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Communicative Action and Citizen Journalism: A Case Study of *OhmyNews* in South Korea

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Drawing on Habermas's theory of communicative action, this case study of *OhmyNews* in South Korea examines how citizen journalism operates in a broad organizational and social context. Through in-depth interviews with professional and citizen journalists, the study reveals that citizen journalism can be well understood at the intersection between the lifeworld and systems. Specifically, the study finds a coexistence mechanism by which citizen journalism competes, collaborates, coordinates, and compromises with professional journalism through communicative action, such as mutual understanding, reason-based discussion, and consensus building.

Keywords: citizen journalism, professional journalism, theory of communicative action, the lifeworld, systems, in-depth interviews

Citizen journalism scholarship has garnered growing interest and attention as citizens increasingly engage in news consumption and production processes through digital communication technologies, which may lead to democratic outcomes (e.g., Carpenter, 2008, 2010; Goode, 2009; Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Nah & Chung, 2009, 2012; Östman, 2012; Thurman, 2008). Although theoretical and methodological approaches vary across these studies, scholars have placed citizen journalism/journalists or user-generated content/contributors in diverse and comparative contexts with regard to professional journalism/journalists. Some research relates to news editors' philosophical and practical approaches of adopting citizen journalism (Lewis et al., 2010), changing journalistic role conceptions (Nah & Chung, 2009, 2012; Thurman, 2008), diversified news content and sources in citizen media sites (Carpenter, 2008, 2010), and citizen journalism or user-generated content as a form of and having an impact on democratic participation (Goode, 2009; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Östman, 2012).

Despite the prolific and growing scholarship on citizen journalism, little attention has been given to where citizen journalism exists and how citizen journalism operates alongside professional journalism in a broad organizational and social context. Only a few scholars have examined how citizen journalists and bloggers establish their identity and value systems, which in turn lead to differentiated and separate

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journalistic roles and ideological stances as compared to professional news producers in a local community (e.g., Robinson & Deshano, 2011a, 2011b). A lack of understanding of the dynamic relationship between citizen and professional journalism calls for research examining how citizen journalists compete, collaborate, coordinate, and compromise with professional journalists.

The present study locates citizen journalism in a broad organizational and social context and examines how citizen journalists interact with professional journalists within a news media organization. Relying on Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987), this study builds a theoretical and analytical framework for understanding citizen journalism, which may lie at the intersection between the lifeworld and systems. In so doing, this case study of *OhmyNews* in South Korea examines how citizen journalism operates in conjunction with professional journalism through communicative action, such as reason-based discussions, mutual understanding, and consensus building in the competitive and evolving journalistic field.

The Lifeworld, Systems, and the Public Sphere ***Theory of Communicative Action: The Lifeworld and Systems***

According to Habermas (1981/1984), communicative action refers to

the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement (p. 86).

Habermas's theory of communicative action (1981/1987) explains how distinct communication mechanisms as part of a long process of social evolution contribute to differentiation of the system and lifeworld.

Although Habermas begins with an action-oriented theory to account for how society has evolved, he later applies it to a system-oriented theory that attempts to connect action theory to systems theory (Habermas, 1981/1987). In the nexus between action theory and systems theory, Habermas's account of action in the lifeworld is understood through action theory, which distinguishes communicative action from systems steered by media of money and power (Habermas, 1981/1987). That is, he applies the theory of communicative action to a social context, because "communicative action takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills" (Habermas, 1981/1984, p. 335). He further notes that "the concept of society has to be linked to a concept of the lifeworld that is complementary to the concept of communicative action. Then communicative action becomes interesting primarily as a principle of sociation" (Habermas, 1981/1987, p. 337).

In the lifeworld, communicative action functions as one of the fundamentals in reaching mutual understanding, which leads to consensus among people. Habermas argues that "cultural patterns of interpretation, evaluation, and expression serve as resources for the achievement of mutual

understanding by participants who want to negotiate a common definition of a situation and within that framework, to arrive at a consensus regarding something in the world" (Habermas, 1981/1987, p. 134). Therefore, the lifeworld can be defined as a "sphere of communicatively integrated networks, consisting of language, culture, value, norms, meaning, and commitment" (Habermas, 1981/1987, pp. 137–138).

The lifeworld, comprised of cultural reproduction (value), society (norm), and personality (commitment), can be integrated through communicative action as a medium of integration. In addition, communicative action is embedded in rationality, claims, rightfulness, sincerity, truthfulness, and mutual understanding. As society evolves, the lifeworld becomes connected to political and economic systems, in which a communication medium operates that is different from the communicative action. In other words, steering media—power and money—become communication media that dominate political and economic subsystems.

By contrast, the system can be defined as a society consisting of economic and political subsystems that operate through steering media. This system is composed of the state administration and economic organizations in which money and power operate as media of integration. As such, the lifeworld and system have different rationalization processes as the system has been detached from the lifeworld. This differentiation process, which is called "uncoupling" or "decoupling," gives different rationalizations to societies.

