



Citizen Journalism: A Solution to the Crisis of

Traditional Journalism

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Abstract

This article delves into the transformative role of citizen journalism in addressing the crisis faced by traditional journalism, particularly within Turkey's socio-political landscape. It underscores the decline of editorial independence as a critical factor contributing to the erosion of public trust in mainstream media. In the face of these challenges, citizen journalism has emerged as a decentralised and democratic alternative, empowering individuals to engage in news production and distribution. The study, focusing on the Occupy Gezi movement as a case study, illustrates how citizen journalists, leveraging social media, have transcended geographical and social barriers to reporting on issues resonating with global audiences. By examining the evolution of activist citizen journalism before, during, and after Occupy Gezi, the article highlights the importance of grassroots participation, authenticity, and immediacy in redefining journalistic practices. It argues that citizen journalism fosters a more participatory media environment, inviting the collective narratives of ordinary citizens to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of news events. This study also underscores the crucial role of media literacy among the public, making the audience feel responsible and engaged in actively participating in and critically engaging with news production, ensuring a vibrant and pluralistic media ecosystem. The findings of this study are crucial for the future of journalism, particularly in Turkey's socio-political landscape.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Alternative Media, Digital Activism, Occupy Movements,

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Citizen Journalism: A Solution to the Crisis of Traditional Journalism

The rise of citizen journalism in the digital era has transformed the landscape of news production and dissemination, challenging traditional journalistic practices and reshaping the role of media in contemporary society. This study examines the intersection of social movements, networked societies, and alternative journalism, focusing on activist citizen journalism. By exploring the theoretical underpinnings of citizen journalism and its relationship with digital activism, the study aims to comprehensively understand how media practices evolve in response to sociopolitical crises and state repression.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in perspectives on networked social movements, power and subordination, and alternative media. Digital networks play a crucial role in shaping contemporary activism, serving as both mobilisation tools and spaces for counter-public discourse. While digital interactions offer new possibilities for resistance, they are also subject to commodification and control. Power structures often influence the media landscape, determining who can voice dissent and who remains marginalised. Additionally, affective networks and decentralised media production contribute to sustaining activist movements by allowing individuals to share personal experiences and political critiques, forming collective narratives of resistance.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative approach, integrating discourse analysis of citizen journalism content with ethnographic observations of activist media collectives. By examining the practices of citizen journalists during and after Occupy Gezi, the study analyses how media activists navigated digital and physical spaces to construct counter-narratives against state-controlled mainstream media. Data sources include social media posts, interviews with former activist jour-

nalists, and archival materials from alternative news platforms. This approach captures the evolving nature of citizen journalism and its impact on the public sphere.

The findings reveal that activist citizen journalism is both a storytelling mechanism and a resistance strategy. Citizen journalists in Occupy Gezi and subsequent local movements developed distinct narrative styles that blended personal experience with political critique, contributing to the emergence of affective news networks. These networks, driven by emotional engagement and participatory media practices, challenged mainstream journalistic norms and provided alternative perspectives on political events. However, such practices' sustainability proved difficult under state surveillance, censorship, and legal repression. Many activist media initiatives either dissolved or adapted by shifting toward more decentralised, collective-based models of news production. This study underscores citizen journalism's fluid and precarious nature in authoritarian contexts. While digital platforms have enabled new forms of participatory journalism, they also expose journalists to heightened risks, raising critical questions about the future of alternative media in repressive environments. By situating citizen journalism within the broader discourse on media activism and resistance, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of digital media in shaping democratic participation and political change.

Ultimately, this study aims to produce a theoretical analysis of the occupy movements based on data collected through different methods in a long-term research process. All the discussions in the study are based on participant observations and analyses of data obtained from in-depth interviews conducted for academic research articles on the Occupy movements. In this respect, the structure, function and impact of citizen journalism in the historical moment based on the Occupy movements are discussed with an original and authentic evaluation depending on the data obtained. How activist citizen journalism emerged as a new genre in response to the crisis of journalism in Turkey is analysed by considering different layers.

1 Social Movements, Network Society and Alternative Journalism

The trend of authoritarianisation, which is becoming widespread worldwide in the neo-liberal order, constitutes an alarm for the “precarious other” (99%) in terms of political and economic terms. Some of these within the great majority, which is called the “multitude” (Hardt & Negri, 2005), are looking for new ways to tussle with the system. There is no choice but to resist the attacks of neo-liberalism in political and economic spheres. This precarity might appear deprived of all rights, including the right to live. In this period, the relation of the precarious other with the mainstream media is about to collapse when perceived from the arguments of the liberal media paradigm. The other’s body, voice and emotions cannot find a place in the media. What is reflected from the media to the other is constant negating. They can reach affirmation only to the point they surrender voluntarily to the will of the powerful. When they are transformed into the will of the powerful, they become accepted citizen of the establishment. According to Spinoza (2005), it is apparent that when the individual becomes a tool for the powerful, they are deprived of their ability to act. From this perspective, under subordination, the agent is not the individual but the order through the individual. An “automaton” whose liberty is destroyed, overpowered by the order; an evil actor.

On the contrary, the new media (Lievrouw, 2011) allows the so-called precarious others to have their voice and build their own stories. Even though life disintegrates negatively due to the power of those in reign, resistance gains a fragmented form and fluidity in real and virtual environments. In this respect, how and when resistance will bloom before suffocating, destroying intervention of the powerful cannot be guessed easily, nor can it be predicted. The occupation of the neo-liberal order on our minds and bodies shows that an affective resistance in a pre-figurative political stance is possible and obligatory. Otherwise, we need to lay aside Spinoza’s affirmations regarding the individual and society and start discussing the end of humanity as we know it.

