subsumed by large-scale media organizations. The case of the citizen journalism in Iran during the presidential election disputes undoubtedly a case in point here. As underlined throughout the case studies, and evident from emerging research and professional discourses, 'the

unidentifiable' citizen journalist has fostered more than its fair share of bad press, finger pointing if you will. Yet, in theory there appears to be no one about as such to point the finger at - aside from a 'global army of citizen journalists' of course as the attempted case study concludes. Who then needs to carry the ethical can of citizen journalism or how can the matter be leveled with as the practice continues on its non-stop trajectory?

In their analysis of 24-hour news trends that have increased significantly since the advent of cable television and the Internet, Lewis & Cushions, (2009) raise the point that "the emphasis on immediacy rather than quality has pushed 24-hour news channels into a ticker taper mentality where speed is all" and the veracity of information questionable (312). Simon Cottle too mirrors this viewpoint noting that getting news first nowadays is actually more important than getting it right (2009). Here then the skills of citizen journalist are enlisted, so that, as David Harvey has noted "some kind of eternal truth that might lie therein" can be revealed in no time at all (Harvey, 1990: 291).

As relayed throughout the dissertation, the postmodern scurry towards relaying today's news yesterday has received its latest boost via an omnipresent citizen journalist, armed with a camera phone no less, coupled with an innate public demand it seems for this real-time representation of news stories. While those within the realms of mainstream media exercise caution regarding the validity and veracity of material supplied by citizen journalists, it is apparent now that there is no going back. While the citizen journalist 'genie' may be out of the bottle as David Burnett (2009) acknowledges, so too is the realization that news must be tracked on a global stage, almost before it happens - 24 hours ago - yesterday. It is within this context that the researcher conclusively argues that sensibilities regarding the use of material supplied

by citizen journalist must be afforded more gravity within the spheres of mainstream media organizations. It is not enough to point the finger, assigning blame after the event or negotiate liability exemption through the avenues of the 'unconfirmed report'. As previously noted, the ethical dimensions associated with the practice frequently only come under scrutiny and discussion when things go wrong or professional normative values are seemingly undermined or threatened. Chris Weigant from *The Huffington Post* draws attention to this matter also with regard to the Neda footage pointing out that the media's double standards on showing the death of Neda were of a contradictory nature. Addressing the manner in which mainstream media were willing to show it but at the same time, attempting to safeguard their own reputation via pixelating the footage, Weigant notes, "pixelating a face is trying to have it both ways" (2009).

While it may be true that citizen journalists frequently bypass mainstream platforms when disseminating material to the public sphere, and editorial decision making in no longer a tightly controlled appointment, it remains the case that mainstream media organizations most frequently furnish the citizen journalists with a global voice. Here then again, the concept of citizen journalism's ability to operate without the reliance of mainstream spheres is questionable. If the media's role in society is categorically embedded in notions of informing the public on "useful truths", publishing ethically questionable material, a series of truths and half-truths in a bid to get their first is a matter of grave concern (Habermas 1989: 25). In this capacity, in the absence of any collective way of dealing with the ethical issues raised by citizen journalism, mainstream media need to take the lead in this race to be the first. In this regard further resources and analysis need to be afforded by mainstream organizations when subsuming material created and distributed by citizen journalists. Singer (2010)

acknowledges the current lack of expenditure, noting that monitoring UGC is a task which is almost impossible within existing newsroom resources" (135). While it may be the case that the media are on their own in charting a way through the ethical frontier of citizen journalism practice, sidestepping culpability via 'unconfirmed reports' or 'potentially offensive material' is undoubtedly a questionable practice. Certainly such endeavours serve to protect and safeguard professional infrastructures but equally call into question the already tenuous nature of citizen journalism' credibility.

To surmise then, the researcher argues that ethical turn of citizen journalism must do a 360, back towards those who act as the primary resource of distribution, that is to say- preexisting established media organizations. Admittedly, this may not always be the case, but recent trends and examples indicate that by virtue of being named a citizen journalist alone, the practice and those participating in it become institutionalized or certainly undergo some form of institutionalization. Moreover, future studies and research in this field might place further focus on how citizen journalists could partake in this 'ethical' conversation, for there is nothing worse than being spoken about, and not being spoken to.

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