

# Citizen Journalism and Implications for Privacy

“As an activity, journalism belongs to the people themselves...” –Jay Rosen

# What is Citizen Journalism?

- Individuals lacking professional journalistic training who utilize modern technology to create and interact with media in collaboration with others
  - The name is controversial, because it promotes misunderstandings about what citizen journalism is.
- Is often contrasted with traditional journalism
  - Journalism used to be a one-way street, where the public were passive receivers.
  - Modern technology allows for bidirectional participation in journalism.
- Can be understood as a change in our culture that processes are continuing to adapt to
  - Not tied to a particular method of dissemination

# Reddit Covers the Boston Bombings

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Mods removed thread: Live updates of Boston Situation (self.news)

submitted 6 months ago\* by JpDeathBlade

**Note to MODS:** Don't touch this thread. News and info is needed to keep people safe. Sit behind your computers with all the power you want...but I won't let people die because you are entitled.

**New Note to MODS:** I love you guys, keep doing what you are doing. I know stuff can get rough and you get a bad rap sometimes but you guys keep things a float. I'm sorry for my message above (which I will leave for legacy) but I hope you understand my temporary anger at the time. Real Talk: Keep up the great work!

From the [live audio feed](#): MIT Officer shot and his firearm was stolen. [Small Edit] Officer is on his way to the hospital [Mass General]. No update on his condition. MIT is also updating their emergency site with news.

**EDIT 11:26 EST:** They have a photo of the alleged suspect.

**EDIT 11:27 EST:** Heard a Black Male in all black clothing.

**EDIT 11:32 EST:** NBC just reported the shots on TV. No new info there.

**EDIT 11:33 EST:** There was a robbery at a near by 7-11 (Dark Skin White Male 5'11' 200lbs, black top). Could be related?

**EDIT 11:40 EST:** Woman reported on the ground screaming/crying. Male that was with her just walked away.

[Unrelated, thanks /u/dontgotmilk]

**EDIT 11:42 EST:** [Image](#) from the scene. Warning blood.

**EDIT 11:44 EST:** Possible witness.

**EDIT 11:47 EST:** /u/philsmith24457 points out they mentioned a [mini excavator](#) [Unrelated]

**EDIT 11:59 EST:** Reportedly a group of Black males. 1 in a gray hoodie, in his early 20's, heavy set. 2 in black hoodies. Firearms present. [Unrelated].

**EDIT 12:04 EST:** from /u/TheFightingFarsi : NBC Connecticut reporting [MIT Officer has died](#). (grain of salt till for now)

**EDIT 12:07 EST:** MIT updated their emergency site with news. Police are searching the campus, stay indoors.

**EDIT 12:12 EST:** Removed links to emergency site to prevent Reddit DDoS. Thanks /u/Some-Internet-Guy

**EDIT 12:13 EST:** Boston Globe Editor confirms [MIT officer death](#).

**EDIT 12:16 EST:** /u/TheFightingFarsi has more info on the [MIT officer](#).

**EDIT 12:17 EST:** [Unrelated] Black male with grey hoodie put his firearm in the front pouch. Please stay inside tonight.

# Beating the Mainstream Media

**EDIT 2:26 EST:** Backdoor found opened. Police searching the area. Handgun mag found.

**EDIT 2:27 EST:** Reports of shots fired at Aberdeen & Mr. Auburn.

**EDIT 2:29 EST:** NBC is showing a cat screaming NO! while being put into a tub...

**EDIT 2:30 EST:** Boston Globe is confirming one of the Marathon bombers is in custody.

**EDIT 2:31 EST:** Gold Nissan Maxima being searched.

**EDIT 2:35 EST:** Different news places are reporting 1 suspect as dead, and another reporting that same suspect as in custody. Nothing known about his status atm.

**EDIT 2:40 EST:** Large area cleared by police (protected area location).

**EDIT 2:41 EST:** Boston Globe seems to be reporting everything...I'm not going to trust them for now on. Just FYI.

**EDIT 2:43 EST:** White male in gray hoodie considered armed and dangerous!

**EDIT 2:44 EST:** More update - White male, black hoodie, curly hair.

**EDIT 2:46 EST:** Mt. Auburn Hospital is being evacuated. - **FALSE, accepted in confusion**

**EDIT 2:48 EST:** [Police confirm these are the Marathon Bombers](#)

# Crowdsourced Coverage

Live tweeting from someone on scene. One picture of arrest being made

<https://twitter.com/sethmnookin>

Edit: Another great twitter with live updates and photos directly on scene

<https://twitter.com/AKitz>

Video of automatic weapon fire

[https://www.facebook.com/video/embed?video\\_id=10152778880075249](https://www.facebook.com/video/embed?video_id=10152778880075249)

Found from Ranger Up's FB page

[/u/JobSeeker55](#) helped their neighbor upload a video from their cellphone of the shootout in Watertown

Direct YouTube Link

EDIT: [http://livewire.wcvb.com/Event/117th\\_Running\\_of\\_Boston\\_Marathon](http://livewire.wcvb.com/Event/117th_Running_of_Boston_Marathon) has been the champs. Great coverage.