With its network-based structure, social media enables users to engen-

der authentic, autonomous and affective narratives of their lived experiences. It helps produce narrative forms that can spread and potentially be contagious (Papacharissi, 2015). All these narratives are inherently affective. Moreover, the power of the affective discourse cannot be denied in the news narratives of social media. For example, the affective activist citizens (Fortier, 2016) that have rapidly grown throughout the occupy movements had the chance to improve the alternative journalistic styles using the affective narrative network of social media. In times of the Occupy movement, the affective news narratives created by affective activist journalists have succeeded in the traditional news. In this respect, we may describe social media as an affective network of storytelling and activist citizen journalists as mediators or transmitters of affective narration. Agents and assemblages of affective activist citizen media resist the media machine of the system; affective activist citizens alternatively create their own media.

In this respect, the Occupy movements have transformed the affective sphere of experience; it can be seen as the reflection of an “affective turn” (Wetherell, 2012). Gerbaudo’s (2012) and Castells’ (2012) works show that both the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements were affective and created their affective counter-public sphere. These movements have been based on rage, excitement, solidarity and other feelings that involve disappointment. They have spread as affective waves and, with their contagious nature, impacted different places in the world. Despite the temporariness of these waves (both as fluctuation and tides), they had an important contribution to the narratives of resistance and solidarity networks. From another perspective, it can be claimed that each new occupy movement is a plateau (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). Most occupy movements have lasted as long as the energy they have raised through the movement and the dynamic afterimage they left. Again, this dynamism can be reactivated or injected into other experiences in different manners and different ways (Massumi, 2004).

In contemporary network societies, alternative media and social movements have evolved into complex, multidimensional relationships. The possibilities provided by the internet and social media have blurred the

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boundaries between progressive democratic social movements and associated alternative media organisations. A new type of citizen who navigates these networks constructs their relationship with social movements and media differently. This digital citizen (Ruppert & Isin, 2015) engages with social movements and alternative media without sacrificing individuality, as traditional power structures often disregard individual opinions (Bailey et al., 2015; Atkinson, 2016; Langlois & Dubois, 2016).

The valued role of traditional alternative journalism in the public eye is under pressure from these new media activist citizens. It can be said that new media activists have already transformed and updated the traditional notion of 'media activism.' Moreover, the number of citizens engaging in citizen journalism on social media platforms owned by global capital, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, is increasing. These new political communication cultures and theories, formed by the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) culture rising with communication and information technologies combined with the theories of radical democracy and alternative media, have engendered theories and practices of established journalism with liberal tendencies to the discussion.

This study aims to shed light on the role of citizen journalism in shaping the future of media, focusing on 'activist neighbourhood citizen journalism' that emerged after Occupy Gezi but quickly dissipated due to unfavourable sociopolitical conditions. As we have witnessed in contemporary occupation movements, similar actions that follow, support, and reproduce the initial act of occupation spread in waves, sometimes crossing national borders and repeating in different geographies as symbolic acts of support. However, the termination of these occupation movements—"movements of movements," as Klein (2001) defines them—either voluntarily by the citizens or by government forces leads to the absorption of the energy that holds the movements together.

When the energy that unites different movements, large and small, under one roof, weakens, coalitions disintegrate. Movements must retreat to their familiar fields and spaces of struggle. Occupy Gezi is an im-

portant example that should be carefully analysed in this context. The end of the occupation of Gezi Park ‘localised’ the protests, and most of the protesters returned to their habitats. Ecological, women’s, LGBTI, ethnic, and sectarian identity movements, as well as radical socialist movements, were left with their familiar strategies and tactics of struggle against the government after the end of the occupation.

Occupy movements largely owe their existence to the fact that the short-term superiority of angry crowds over law enforcement forces can be transformed into the energy generated by coalitions. However, citizens are loosely networked in these movements, which take their character from occupy movements (Castells, 2012). Moreover, they cannot easily hold on in the face of state violence aimed at ending occupations. When power reasserts its sovereignty in city squares, citizens have roughly two options: to give up or to continue the struggle in ‘localities’ where networks are more tightly knit -real or virtual. Thus, after these temporary periods of upheaval, which can turn countries upside down, activists return to familiar fields and practices of struggle.

Citizens who are used to coming together in loose networks and those who continue their resistance in tighter networks of struggle are forming a fluid global-local practice of struggle, in which the local and the global are intertwined, and a parallel activist identity. This understanding holds for media activists in general and citizen journalists in particular. Based on past research data and new observations, this study asks fresh questions about citizen journalists and their practices in localities and attempts to conceptualise this unique case.

In our networked society, communication and information flow through horizontal networks, bypassing traditional power structures, borders, and boundaries. Activist journalism leverages online platforms to connect with diverse local and global audiences, amplifying the voices of “networked social movements” (Castells, 2012) or “networked publics,” where online networks also facilitate collective action and amplify dissenting voices (Tüfekçi, 2018). Shirky (2011) underscores social media’s role in amplifying activist voices and fostering collective actions be-

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yond state boundaries. Lievrouw (2011) emphasises how digital tools in activist media challenge societal norms.

The emergence of “networked journalism” integrates traditional practices with digital innovations, with scholars like Russell (2011) and Beckett and Mansell (2008) advocating for audience-involved news production. Journalism evolves as an activist endeavour, championing citizen rights against oppressive states. When activist journalism gains a networked and participatory character that transcends all borders, including national ones, it creates a powerful social narrative through new journalistic practices.

