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Revolutionary citizens become better journalists (new LSE research)

0 comments

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This report by LSE's Max Hanska-Ahy on his work with Roxanna Shapour on media and the Arab Spring.



Journalists in Training?

We know that 'ordinary people' played an important role in reporting the recent protests that cascaded across the Middle East and North Africa, but our **new research** shows that they also became savvier reporters in the process. At the same time, professional journalists became better and more comfortable working with "user generated content".

The interesting thing that our research observed is that the “journalistic literacy” of citizens reporting the protests, from Iran to Egypt and Bahrain, increased between 2009-11.

Within the social media ecology, which is not primarily a tool of reporting but itself a site of protest, some began to specialise on feeding content to news organisations. In the process they assimilated the editorial requirements of professional journalism, signposting their reports and producing content with the demands of broadcasting in mind.

This is important because for content to be valuable to journalists it needs to be editorially compatible with the requirements of newswork. Footage ideally needs to be of a quality and composition suitable to broadcast; stories and reports need to be signposted and tagged in a way that facilitates verification.

Over the same period journalists also gained new skills and put in place routines and procedures that greatly facilitated the integration of user content into the news. Of course content produced by ordinary people was not first and foremost a journalistic choice, but a necessity. To cover these protests, let alone to show pictures, journalists had to rely on ordinary people.

Both citizen and professional journalists went through a learning process that enabled them to better work with each other. For citizen reporting to work well with professional journalism in covering the perilous and blacked-out corners of the world, citizens have to understand and work towards the requirements of professional journalism, and journalists will have to adjust towards the capabilities of ordinary people reporting critical events under conditions of significant duress.

[Read more about our research here.](#)

This article by Max Hanska-Ahy

For more information on this research, contact us at Polis@lse.ac.uk

About the author



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