In sum, with the theory of communicative action, Habermas (1981/1984, 1981/1987) explains how society has been differentiated between the lifeworld and system. Different mechanisms of integration and components make the lifeworld and system separate and detached. Therefore, the theory provides insights to understanding societies, which operate in different ways through different communication modes. In this theory, the nexus between the lifeworld and system locates the public sphere concept that mediates between the system and the lifeworld and functions as a buffer between the state and civil society.

The Public Sphere and Multiple Public Spheres

The concept of the public sphere has expanded over time, reflecting social change and technological transformation. First, the notion of a bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989) is referenced in face-to-face communication. Historically, the public sphere indicates a bourgeois public sphere as a realm between civil society and the state, in which the public gathers to discuss common problems in order to solve them. That is, the public sphere is a mediating realm between the state and civil society wherein general citizens participate in public discussions to achieve common goals as opposed to private interests. The concept of the public sphere has expanded as media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, have developed beyond face-to-face communication. The public sphere in a mass-mediated communication context obtains dual status as a sphere both in physical and mediated realms (Habermas, 1974).

In a modern society, the news media attain important status as public spheres in which public opinion forms through open and rational discussions (e.g., Dahlgren, 1995; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1993;

Habermas, 1962/1989). In particular, the news media empower themselves as they play major roles in terms of providing information and news so that citizens can discuss public affairs to reach common goals. News media as public spheres lie between the lifeworld and system. That is, news media as societal institutions and professional practices are subject to steering constraints on a continuum (e.g., Curran, 1991; Garnham, 1992; McChesney, 1997, 1999). However, news media remain linguistic media of the public sphere, articulating the relationship between political power in the state and the lifeworld.

In a digital era, the Internet provides possibilities and potential through which it can function as a public sphere. Despite skepticism, various online news media can provide spaces for discussion where journalists and citizens interact (e.g., Friedland, 1996; Papacharissi, 2000; see also Dahlberg, 2004). Given the magnitude of the spaces that the Internet provides (e.g., websites, blogs, discussion forums), it can function as a site for multiple public spheres (Dahlgren, 2005), being interrelated and interconnected through *networked* public spheres (Friedland, Hove, & Rojas, 2006).

In sum, the public sphere concept provides a useful framework to understand how the news media and journalism function in conjunction with the lifeworld and systems. Given that the public sphere mediates the interface between the lifeworld and systems, the roles that journalism and news media play can be understood as a public sphere. Furthermore, multiple public spheres provide a basis for complexity and multiplicity of journalism phenomena, which has enabled ordinary citizens to become citizen journalists through digital communication technologies. Moreover, the concept of the public sphere facilitates our understanding of the journalistic field as a multifaceted one where both professional and citizen journalists produce and consume information. In this vein, journalism—both professional and citizen journalism—can be defined as a complex of linguistically and discursively embedded and communicatively bound practices in the public sphere that resides at the seam or intersection between the lifeworld and system.

A Theoretical and Analytical Framework Toward Citizen Journalism

The theory of communicative action provides a larger social context for locating the public sphere that explains the basis for the news media and journalism to function as democratic communications in a civil society. Figure 1 depicts the interrelationships among the lifeworld, systems, and public spheres, which reside in the journalistic field. Two underlying criteria exist—the closeness of social relations and the means of social coordination or integration (Nah, 2010; see also Friedland, 2001; Habermas, 1981/1987; Warren, 2001).

On the one hand, the system is comprised of states and markets whose social relations are distant, including mediating political and economic associations along with mediating spaces by the public, whereas the lifeworld is comprised of intermediate relations (e.g., voluntary and civic associations) and intimate relations (e.g., families, friendships, and neighbors). On the other hand, the system, composed of states and markets, operates through steering media (e.g., legal coercion and money), while the lifeworld operates through social norms and communicative action based on mutual understanding and reason-based discussions.

Closeness of social relations	Means of social coordination or integration		
	Legal coercion	Social (norm and communication)	Money
System Distant	States Mediating associations: Political society	Mediating spaces: Publics	Markets Mediating associations: Economic society
Lifeworld Intermediate	Journalistic fields: Multiple public spheres		
Intimate	Civic/voluntary associations Families/friendships/neighbors		

Note. Modified from Nah (2010).

Figure 1. Locating citizen and professional journalism.

As shown in Figure 1, both professional and citizen journalism can be understood as journalistic practices in the public sphere or the journalistic field that lie at the intersection between the lifeworld and system. Whereas some scholars argue that citizen journalism is an extension of civic or public journalism (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010), citizen journalism is more complex than civic or public journalism in terms of the type of journalists involved.¹ While civic or public journalism is led almost exclusively by professional journalists, a vast amount of citizen journalism can be autonomous from conventional journalism and can be led by ordinary citizens and/or through the collaborative work of citizen and professional journalists. The presence of more than 1,000 independent citizen (and community) journalism sites (Knight Community News Network, www.kcnn.com) indicates that citizen journalism is not only dependent on but independent from professional journalism. That is, citizen journalism can be best understood in conjunction with professional journalism, and both are situated in the multiple public spheres that mediate the lifeworld and system.