Since alternative media studies have dealt with the history of social movements and their media, their reading of journalism history has also differed from mainstream liberal readings. In the context of ‘alternative journalism,’ citizens as activists, militants, volunteers, etc., have always been a natural part of the news gathering, writing, and distribution process and have been the protagonists of a creative media adventure that can be called uninterrupted to date (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Downing, 2001; Forde, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011; Rodriguez, 2001).

When the history of alternative media in Turkey is examined, it will be seen as a unique but related part of this general history (Çoban & Ataman, 2015). In these studies, terms such as citizen journalism, public journalism, participatory journalism, citizen-oriented journalism, and cause journalism often overlap with alternative journalism definitions. Since the involvement of the new media, other conceptualisations such as networked, open-source, and collaborative journalism have been added to these concepts. Such approaches refer to egalitarian alternatives that are primarily anti-capitalist and in favour of oppressed classes and communities but to a world of rhizomatic vitality in which we witness much hybridisation regarding goals, principles, and practices intertwined (Bailey et al., 2008).

2 Crisis of Traditional Journalism and the Rise of Citizen Journalism

Traditional journalism and modern professionalism face crises due to the erosion of editorial independence from commercial interests (Carroll & Hackett, 2006) and the mainstream media's failure to maintain objectivity, impartiality, and accuracy, fuelling the rise of fake news (Bennett, 2017; Starbird, 2017). These issues and digitalisation and social media have radically transformed journalism. The most autonomous and creative journalism now exists in small-scale independent initiatives and alternative media, viewing journalism history through revolutionary struggles and social movements (Downing, 2001; Lievrouw, 2011; Rodriguez, 2001).

Digitalization has introduced concepts like networked and participatory journalism. Many alternative journalism perspectives retain traditional norms while redefining them through participatory grassroots and direct approaches to strengthen democracy (Forde, 2011; Radsch, 2016). Despite heavy censorship and dangers in authoritarian countries, some forms of alternative journalism foster new forms of citizenship and democratic journalistic practices, amplifying diverse voices and ensuring representation of disadvantaged social groups. Thus, many alternative journalism perspectives hold onto traditional journalistic norms while critically redefining these norms by referring to participatory, alternative and activist variants to strengthen democracy. It has been argued that forms of citizen journalism, which perhaps contribute to creating new forms of citizenship through a pro-democracy journalistic practice, despite being under heavy censorship, surveillance, threat, and danger in repressive authoritarian countries (Rodriguez, 2014; Ataman & Çoban, 2018).

Citizen journalism, which involves citizens' active intervention and inclusion in journalism, is a crucial component of alternative journalism. As emphasised by Stuart Allan (2013), many new journalism terms signalled the active intervention and participation of citizens in journalism. Although "citizen journalism" is the most inclusive and most frequently used of these terms, attempts are made to analyse the change and

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transformation of today's journalism with descriptive adjectives such as "participatory", "open-source", "amateur", "hyper-local", "distributed", "networked", "grassroots", "DIY", etc. (Glaser, 2006). Although there are many definitions of citizen journalism, Rosen's (2008) definition is notably comprehensive, emphasising the transition of individuals from passive audiences to active news informers through media tools: "When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools, they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism" (2008). Citizen journalists gather, process, research, report, analyse and publish news and information through various technologies and related applications made possible by the Internet. Citizens believe "citizen journalism is" considered part of a global media transformation in which the media reconnects with the public; it is a grassroots initiative that takes citizen participation to a new level.

The relationship between citizen journalism and activist journalism is rooted in their shared objective of challenging mainstream narratives and advocating for social change. These forms of journalism empower individuals to engage in news production and distribution, thus fostering a more democratic media landscape (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). The active participation of citizens in journalism practice and the development of their ability to tell their own stories has become one of the critical factors forcing the transformation of journalism. Citizen and activist journalists frequently collaborate to bring attention to marginalised issues and guardian fairness (Poell & Rajagopalan, 2015). In this manner, it was also possible for the citizen to become an influential power in agenda-setting. Citizen journalism involves regular people gathering and reporting news, often using social media (West, 2019). Activists and citizen journalists promote social or political change through journalistic practices that endorse specific causes. Their endeavours create a more participatory media environment, fostering critical dialogue and civic engagement.

3 Citizen Journalism – Occupy Gezi and Its Aftermath

To understand citizen journalism's transformation, it is essential to consider it in terms of time (process) and space (place, location). The character of citizen journalists is determined by the spirit of the time and space in which they operate. The emergence and transformation of citizen journalism are characterised by three main determinants: the subjects of the news—the producer-subject, the news subject, and the consumer-subject—time and space.

Citizen journalists, as the producer-subject of the news, exhibit a character unique to the historical-spatial process in which they emerged. Occupy Gezi and its aftermath can be analysed in three stages: the activist citizen journalists of Occupy Gezi (square-centered), local activist citizen journalism after Occupy Gezi (neighborhood-centered), and citizen journalist collectives and issue-based citizen journalism (dispersed issue/space-centered).

In this sense, the subjects of activist citizen journalism published with Occupy Gezi acted with an approach based on the defence of living spaces (Ataman & Çoban, 2015). They carried out their journalism at the centre of the areas covered by the square movements and during the movement. With the end of Occupy Gezi and its continuation based on forums, some journalists reported in these areas for a while. However, with the fading of the forums, the reporting specific to this process faded away.