# The Reddit Witch Hunts



FINDBOSTONBOMBERS: THIS SUBREDDIT IS PRIVATE

- A subreddit called /r/ FindBostonBombers was created for users to post theories about suspects
- Sunil Tripathi, a student from Brown University who had been missing for a month was incorrectly identified as “White Hat”.
  - His grieving family was harassed by the internet community.
- Reddit apologized publicly for the embarrassing event, and this was widely seen as a failure of crowdsourced journalism.



this subreddit is private

the moderators of this subreddit have set it to private. you must be a moderator or approved submitter to view its contents.

# How Does this Apply to Sensitive Information and Privacy?

- Traditional structures deal with loads of sensitive information
  - Journalists must protect sources, fact check information, and generally remain objective.
  - Law enforcement must keep sensitive information private to aid investigation.
- As these structures are now applied in a new context, what does this mean for our sensitive information and privacy?

# What Counts as Citizen Journalism?

- Social Media Platforms
- Moderated Forums
- Traditional Media Utilizing Crowdsourcing
- Citizen Journalism Sites
  - Demotix
  - AllVoices
- Data Havens
  - Networks that act as legal refuges for unregulated data



# Advantages

- Prevents monopolies on information dissemination (democratization of information)
- Speed
  - MSNBC showing cat videos during a national crisis
- Access to massive resources at low cost
  - The Guardian was one of the first publications to publicly support citizen journalism by publishing a cross-section of their reporting on a blog that calls for public participation
    - Was able to explain the tax loophole that Tony Blair uses to keep his finances secret.

# Disadvantages

- Lack of quality- little to no verification of accuracy or truth
- Subject to perhaps as much bias as a traditional source of information (democracy is not objective)
- Cannot fully replace traditional media, as journalistic training allows professionals to navigate complex societal norms and laws

# How does this affect privacy?

- Citizen reporters
  - Tradeoff between anonymity and verifiability (identity issues)
    - Journalists use real names to add credibility to their stories.
    - Is an anonymous journalist possible?
  - Publishing of potentially defamatory information
  - Can unintentionally reveal data
    - EX: Pictures taken on iPhones have metadata such as time taken
  - Are vulnerable to those who disagree with their content
    - Repression of dissidence
  - Do not often have the same protection of the law as professional journalists
- Subject of the Media
  - Previously localized issues now become subjects of mass media
    - Steubenville, local political scandals, etc.
  - False Accusations and Mass Targeting
  - Nothing is Private in Public
- Journalists
  - Have to adapt to crowdsourcing by synthesizing and presenting material in an ethical and factual manner
    - Ie- it is not good enough to cite YouTube as a source

# Legal Privacy Issues

- Shield Laws grant journalists the right to protect their sources.
  - 37 states have shield laws to empower journalists to increase the flow of information and prevent chilling effects by regulation.
    - A bill calling for federal reform of shield laws has failed to pass through congress three times.
  - Does not currently extend to citizen journalists.
- Examples:
  - Elliott Madison- house was raided for breaking an anti-rioting law when he retweeted police movements so that protesters at a G20 summit could avoid being apprehended
  - Josh Wolf- was jailed for a month for refusing to hand over a subpoenaed video that would implicate protestors of damaging a police car during an anti-G8 summit
    - Courts ruled that he was not a journalist, and his “sources” were committing a public act.

# Rights and Responsibility

- Citizen Journalist websites that clearly state their function place full responsibility upon content providers.
- Moderators of forums like Reddit are responsible for content provided by users (not in a legal sense- CDA 230, but a social one).
- Traditional media's usage of crowdsourced information must be held to strict protocol in order to assure quality and accuracy.
  - NYCLU app to document stop and frisk experiences.
  - The Guardian supplemented Tottenham riot coverage with survey results and verified anecdotal information.
- Do Citizen Journalists have a responsibility to ethics?
  - Do everyday citizens have the right to protect sources?
  - Journalists often have to identify themselves in private, and some argue that they should do so in public as well.
    - What implications would this have in conjunction with the idea that anyone can be a citizen journalist?

# Edge Case: Techno-Vigilantism

- Were any laws broken in the Sunil situation?
  - No one was prosecuted, but most of the worst offenders were shunned by the online community.
- Citizens who break laws in order to acquire information (even to report it) are still liable for that crime.
  - EX: Anonymous, LulzSec, etc.
- Interestingly, but perhaps intuitively, people care more about whether vigilante actions are in line with their beliefs than whether or not it breaks the law.
  - Tim Libert analyzed the discourse surrounding illegal attacks conducted by LulzSec to determine that actions in line with public opinion were embraced positively.
    - <https://timlibert.me/writing/the-rise-of-techno-vigilantism-lulzsec-and-public-opinion/>
  - How should society treat vigilantism?
    - Deric Lostutter, if convicted for hacking a website to obtain evidence, may spend up to ten years in prison for bringing the national spotlight on the Steubenville Rape Case.
    - Does a case-by-case basis work?

# Questions

- Is there a responsibility upon society to become better readers and filter through information ourselves?
- Do citizen journalists deserve the same kind of protection as professional journalists?
- Does it matter that collecting sensitive information illegally is done for a good reason? Should it matter?
- How do you think that traditional media and crowdsourced journalism will continue to interact in the future? What is the best form that journalism currently takes?