Citizen journalism has emerged as a movement in which ordinary citizens express their opinions from their own perspectives (Deuze, 2003; Kern & Nam, 2009), thereby empowering civil society—

¹ Civic (or public) journalism refers to “a way of thinking about the business of the craft that calls on journalists to (1) address people as citizens, potential participants in public affairs . . . ; (2) help the political community act upon . . . ; (3) improve the climate of public discussion . . . ; and (4) help make public life go well, so that it earns its claim on our attention and (5) speak honestly about its civic values, its preferred view of politics, its role as a public actor” (Glasser, 1999, p. 44). Although both civic (or public) and citizen journalism can contribute to the conversation of democracy, the key difference between them is “who produces news stories.” Civic (or public) journalism emphasizes news content created by professional journalists for and of the public, whereas citizen journalism focuses on news content created independently by citizens themselves, although citizen journalists, more often than not, collaborate with professional journalists.

although these practices are largely dependent on or interdependent with professional journalism. Given that the Internet can function as multiple or alternative public spheres opposed to the colonized mainstream public spheres (Habermas, 1962/1989, 1981/1987), citizen journalism has emerged as a form of alternative journalism (e.g., Deuze, 2009; Rutigliano, 2009).

Although various terms have been used interchangeably to describe this phenomenon, citizen journalism generally refers to "contribution to discussion in the public sphere, whether in the form of simple information, synthesis, reporting, or opinion. The contributions can range from very local to global, entering into the 'conversation of democracy' in media critic James Carey's phrase" (Friedland & Kim, 2009, p. 297). In a broad sense, "citizen journalists can be individuals making a single contribution (a fact, correction, photo, etc.), bloggers, or professionals editing citizen content for 'professional-amateur' (pro-am) sites which integrates the works of professional staff and citizen contributors" (Friedland & Kim, 2009, p. 297; see also Nah, 2008). These definitions indicate that citizen journalism, as linguistically and communicatively bounded practices, can contribute to the public sphere where the general public may engage in public discussions, thereby working toward common goals and interests.

Scholars have discussed citizen journalism in conjunction with conventional and civic/public journalism, claiming that citizen journalism originates from professional and civic/public journalism practices (Rosenberry & St. John, 2010). In this vein, citizen journalism can be defined as a type of journalism that is embedded and operates in the public sphere between the lifeworld and system. Citizen journalism also overlaps with conventional and civic (or public) journalism in the journalistic field, where diverse journalists compete, cooperate, or coordinate their activities over resources, reputations, norms, and journalistic roles.

There are various types of citizen journalism activities. For instance, Kern and Nam (2009) propose three dimensions of citizen journalism: purpose, production, and profit oriented. The first dimension, *purpose*, indicates whether citizen journalists contribute to community building by facilitating civic conversations or merely gather news and information. The second dimension, *production*, indicates whether citizen journalism emphasizes the gatekeeping role from professional journalists or lets citizens control the production or both. The third dimension, *profit oriented*, indicates whether citizen journalism is profit oriented through subscriptions and advertisements or is not-for-profit oriented toward voluntary journalism.

In a similar vein, Nah (2008; see also Nah, Yamamoto, Chung, & Zuercher, 2015) classifies citizen journalism in terms of the combination of the extent of content contribution by citizen reporters and professional journalists and the extent of the independence of citizen journalism sites from professional journalism sites. For example, citizen reporters may merely post comments to professional news sites (e.g., CNN) or major local news sites as well as citizen news sites (e.g., MyMissourian.com). Furthermore, citizen reporters may actively participate in news production through mainstream and citizen news media sites by delivering news and information in various forms, such as text, audio, video, and photo, as seen during the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Citizen reporters also produce news content with professional journalists, as seen on BluffonToday.com, Lawrence.com, DenverPost.com, and *OhmyNews*.

These various types of citizen journalism and journalists add dynamic contributions to the journalistic field as they create diverse relationships with preexisting professional journalism in the public sphere.

A Case Study of *OhmyNews*: Research Context

OhmyNews in South Korea was founded by Yeon Ho Oh, a former professional journalist, on February 22, 2000 (see Joyce, 2007, for a detailed history of *OhmyNews*).² With the motto "Every citizen is a reporter," *OhmyNews* is one of the first news outlets to publish citizen-generated news content along with professional journalists' stories.³ *OhmyNews* provides a unique research site where professional journalists work with citizen journalists for news production and reproduction. In particular, the *OhmyNews* case demonstrates how citizen journalism coexists with professional journalism through *cooperation* and *competition* processes, which operate through communicative action.