After Occupy Gezi, due to the revolutionary opposition revived by Occupy Gezi, citizen journalists emerged in the neighbourhoods who adapted the citizen journalism experience of Occupy Gezi to the neighbourhoods differently. These citizen journalists, who had an activist background, covered the events in their communities, primarily protests and resistance. These news-producing subjects made the social problems of which they were also the subjects visible and had the chance to reach a wide range of news consumer subjects in a process that they had not been able to reach up to this point. In regions where opposition was

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rising through social media after Occupy Gezi, interest and support increased based on #hashtag publics (Rambukkana, 2015). This situation has been the primary motivation of local activist citizen journalists.

However, the state's harsh attitude towards neighbourhoods and the lawsuits, detentions, and threats against citizen journalists on charges of 'terrorist propaganda' have led to the decline of local citizen journalism. In the following period, citizen journalism generally continued through citizen journalism collectives and issue-based individual citizen journalism practices, in which the experience gained during Occupy Gezi continued in different forms. Collectives, as shields protecting individuals, can resist oppressive processes as they are more resistant to complex processes, and citizen journalists who produce news on an issue-based basis carry out the practice of journalism by considering the process.

With the efforts of citizen news collectives to reach all neighbourhoods where social-political issues are experienced, due to their networks and the individual initiatives of individuals in these neighbourhoods, citizen journalism still maintains its importance as an effective news-production field. Essential issues in the debates on citizen journalism are the identity and practice of the citizen journalist. A citizen becomes a journalist because of the conditions of the historical period in which they live. Suppose the citizens have a public space and a communicative environment where they believe they can express themselves. In that case, they can construct a narrative about themselves through the media. However, citizens need alternative media in the context of alternative publicness because they are deprived of the means of expressing themselves in cases where the media is inaccessible due to natural or social reasons or where the communicative environment has become anti-democratic. The media's access to social issues is restricted and blocked.

Moreover, if alternative media is absent or inadequate, and if they have the ability and means to construct their narrative by using media possibilities, they can create their media. Citizen journalism is the product of

citizens who create and become media themselves. Citizens' narratives based on social issues are the narratives of their daily lives, which the media also reports daily. In this respect, instead of listening to their narratives from another medium, they create and tell them together. The news text of the citizen journalist is part of a collective narrative; in this respect, if we define it in terms of the practice of citizen journalism, it is possible to call it a 'storyteller.' This storytelling process is always fragmented, interrupted, discontinuous, and incomplete, and it gains meaning from all other narratives within a collective network.

Moreover, the news narrative is nothing but a narrative process about social issues since the communicative network is always incomplete, and it is an intertextual narrative that interacts with other narratives (complementing or invalidating other narratives). During Occupy Gezi, Twitter became a significant social movement -communication, organisation, mobilisation-medium and a news-centric media medium through which activist citizens expressed themselves and constructed their narratives. Citizen journalists, in addition to being the subjects of the action as activist citizens, started to produce their collective and interactive narratives with photographs, videos, and texts by using social media effectively, especially by using the possibilities of Twitter.

These networked social movements, which interact diachronically and synchronously, established solidarity networks through #hashtags and learned from each other's experiences, leading to a process that shook the whole world. #hashtag has become indispensable for networked social movements in policymaking, public debate, information acquisition, news sharing, and mobilisation processes (Rambukkana, 2015). New types of counter-publics created through #hashtags have made it possible to cross the borders of both cities and countries easily. #hashtag publics have led to the rapid mobilisation of effective street protests and the creation of a power to pressure public opinion on governments based on digital activism.

Some of the citizen journalists who learned to use social media effectively during Occupy Gezi and developed skills beyond traditional ac-

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tivism in the creation and mobilisation of issue-based publics, both on the street and in the digital space, or other citizen journalists with whom they shared their experiences, carried out an effective activist citizen journalism activity, albeit for a short period in neighbourhoods where social opposition was at a higher level for a while after Occupy Gezi. In this process, citizen journalists who used #hashtags effectively freed themselves from being confined to their neighbourhoods and neutralised the state's policies of isolation and suppression. The experiences of local activist citizen journalists, albeit short-lived, are essential as a unique example of urban struggles and activist citizen journalism practice.

4 Citizen Journalists as Storytellers and News as an Interactive Narrative

Contemporary social movements and their alternative and activist new media fronts are the blossoming arenas of the fight: mediated resistance of the multitude. Social media enables them to generate authentic, autonomous and affective narratives of their everyday activities and lived experiences. As Papacharissi mentioned, “technologies network us, but it is narratives that connect us to each other” (2015: 5). She also argues that affect is a fundamental character that determines the networked digital structures of mediated articulation and association. It could be asserted that “activist citizen journalists” are among others within social movements that use these affective narrative structures the most. By deploying themselves both as an activist citizen and a citizen journalist, they are experimenting freely within this network. Although unorthodox, distinct journalistic styles and genres they develop are welcomed mainly by most within movements as long as the content is accurate, valid and sincere. Social media may be described as an affective network of storytelling, and activist citizen journalists as mediators or transmitters of affective narration. The Occupy movements have transformed the affective sphere of experience. These movements have been based on rage, excitement, solidarity and other feelings that involve disappointment. Social media enables them to generate authentic, autonomous and affective narratives of their lived experiences, which are

inherently affective.

