

Why do they do it? BBC on UGC (Polis Summer School)

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60 000 people sent in material to the BBC during this year's heavy snowfall in the south of England – yet during the recent heatwave the BBC's user generated hub only got 60 – why?

Some of the answer is obvious. Snow is more fun to film. It was more of an unusual event. [As I have written](#), it became a day of national rejoicing when we should have been at work. It was a landmark UGC moment. But why such a massive discrepancy?

[Matthew Eltringham, assistant editor of interactivity at the BBC](#) told Polis Summer School students that his team of 23 had tried hard to get the public to send in pictures of sun-drenched Britain but there was no response and certainly not the avalanche of snow pictures from February's event. Perhaps people were too lethargic in the heat. But why people do send in stuff is a big issue when it comes to rather harder news such as Iran.



Matthew explained how his team sticks to basic journalistic principles. Everything has to be authenticated by contacting the citizen journalist. But he also showed how difficult that can be when a repressive regime punishes anyone seeking to speak out. So in effect, the BBC had to find other ways to judge the authenticity of what they were either being sent, or what they were gathering from social media networks such as Twitter.

And people lie. Sometimes they want to manipulate media for political reasons. Sometimes they are simply over-enthusiastic. Apparently, when the BBC interactivity people ask the public to 'send in pictures' the public often sends in pictures culled from news websites. 'They are just trying to help' says Matthew.

It can take complicated detective skills to work out whether a picture is genuine, comparing it with other material or trying to spot recognisable land-marks and then relating it to other known facts. Sometimes it is just common-sense. Could the citizen journalist have really taken all those pictures from all those vantage points in such a short time?

But the result is that BBC coverage is undeniably enhanced, says Matthew. You only have to look at the Iranian coverage. BBC reporters were holed up in hotels, but their reports included footage of the demonstrations and information culled from emails, instant messaging and social networking sites. It was [networked journalism](#) in action.



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