Since its founding, *OhmyNews* has been sensational and influential in many aspects. From a political viewpoint, it played a vital role in helping an underdog, liberal presidential candidate, Moo Hyun Noh, become elected as South Korea's president in 2002, and it is still significant as an opinion leader in South Korea. In the journalistic field, *OhmyNews* has been referred to as a pioneer of innovative citizen journalism.

This case study of *OhmyNews* proposes a theoretical and analytical framework through the theory of communicative action to understand the multiplicity and complexity of citizen journalism from an organizational and social context. Specifically, the study explores the following interrelated research questions: (1) how citizen journalism is defined and connected to the lifeworld of ordinary citizens as compared to professional journalism and (2) how citizen journalism interacts with professional journalism through communicative action.

Method

In-depth Interviews

To understand how citizen journalism operates in conjunction with professional journalism at *OhmyNews*, we conducted in-depth interviews because they are appropriate for allowing the social actors to elucidate their own perspectives (Lindlof, 1995). Both citizen and professional journalists were

² *OhmyNews* currently has about 100 professional staff, including both beat reporters and editorial staff, and about 70,000 registered citizens who can contribute to the news site. Although only a small portion of registered citizens contributes actively, almost half of its news stories are produced by citizen journalists and are placed on its front page on a daily basis. Citizen contributions are categorized into five layers ranging from raw and unrefined stories to edited versions for publication. Although citizen journalists are not full-time employees and do not work on a regular salary-based system, they can receive compensation and incentives through payment by readers who donate money to the stories they like.

³ Prior to *OhmyNews*, *Newsboy* adopted citizen journalism practices ("honorary citizen reporters") and was founded in 1999 (Kern & Nam, 2011, p. 182).

interviewed to provide a comparison of perspectives because they are positioned to speak meaningfully about the phenomenon being examined.

Semistructured questions allowed the participants to share detailed accounts of their activities. A standardized protocol of open-ended questions was used for both groups to assess the similarities and differences between citizen and professional journalistic practices, in which each respondent was treated as an authoritative speaker.

Because *OhmyNews* was founded in 2000 and may include among its registered users many inactive participants, a sampling frame was created to target individuals who had submitted content to *OhmyNews* in the past year. Thus, in this study, citizen journalists were defined as any citizen who had registered with *OhmyNews* and had submitted stories in the most recent year. Professional journalists were defined as individuals employed by the *OhmyNews* organization who have a responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996) for the news site.⁴

Citizen journalists were first asked general questions related to their contributions to *OhmyNews*, such as when they first registered with the site and the frequency of their submissions. These questions were followed by perceptual questions that gauged their understanding of distinctions between professional and citizen journalists, their interaction or exchange with the professional staff, and the independence of the participation process. Finally, they were asked about the journalistic roles of citizen and professional journalists in society. Similarly, professional journalists were also initially asked general organizational questions, such as about the goals and history of the news organization. Then they were asked about their expectations of citizen journalists' submissions and the standards for story publication. Finally, they, too, were asked about the distinction of activities between both types of journalists, the interaction/exchange, and the roles that citizen and professional journalists perform to their publics. All interviews were conducted in Korean.⁵

⁴ To recruit citizen journalist participants, the *OhmyNews* headquarters sent an e-mail message to 2,871 citizen journalists in October 2011. A total of 2,540 e-mails (88.5%) were successfully sent. Of those e-mail messages, 763 individuals (30%) had opened the recruitment message by the second day of its initial circulation. To recruit professional journalist participants from the *OhmyNews* staff, the internal online message board was used to circulate an invitation message. About 90 individuals had access to this system. A total of 61 individuals had viewed the message on the message board by the second day the message was posted. The in-depth interviews for both groups were conducted in November and December of 2011 in Seoul, South Korea.

⁵ Both researchers involved in the project were fluent in the English and Korean languages. The recorded interviews were transcribed and then carefully translated. Then the transcripts were given preliminary readings followed by multiple detailed readings to identify pervasive patterns and themes in the participants' responses. The data were then classified based on those repeatedly surfacing trends that emerged naturally through the interviewing process. Finally, these notions were prioritized based on the interrelated and interdependent ideas that surfaced throughout the narratives that provided explanations

The Sample

A total of 16 citizen journalists participated in the interviews. The average interview lasted about 46 minutes. Five interviews were conducted face-to-face, and 10 were conducted via telephone.⁶ One interview was conducted via e-mail because the participant lived overseas, and the time difference made it difficult to coordinate schedules. The participants' occupations were diverse, ranging from professor, high school teacher, graduate student, college student, high school graduate, interior designer, manager at a large company, and retiree. Five participants were women. About a fifth had first registered when the site had launched, but most had registered within the past three years. The frequency of submissions ranged from "more than 10 times a day" to "very rarely in recent years." While most participants have had their stories published, a few have yet to see them published on the site.