Benjamin's (1998) view of the new public sphere integrates new forms of solidarity and sociality into the technological potentials of new media as playgrounds (Kang, 2014: 193). Social media applications constitute play forms of technology in the Benjaminian sense (Hansen, 2004: 18). These play forms have an emancipatory function and mediate, creating an emancipatory playground (*spielraum*) as a public sphere (Habermas, 1989). In this sense, communicative practices are of fundamental importance in constructing and realising a new society, even in the form of a game. Today's social movements have realised the playground as an alternative counter-public (Negt & Kluge, 1993). In this process, alternative new media has had an essential function as one of the founding elements. The new playgrounds created in alternative new media, especially in social media platforms, offer citizens the opportunity to express themselves, interact with other citizens, design new games, form public opinion through these games, and create their own autonomous spaces. In the citizen's interaction with the state, the social media space has become increasingly important and the main channel through which public opinion is formed. New interrelated playgrounds created through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp applications have transformed traditional journalism. Traditional journalism's news-production and consumption processes, in which the citizen is not included in its professional playground with specific rules, have become invalid. A new news production-consumption process has emerged in which the digital citizen is at the centre and produces and consumes the news. With the new media opportunities, citizens have ensured the validity of a new form of journalism based on participation, which operates through a network of horizontal relations in which they are the play-makers.

Benjamin states that anyone can now become a media producer with a polytechnic education on the use of media tools and applications without special training (Benjamin, 1998: 90). With the advancement of technology and the development of self-learning possibilities and the development of user-friendly technologies, the way is paved for

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the oppressed classes to develop themselves intellectually -to express themselves- despite the persistence of poverty and deprivation. Benjamin also states that technological developments and technical progress form the basis of the political development of the productive author (1998: 95). In this sense, the necessary conditions exist for developing a participatory and collaborative understanding in both the political and cultural spheres. Benjamin discusses how transforming the public sphere based on communicative practices transforms social subjects. Benjamin reveals the conditions of newly structured communication and how newspapers opened new horizons for collective cultural and literary practices. He states that the dissolution of the bourgeois literary public sphere has also led to a new height of media space that enables the masses to have multiple social agencies as consumers, viewers, and even journalists themselves (Kang, 2014, pp. 58-59). Communication technologies have also given hints that a network of horizontal relations can replace the anti-democratic structure that works through vertical relations by involving all citizens in producing political thought through the media. Accordingly, the replacement of professional journalism by citizen journalism, as a new kind of storytelling, can be seen as one of the most important contributions of technology in the context of democratisation and participation.

There are remarkable similarities between Benjamin's storyteller and activist citizen journalists. It can be said that Benjamin's storyteller, which lost its function in the process of communicative change and transformation, has returned with social media, albeit in a different form. Benjamin clearly defines the role of the storyteller; the main emphasis in this approach is to be in social life and to play the role of being one of the perpetrators of the struggle based on action; the task of an active writer is not to report but to struggle; in other words, the writer should take on the role of being actively involved, not a spectator (Benjamin, 98, p. 88). Activist citizen reporters or collectives call on their followers/participants to gather information, disseminate/share this information and raise awareness (Kang, 20014, p. 152). Furthermore, activist collectives organise online activist reporting training or provide online training brochures and videos to media activists on using new

technologies and practices.

Activist citizen journalists act as solitary storytellers. Based on social media, the followers of these storytellers are both solitary followers and collective audiences. They become part of collective processes in which they are not restricted to passive roles but take part as active participants/producers in all new production processes. This does not happen simultaneously but through interaction and collective learning processes in the social media environment. Activists who participate in social movements and create or become media use social media. In the case of Occupy, Twitter extensively expresses its experiences and tells stories using verbal and visual language. In this process, the storyteller is also one of the actors of the story they tell; the activist citizen journalist is a narrator beyond being an active activist. While all activists can become individual storytellers, they are also collective audiences. The collective audience includes not only all activists but also those who are not actively involved in the action but are active in different social networking environments as a component of the virtual environment. Apart from the social media environment, the activities carried out in real life to disseminate messages to society through different forms of media activism also prevent the collective audience from being restricted to those who only use media tools. For example, examples of individual or collective dissemination of messages to the masses in public transport vehicles and squares are indicators of this (e.g. playing or showing banned audio recordings in public transport vehicles, exhibiting performances expressing the events in the subway or buses, etc.). In this context, the collective audience includes not only all media but also all citizens addressed by activists in everyday life.

Today, the narrative of social movements is formed by the sum of fragmented narratives of individual storytellers rather than the holistic narrative of traditional alternative media. These fragmented narratives form a whole in the context of their fluidity. We can see that there is a continuous flow on Twitter. In the context of the current reflection on the transition from storyteller to novelist, from collective audience to individual reader, the author's experience as a producer today is a situ-

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ation in which all these roles are interrelated on Twitter. The ‘timeline’ has a multi-part flow in which many narrators convey their experiences about the ongoing movement, especially during periods of social movement. However, multi-part narratives can offer the audience a holistic narrative about the movement.

According to Benjamin, storytelling has four attributes (Kang, 2014):

1. As Benjamin points out, Storytelling is one of the oldest communicative methods based on oral culture. Stories are produced from social events and experiences and are reproduced in every social process. Moreover, they serve the continuous reproduction of social culture.
2. Storytelling is tightly linked to the everyday life of society and is a collective communication practice in which practical knowledge is shared.
3. Storytelling has distinctive spatiotemporal attributes of storytelling. These attributes change and transform according to the historical period and the media used. There is a continuity between the experiences of the narrator and the listeners.
4. Storytelling is based on a shared collective experience. The communal characteristic of storytelling distinguishes it from other forms of communication. The fact that the narrator and the listener share their experiences and that the collective listener and the narrator are in direct interaction is due to its communal structure.

Activist citizen journalists continue storytelling through social media channels and applications by reconstructing these four features mentioned above. The participatory and democratic, in short, communal communication practice created by the new type of social media-based storytelling also plays a role in spreading the voice of the Occupy movements to the whole society and gaining support. What makes the new type of storytelling possible is the articulation of actual streets and digital streets like a Mobius strip. Occupy movements occupy not only a part of the city but also digital streets, and they have the power to carry the communal spirit beyond the concrete space-time of occupation. In this process, activist citizen journalists have played an essential role in

reorganising alternative publicness.

Moreover, the emergence of citizen journalism has introduced a new plane of political, cultural, and social conditions that open the way for discussions on news production and consumption processes. This study proposes that these processes be analysed through ‘narrative’. In this framework, we argue that news formation resembles the intertextual relations in post-structuralist theory. However, it goes beyond the boundaries of this theoretical perspective by encompassing people, communities, and the public in terms of the multidimensional complexity of the network structure. The most important reason is the increasing tendency for narrators and listeners to co-construct narratives interactively rather than in the individual act of reading and writing.

A natural consequence of this process is the increasing complexity of the reader’s preferential fiction and the meanings produced in parallel with it, which are constructed by the reader who intervenes in the narratives by accepting to enter an intensive interaction process. Social media networks predetermine news production processes, but citizen journalists always create authentic narration depending on their real-life experiences. New news narratives are not just a product of a single individual but are created collectively and depend on the collective narration of ordinary citizens. In contrast to the classical journalist’s method of presenting information that has been completed, framed, and turned into a product as an authority in the context of a hierarchical relationality in an ‘objective, balanced, meticulous, and accurate’ manner, in parallel with professional journalistic codes, the activist citizen journalist is an individual who shares their authentic narrative in the same horizontal peer-to-peer networks with the reader in line with the data they obtain. This narrative, like every narrative, is incomplete and subjective.

Even though professional journalists, under the influence of the ideology of ‘objectivity’ originating from positivism, cannot easily accept it, their news text is equally the product of a subjective construction. Readers collect these incomplete and subjective narratives within the framework of their perspectives and form the news text in digital net-

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works from an amorphous combination of informative, misinformative, and ideological elements that they encounter, find by searching, already know, think they know, learn through negotiation, superimpose, etc. In other words, the construction process of a news item is carried out in a multi-stage and fragmented manner, and the news item and its meanings are never wholly closed or completed, remaining fluid as a non-linear, fragmented narrative process.

Since news is constructed in the context of interaction between narrators and readers, the reader needs to minimise the margin of error regarding the relationship between what happens in the real world and what is represented in the media as news. For this, the reader must be an advanced social media literate. It is necessary to develop a ‘do-it-yourself’ literacy about where and from whom the data that can construct a specific news text can be collected and where the news constructed with the collected data can be controlled. Although alternative news gathering, writing, sharing, and consuming processes against the power-producing and pacifying structure of classical news construction and reading processes can potentially eliminate power production, this requires active, informed, and conscious participation of the reader. Against the claim that news is an objective, finished product produced sterilely by a competent authority, the approach that sees news as an incomplete, fragmented, and incomplete intersubjective narrative constantly refers to this mutual and high-level interaction.

The reader is involved in the production process, interacting with the news producer, and can have a guiding effect in the context of the dynamic structure of the narrative, can construct a shared narrative with the narrator, interact with different narrators, and correlate all narrative production processes. In this respect, the traditional news text of the past, which could only be produced with the finalisation of an event, has been replaced by a process-based news narrative in the network society based on the communication infrastructure created by information and communication technologies (Castells, 2008); van Dijk (2012), which moves with the event and in which the narrators share their subjective experiences as part of this event. This can also be read as writing the

history of resistance and keeping a memory record based on observing, making visible, and archiving what happens in every event where the powers meet with the oppressed. However, this narrative, like any other narrative, is an open work, and the plane where meaning is constructed is the reader's mind (Eco, 1989).

5 The Autonomous Identity of the Citizen Journalist

Occupy Gezi, as an autonomous movement, makes the difference between those with previous political experience and those without political experience invisible. As an experience that has never been lived, Occupy Gezi equalises all participants in identifying themselves and engaging in political activity. In the context of Castells' (2008) categorisation, the identity created in this process is an "autonomous identity," which is a combination of "resistance identity," which brings about the creation of communes or communities, and "project identity," which produces subjects and which is established in social discourse and action with a unique historical position because, as Melucci states, identity for the subject is "first and foremost an autonomous ability to construct and recognise oneself" (Melucci, 1996, p. 30). On this basis, it is the authenticity and autonomy of Occupy Gezi that makes it possible to create an autonomous identity.

Occupy Gezi enabled each participant to express themselves with a new identity and to exist with an authentic and autonomous identity, albeit for a while; the aura of Occupy Gezi fuelled these temporary identities. It can be said that activist citizen journalists, the pioneering actors of the alternative communication process, were the carrier agents that made spreading these identities possible. Since the Occupy movements were too fast for traditional alternative media practices to keep up with and too fragmented and comprehensive to cover, they brought about a simultaneous process of building 'autonomous alternative media' and media practices unique to the process. The activist citizen journalists' formation begins with the social movement's call. The practice of social movement effectively draws all the subjects it addresses into a commu-

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nicative process. The communicative practices of social movements are realised through different media possibilities in each historical period.