Nine professional journalists were interviewed, and all interviews were conducted face-to-face. The average interview lasted about 53 minutes. Most of the professional journalists we interviewed were editorial staff members who had insights into the interactions with the citizen journalists. Participants included the editor-in-chief, editorial staff members, a publishing and education director, a political team leader, and a social media editor. Three women participated in the interviews. Most of the professional participants had been part of the *OhmyNews* organization for about eight or nine years.

In reporting the results, we have masked the participants' identities by removing their names and instead identify them as citizen journalists (CJ) 1–16 and professional journalists (PJ) 1–9. We include the participant's occupations and genders to provide more context regarding their backgrounds.

Results

Citizen Journalism as Alternative, Nonprofit, Voluntary, and Participatory Journalism

Citizen journalists in this study consider citizen journalism as a journalism that originates from the lifeworld comprising cultural values, social norms, and commitment. According to the citizen journalist participants, citizen journalism comes from their everyday lives and occupations as well as voluntary participation. That is, citizen contributors to *OhmyNews* define citizen journalism as "storytelling networks" tied to linguistically and discursively situated and communicatively practiced journalism by which citizens write news stories that come from their everyday lives, experiences, and occupations.

Furthermore, they consider individuals who are sincere, honest, trustful, rational, and passionate as well as responsible, reliable, and authentic as citizen journalists when they evaluate, deliver, and share news stories and information. In this regard, citizen journalists refer to those who are willing to express themselves, seek self-identities through a storytelling process, share their opinions and thoughts with

and interpretations of the participants' complex journalistic activities performed within the *OhmyNews* organization.

⁶ These individuals were living outside the Seoul metropolitan area.

others, have missions and social beliefs, and would like to be beneficial to society. Thus, any ordinary citizen (e.g., students, teachers, workers, employees), regardless of his or her socioeconomic status, age, and gender, can be considered a citizen journalist (Friedland & Kim, 2009). Because anyone who has something meaningful to contribute can function as a citizen journalist, there is also a diversity of stories that can be contributed through various perspectives. As PJ6, a female editorial member, puts it:

Ordinary citizens find stories from their daily lives and write those stories. They write passionately from their very work setting [e.g., courtroom staff]. The difference between Twitter/new media and citizen journalism is that [citizens] understand their roles and think about how they benefit society.

In contrast, citizen journalists in *OhmyNews* view professional journalism as a journalism that is closer to the systems operated through such steering media as power and market forces. They refer to those citizens who deliver news and information from individuals' perspectives without social, political, and economic pressures and without organizational constraints that otherwise may have not been covered by professional journalists. In this regard, citizen journalism as an *alternative, voluntary, and nonprofit* journalism (Downie & Schudson, 2009) is realized from diverse spheres and voices in society, which can be independent from the government and markets as well as mainstream news media. The following quotes from citizen journalists illustrate this reasoning:

Citizen journalism is what can represent citizen journalists. And the goal is not for profit or power but to represent citizens, whether personal or organizational—I agree with the *OhmyNews* slogan of "Every citizen is a reporter." For example, writing about something I saw during a casual walk down the street—without anyone's approval and without any purpose for gain in profit or power—can be considered citizen journalism, and those individuals can be considered citizen journalists. (CJ1, elementary school teacher and graduate student, female)

Citizen journalism is difficult to define. Citizen journalists are individuals who share stories that are unedited, but those who share stories from diverse perspectives so as to challenge existing frameworks of the government or mainstream media. The citizens may not have full control or power but can be more independent from the mainstream media. (CJ12, high school teacher, male)

Citizen journalism is about voluntary journalism without anything in return. That's why it is more authentic. I have a reason to do journalism. I have a lot of interest in society. That is why I volunteer without anything in return. I have this sense of justice. I want to show things through my writing. That path is alternative media. That is the definition of citizen journalism. (CJ13, designer, male)

Interviewed citizen journalists in *OhmyNews* also discuss citizen journalism as "participatory journalism." Thus, those who are reading and writing news stories, taking and uploading photos and videos, and even merely posting comments to news stories can be considered citizen journalists in a broad

sense (Friedland & Kim, 2009). Citizen journalists freely contribute news stories about their everyday lives and workplaces. In contrast, professional journalists have pressures and constraints and employ workplace routines. Overall, the interviewed citizen journalists consider everyone taking part in this phenomenon as possibly functioning as citizen journalists. This reflects the *OhmyNews* slogan of "Every citizen is a reporter." In actuality, however, every citizen contribution may not qualify as citizen journalistic activity. Rather, a select and limited group of citizen journalists are likely to carry out citizen journalism that requires professionalism, responsibility, and ethics. CJ8, a female elementary schoolteacher, reflects this perspective:

The moment one submits a story to an online publication is when that person becomes a citizen journalist. However, one must take responsibility for the story he wrote. There are some citizen journalists who do not write sincere stories but are instead more interested in communicating their sides of an issue. This is the negative consequence of citizen journalism activity. Thus, citizen journalists must be able to take responsibility for what they wrote.