The subjects of the movement fulfil certain essential functions in the process of using communicative practices. However, it is seen that some subjects become 'nodes' (connection points) and turn into components of the communication centre created in the social movement process. While every subject of the social movement is a component of the communicative practice, the subjects who listen to the 'call' (interpellation, hail) in a different Althusserian sense and become nodes acquire a new activist identity with these qualities (Althusser, 2000). The new activist identity is a response to the call to 'create your media' and 'be the media yourself'; the activist responds to the call of the social movement by transforming themselves into the media while at the same time temporarily adopting a new identity.

Althusser's approach to the 'call' at the moment of the constitution of the subject has controversial implications in the context of alternative ideology. Laclau's (1977) 'popular-democratic interpellations' approach centres on new social movements outside of the class movement, which can be transcended by the autonomous interpellation seen in today's social movements, especially in Occupy movements that use internet media effectively. In the process Ashcorf (2001) defines as 'interpolation' (infiltration-falsification, i.e., changing the text's structure by intervening in it), we can claim that today's social movements are in an autonomous structure, and their discourses and actions should be evaluated in this context. In this sense, the call of the Occupy movement is not an infiltrated, distorted, and reorganised form of the dominant discourse but an autonomous call created by these specific conditions. The autonomous call, in this sense, includes the class movement and all social movements associated with the class movement in different ways, but which nevertheless preserve their autonomous structure.

The current autonomous structure of social movements requires such temporary identities and has a network structure that operates through them. Apart from the effective use of communication practices by all

participants, creating activist communicators with essential functions as mediators becomes an inevitable necessity. In this respect, the existence of the movement necessarily requires activist subjects who heed this call. Actors called activist citizen reporters are needed to create media to maintain the interaction of the general mass of participants for the information of internal participants and the organisation of their actions, as well as for the interaction with external participants and the maintenance of their support. These actors emerge spontaneously in the social movement process and gain visibility and functionality by distinguishing themselves from others through their communicative practices.

In the first phase of the movement, many of the activists who responded to the call and call of the movement could not sustain media activism consistently in the process; only a certain number of people continued their media activism by using the technological possibilities and skills at their disposal, and they become the nodal points followed by both internal and external participant masses. We can argue that at the beginning of every social movement, activist subjects who respond to the movement's call spontaneously form a network that carries the movement to the masses with spontaneous communication. However, after this network is formed, they do not continue their communicative activity; some actively participate in the action, while others are passive supporters and spectators. In this process, we can say that only a few activists continued to engage in sustained communicative activity and transformed themselves into media.

It can be observed that the number of leading communicative actors, which was in the hundreds (maybe thousands) during the rise of the social movement, gradually decreased during the movement, and that the number of people expressed in tens continued the communicative practice, that is, the production of media. It can also be said that activists who became visible due to this natural selection experienced a transformation in the face of the role assigned to them in the new process and had to adopt new identities. The problem with these identities is their transience. As soon as the magic of the historical process created by the

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activists' social movement ends, the magical identities created inevitably disappear. If the activist cannot produce their identity in a new form with a different role, no matter how hard they try, they cannot have the chance to preserve this identity.

With the social movement's end, created by the social movement's call, and the dissolution of the participant mass created by the social movement, the media activist, created by the original call of this movement, loses the atmosphere that created their identity, and their identity evaporates with this atmosphere. Although the identity of the media activist is based on the accumulations of the individual's own life, it is a part of the collective identity, and the media activist has to be a component of either a political project or an institutionalised media production process to sustain this identity. The fluctuating, fragmented, and fluid nature of social movements and the fact that they rise and fall based on social problems in different ways make it difficult, or even almost impossible, to continue dancing by constantly holding on to them at the individual level. Capturing this continuity is only possible for institutionalised alternative media. For this reason, it can be said that with the fragmentation and fluctuation of social movements, media activists unique to each process emerge and disappear.

It is observed that emancipatory social movements create their own unique autonomous identities. The identity of media activists feeds on this authenticity and fades away with it by creating a tradition. The unique autonomous identity created by movements has an aura (Hansen, 2008) that defines unique existence and uniqueness, which (because it is over-emphasized based on social media) becomes most visible in the identity of the media activist. Perhaps this aura enables the media activist to continue their practice, mesmerised, struggling to capture this newly acquired magical identity. The citizen reporter becomes the storyteller of the process they experience, with the 'fascination' given by the aura. They visit the occupied space like a flaneur, tell its story by including themselves in it, and try to carry this atmosphere to everyone they can reach with the media they use.

They cannot accept the transience of the aura that their autonomous identity grants them, that they are unique to the process and will lose it no matter what they do. However, the end of the atmosphere unique to the social movement leads to the irreversible loss of the aura that envelops its identity within this atmosphere, which makes it unique and magical. After the end of the process, they strive to preserve their aura in different ways. When they realise they have lost it, they either become invisible with profound disappointment, disappear, wait for the processes that they think can catch a new aura, or become a component of the political struggle to create it. Aura requires autonomy as well as authenticity for the activist subject; in this sense, it is necessary to emphasise the ‘autonomy of the revolutionary subject’ (Bonefeld 1994: 45). Responding to the autonomous call also requires the construction of an autonomous—and rebellious—identity in the process: ‘Authenticity involves (i) creation and construction as much as discovery (ii) originality and even more so (iii) opposition to social rules’ (Taylor 1992: 66). Authentic autonomous identity is based on rebellion with the demand for freedom since ‘authenticity itself is the idea of freedom’ (Taylor 1992: 67). In this sense, the media activist undertakes the defence of both individual and social freedom and autonomy at the same time. Their discourses and actions make them unique during social action, and they are the areas where their autonomous and unique structure is revealed.

Their past forms the media activist’s unique autonomous identity and the social movement. Although the activist started the process of identity creation with their name and photograph, they evolved towards creating an invisible autonomous identity to escape the eyes of the power. This autonomous identity becomes expressed based on rejecting traditional identities with a newly acquired name and an image that serves as a mask. The media activists express themselves by constructing the visual (photo, video), written, and audio information that they share with the participants of the social movement uniquely, and this process is the founder of their autonomous identity. In this sense, it can be said that this unique autonomous identity is an identity created within the social movement practice, that is, within the action. The interruption of the action puts the identity in crisis, and the end of the action causes it

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to evaporate.

One of the most fundamental qualities of the activist journalist's identity is mediation. In other words, activist journalists exist as mediators (mediator-negotiators) apart from carrying information. The mediation process results in the media user, who turns into an activist, continuing their daily existence in the social movement without interrupting it. The media practices of everyday life are transformed into everyday political practices during the social movement. Thus, the media activist becomes the founding agent of the connection between their environment and the social movement.

The mediation of the media activist is also crucial in transforming the multipartite structure of social movements into an interconnected network. The social movement's multipartite structure brings a state of perpetual crisis. Therefore, mediators must resolve and end the conflicts between participants. Therefore, activist journalists inevitably become mediators in terms of their function.

The most fundamental mediation issue is the creation of a bond, an emotional unity between all active or passive movement participants. Under the influence of the autonomous call, the activist journalist, the call to transform emotion into action becomes the nexus of collecting and disseminating this emotion and creating a common identity. As Gerbaudo (2012) points out, this process is not just a simple process of sharing information but also involves emotional investment. Castells also emphasises the importance of emotion: at the individual level, social movements are emotional. Rebellion does not start with a program or a strategy... but the incredible explosion of social movements begins with transforming emotion into action' (Castells, 2013, p. 27). In this sense, we can say that mediation is both informational and emotional and that the emotion reflects itself differently from the beginning of the movement.

In the context of the emotional plane, the activist reporter as a mediator starts to carry information about the process to their environment; that

is, the primary target audience of media activism is their environment. Then, with the establishment of awareness through social media based on this circle, it begins to address the ‘extended family’ in the inner or outer periphery of the social movement in social media. In the coordination of the social movement, i.e., the relationship between the centre and the participants, the relationship between the centre and the supporters, etc., the mediation task also functions in different ways in different processes, e.g., ensuring communication between barricades, ensuring that healthcare professionals communicate with those with health problems, etc., providing the interaction of activists in different regions, and organising mutual support.

Mediation may be the most needed mechanism in resolving problems between central coordination and individuals or groups, often between different political groups. Activist journalists are essential in preventing violence and solving problems through dialogue. They also provide accurate information and disseminate the parties’ explanations for solutions to crises caused by misinformation.

6 Conclusion

This study demonstrates citizen journalism’s significant role in political activism and alternative media landscapes, particularly in repressive political environments. A detailed analysis of activist journalism during and after Occupy Gezi highlights that digital platforms empower citizens to construct alternative narratives, resist mainstream media control, and foster solidarity networks. These journalists become active agents in shaping public discourse by producing counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge dominant power structures.

However, the study also reveals key challenges that hinder the sustainability of citizen journalism. Despite its initial success in amplifying marginalised voices and mobilising activists, many citizen journalism initiatives struggle to persist in the face of state repression, legal threats, and digital surveillance. Government-imposed censorship, arrests, and

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systematic discrediting campaigns weaken the effectiveness of these journalistic efforts, forcing many citizen journalists to abandon or transform their practices. Additionally, relying on commercial social media platforms introduces vulnerabilities, as these platforms can manipulate algorithmic visibility, impose bans, or cooperate with state authorities to suppress dissenting voices.

The analysis further shows that while social media facilitates rapid information dissemination and real-time mobilisation, it fosters fragmentation. The decentralised nature of citizen journalism allows for flexibility and adaptability but lacks long-term institutional stability. Many activist-driven media initiatives fail to establish durable infrastructures that could sustain their journalistic endeavours beyond protest movements. The absence of financial security and organisational frameworks leaves them vulnerable to dissolution once the initial momentum of activism subsides.

Despite these limitations, the study underscores that citizen journalism remains crucial in contemporary media ecosystems. It redefines journalistic norms by prioritising participatory engagement, grassroots storytelling, and affective narratives. By merging activism with reporting, citizen journalists create new forms of storytelling that challenge objectivity-driven traditional journalism, instead embracing subjective experiences and communal narratives as legitimate modes of knowledge production.

The study suggests several strategies to enhance the resilience of citizen journalism. First, alternative media initiatives must seek decentralised funding sources and cooperative models to mitigate financial instability. Second, activists should develop secure communication infrastructures to protect against surveillance and digital suppression. Third, citizen journalists must engage in capacity-building efforts, including training in media ethics, fact-checking, and digital security, to enhance their credibility and effectiveness in combating misinformation.

In conclusion, while citizen journalism faces structural challenges, it

remains a powerful tool for democratising media, resisting authoritarian control, and amplifying diverse voices. This study's findings reaffirm that citizen journalism's future depends on navigating state repression, building sustainable infrastructures, and harnessing the power of digital networks without becoming reliant on corporate platforms. As alternative media landscapes evolve, citizen journalism will remain essential for fostering democratic engagement and shaping collective resistance narratives in an increasingly digitalised world.

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