Likewise, professional journalists consider citizen journalism as a systematically and voluntarily organized system, which enables ordinary citizens to express and share their opinions with the public and mobilize others to engage in collective action. That is, interviewed professional journalists share common ground in their perspectives with citizen journalists regarding citizen journalists and their activities. PJ1, a male editorial team member, describes this point of view:

Participatory citizen journalism [is in] opposition with traditional media. Traditional media had dominated information delivery. While the news media need to be fair and unbiased, it is not so in Korean society. That is why the public does not believe in the media. . . . But citizen journalism is about allowing citizens to systematically and freely express their ideas. . . . From elementary school students to elderly folks in their seventies to eighties, to government officials, students and teachers to soldiers, a diverse range of people can participate. Then do these people possess professionalism? Writing is a skill. The more you write, the better you get. Professionalism, however, is about content. In other words, how would you fill a story? Thus, a homemaker would have expertise in homemaking. Likewise, a soldier, a politician, and a teacher would have expertise in their respective fields.

In relation to professionalism, citizen journalism and journalists refer to those who have established expertise in specialty areas. Not all professional journalists have built expertise in specific fields. Rather, citizens who have worked in specialized areas, such as schools/education, the environment, and travel can carry out more professionalism than professional journalists.

In sum, citizen journalists in *OhmyNews* are considered grassroots communities or ordinary citizens who write, convey, and express what they think in their everyday lives. At the same time, ordinary citizens can be experts in their jobs and lives (e.g., schoolteachers, travel experts), which can be closer to professionalism in terms of knowledge/content rather than skills/ethics. Citizen journalists also

can develop skills and journalistic ethics with training. In contrast, professional journalists work full-time as a vocation and have greater access than citizen journalists to those at the system level through the beat system.

Within a news organization, professional journalists adhere to their organizational norms and values. They are also more sensitive and responsive to market changes and profits than are citizen journalists. Whereas citizen journalists reflect on their everyday lives and life experiences from the lifeworld, professional journalists embrace organizational values, norms, and ethics as they follow routines as a full-time vocation and write news stories on a regular basis. As a “quasi-professional journalism,” however, news stories from citizen journalists get published through professional journalistic values, norms, and skills. That is, professional journalists still function as gatekeepers—especially for hard news stories. This is still the case of *OhmyNews*.

Interaction Between Citizen and Professional Journalism

The journalists we interviewed, both professional and citizen, share some similarities and differences in their journalistic roles in society. While *competing* with differentiated roles, they also *collaborate*, *complement*, and *compromise* through skills and knowledge, mutual respect, understanding, agreement, and consensus building. Specifically, both professional and citizen journalists at *OhmyNews* play similar roles as information providers to society while having the same goals as journalists working within a news organization. CJ6, a female foreign correspondent in Africa, explains:

Similarities include the fact that both work from an organizational framework. While both work within the [*OhmyNews*] frame, citizen journalists are able to tell a more diverse array of stories. Citizen journalists can approach stories from a more personal perspective. However, both have the same goal. Thus, citizen journalists also participate in these activities.

However, there are also considerable differences between citizen and professional journalists. These differences mainly involve whether the journalistic activities are a source of income and compensation for occupational responsibilities and whether individuals have journalism training. That is, the key distinction between these two groups is drawn by whether one is classified as being on a salary-based system for a full-time job and whether one has undergone specific journalism preparation that can influence the journalistic roles considering the broader organizational and social context. The following two reflections exemplify these distinctions:

Citizen journalists also can receive an income/payment. However, citizen journalists do not depend on that payment for survival. They write for small pleasure. Professional reporters write for survival, so there is a different level of professionalism [in terms of writing, style, content communication, etc.]. However, there is also a different level of authenticity that comes across with citizen-contributed content. Thus, if the citizen reporters also can possess a level of professionalism in their writing, they can write better stories than professional journalists. (CJ1, elementary schoolteacher and graduate

student, female)

Citizen journalism versus professional journalism is about whether it's an occupation for them and whether they are getting paid or not. There is a difference between writing for your job and writing as an ordinary citizen. Because it isn't a job, and citizens work from their own desire, there are no constraints. (PJ6, editorial team member, female)

On one hand, citizen journalists compete with professional journalists as their news stories are more specialized given their expertise in a specific area. However, citizen journalists also collaborate and cooperate with their professional counterparts. Citizen journalists write news stories first, and then professional journalists follow, or vice versa. Most citizen journalists voiced working independently and being contacted for formatting or structural changes, but some also commented on their intense interactions and deliberations with the staff. In other words, communicative action in the editorial department often occurred among professional and citizen journalists through reason-based discussions, mutual understanding, trust and consensus building, solidarity, and sharing culture, norms, and values for current issues and problems. For example, citizen journalists may receive a phone call or e-mail with a request to revise a story. Subsequent conversations may lead to the sharing of common goals, developing mutual respect, engaging in reason-based discussion, and, finally, reaching consensus concerning the issues at stake. Two participants describe this process:

Even if the [story] topic is not accepted at first, I can discuss with the editorial staff, and it is possible to get the piece published. Therefore, I would say there is a high level of interactivity. I can argue about the pieces that were rejected. (CJ1, elementary school teacher and graduate student, female)

They often request additional information. When my stories are not published, I aggressively ask about them. I call the editorial department frequently. Sometimes I even write stories together with their professional staff. (CJ7, citizen journalist who had registered with the *OhmyNews* site in 2009, male)

The differences between professional and citizen journalists can lead to separate but interrelated roles (Chung & Nah, 2013, 2014; Chung, Nah, & Carpenter, 2013; Nah & Chung, 2009, 2012; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986, 1996). First, citizen journalists do not necessarily adhere to organizational norms and values, because their actions do not necessarily focus on making a profit, and their submissions may not be routine. Furthermore, citizen journalists are relatively free from political power or government and market forces from the system level. In this regard, citizen journalists can produce news stories from more diverse perspectives and perhaps focus on more meaningful issues. Thus, citizen journalists in some cases can function more appropriately as watchdogs and perform as an adversary by freely expressing their opinions and covering issues that otherwise may have been neglected by professional journalists—although this can be controversial given their limited access to official news sources (e.g., government and corporate officials). In the case of *OhmyNews*, the following comment exemplifies this perspective:

Citizens are a part of society; thus, when they write [those who do not necessarily write for payment/survival] . . . they are not writing based on pressure from higher-ups . . . professional journalists may start to pay attention or get nervous . . . they notice that the stories from citizen journalists are impressive; thus, their level of interpreting stories from the press are also impressive. Therefore, they need to produce better stories as they compete [because they write for survival]—they feel this pressure. From the perspective of readers, [citizen journalists'] level of understanding/interpretation also is elevated. [Citizen journalists] can function as better harbingers of news because their role is not connected to survival. (CJ1, elementary school teacher and graduate student, female)

Second, citizen journalists can function better as analyzers and interpreters because these traditional journalistic roles have been diminishing among the mainstream media due to the increasing number of communication channels, sources, and content providers. Given the massive amount of information and news available online, especially from alternative online news sources, citizen journalists—who are under less time pressure—can gather more relevant information and offer in-depth analysis concerning public issues and affairs. As CJ2, a male college student, explains:

The influence that citizen journalists have on the press and society is enormous. There is great diversity. What is lacking from the reporting of professional journalists is compensated by citizen journalists. If citizen journalists are able to cover and communicate issues that the traditional press ignores or dismisses, they can have a huge influence on society. . . . Citizen journalists have no constraints in terms of a framework they are working from. They focus more on interpretation, provide information, communicate public opinion.

Third, citizen journalists can function better as mobilizers who can motivate ordinary citizens to engage in civic activities and decision-making processes. That is, citizen journalists can produce news stories that come from their everyday lives and workplaces and reflect what ordinary citizens think and want to express in the lifeworld. In this regard, citizen journalists at *OhmyNews* can set their own agenda (in contrast to the agenda set by professional journalists) from their perspectives, which can contribute to diversity of the public sphere.

This competition between citizen and professional journalists can lead to *collaborative*, *complementary*, and, thus, *compromised* roles given the lack of professionalism, journalistic training, and responsibility of citizen journalists when citizen and professional journalists work together toward common goals. Whereas citizen journalists can offer more diverse and alternative perspectives without organizational pressure, professional journalists can work together to make the stories publishable through the professional editorial process. For instance, professional journalists mentioned that when citizen journalists have a good news source for a good news story but do not know how to write that story, professional journalists collaborate with citizen journalists, who actually are better informed about the real world and those specific workplaces. CJ3, a male graduate student, notes:

Citizen journalists lack professionalism when compared to professional journalists, but there are many citizen journalists. Thus, together, they can collect diverse information. They are free from pressure and constraints. Professional journalists work from a framework and institutional boundaries. Citizen journalists work freely from these types of pressures.

While professional journalists still perform their traditional journalistic functions, such as the disseminator, adversarial, interpreter, and mobilizer roles (Weaver et al., 2007), citizen journalists perform those journalistic roles as well. Under certain circumstances, citizen journalists carry out these roles better than professional journalists due to their relative autonomy from organizational pressure and loose ties through voluntary contributions. At the same time, because citizen journalists have limited access and influence due to their lack of journalism training and commitment to a full-time job, they can collaborate with professional journalists and complement and supplement the roles that professional journalists carry out in society.

While *OhmyNews's* editorial staff and professional journalists function as gatekeepers, this filtering and selection process is carried out jointly by professional and citizen journalists. That is, professional and citizen journalists build mutual understanding, agreement, and consensus through reason-based discussions and interactions where communicative action as a uniting mechanism operates through the collaborative and compromising process. Although differences and similarities exist between citizen and professional journalists, citizen journalism can be understood as located at the interface of the public sphere between the lifeworld and systems where citizen journalists compete, collaborate, cooperate, and compromise with professional journalists. In sum, both professional and citizen journalism operate at the public sphere between the lifeworld and systems through not just the gatekeeping process but through communicative action.

Discussion

This case study of *OhmyNews* examines how citizen and professional journalists define what citizen journalism means and how citizen and professional journalism operate through communicative action considering similarities and differences of their roles in society. First, citizen journalism is defined as an alternative, participatory, voluntary, and nonprofit journalism. Citizen journalists are also defined as ordinary citizens who can contribute to "the conversation of democracy" through commenting, discussing, and writing news stories (Friedland & Kim, 2009) although they are limited by their lack of journalism training and the fact that journalism is not their full-time occupation. Based on this observation, the current study adds dimensions to the definitions of citizen journalism as alternative, participatory, voluntary and nonprofit journalism (Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987). Definitions of citizen journalists are limited and conditional in the sense that every citizen can become a citizen journalist as long as one has the will to contribute something meaningful and is able to be accountable for his or her stories.

Second, although citizen and professional journalists perform some similar roles and some different roles (Chung & Nah, 2013, 2014; Nah & Chung, 2012), communicative action works because journalists interact through reason-based discussions and mutual understanding, thus leading to

consensus building and collective action toward common goals. The different journalistic roles are based on professionalism (Singer, 2003), such as knowledge, skills, and ethics, with a full-time job, payment, and training. Despite these differences, journalists can compete, collaborate, complement, and compromise their roles to society through communicative action. Both types of journalists accept each other's domain of expertise and, thus, balance each other's work by compensating for gaps and limitations to provide richer journalism to their publics.

The current study offers some insight for better understanding citizen and professional journalism in a rapidly evolving journalism environment, and how both operate together through communicative action in an organizational and social context. The different types of journalism initially seemed incompatible and irreconcilable because they operate through a different integrating mechanism (Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987). For example, the gatekeeping function described in the literature points to its control over citizen-produced content when employed by newsroom editors. However, this study reveals a coexistence mechanism by which citizen and professional journalism can work together through communicative action, which goes beyond the gatekeeping function (White, 1950; see also Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) of journalism in a traditional sense. In the case of *OhmyNews*, for example, gatekeeping, although still imposing a filtering and selection process, is used to ensure the quality of citizens' contributions. Thus, the study offers a new theoretical perspective that can explain the relationship between citizen and professional journalism and how they operate within the same news media organization despite the different integration mechanisms. This study exemplifies how professional journalists continue to play important roles to the public, but perform more relevant and meaningful journalism through collaborating with citizen journalists. This interdependence of professional and citizen journalists appears to provide the kind of valuable storytelling that is most appropriate in the contemporary media climate.

Nonetheless, the study offers a partial theoretical framework that does not holistically explain the interaction between citizen and professional journalism and that calls for subsequent studies to further explain the dynamic relationship between journalism and journalists through other theoretical perspectives. First, future studies should examine how the action theory is being transformed into system theory, which can explain how citizen news media organizations or citizen journalism ties into the system level or political power/market forces and, inversely, how the system penetrates into citizen journalism. From a different perspective, future studies may examine how citizen journalism embraces professional journalism or vice versa, underscoring the methods in which professional journalism adopts or co-opts citizen journalism. Second, future research should adopt other theoretical perspectives. One example would be to include Bourdieu's field theory (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990, 2005), which may help scholars examine the journalistic field and the dynamic relationship between professional and citizen journalism in an evolving journalism environment. This would allow scholars to move from the communicative action theory at the higher level of abstraction to field theory with a more concrete examination of what kinds of habits, practices, mechanisms, and constraints operate in the citizen journalism field vis-à-vis the professional journalism field. These theoretical perspectives will enable scholars to examine how citizen and professional journalism interact in a more holistic approach and under what conditions both citizen and professional journalism can compete, collaborate, and contribute to the public sphere. In doing so, scholars should apply these theoretical frameworks to various journalism

environments in other countries from a comparative perspective.

In conclusion, future studies should examine and understand the dynamics of the journalistic field to examine: (a) how professional journalists try to shield/protect citizen journalists, (b) how journalistic experiences may influence the distinction between citizen and professional journalists, and (c) how citizen journalists navigate the field to reach the system level, but through professional journalists from the lifeworld to system. Such investigations into the increasingly significant interdependence and interrelatedness of traditional and new storytellers may provide insight into the complex and critical role of contemporary journalism in society.

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