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Perspectives of an underconsidered stakeholder group: Citizen journalists' views of public relations practitioners and their materials

Burton St. John III^{a,*}, Kirsten Johnson^b

^a Old Dominion University, BAL 3010, Norfolk, VA 23529, United States

^b Elizabethtown College, One Alpha Drive, Elizabethtown, PA 17022, United States

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long studied the relationships between professional journalists and public relations practitioners. However, public relations literature (both scholarly and trade) has not sufficiently examined the nature of the relationships between citizen journalists and public relations practitioners. This study addresses that gap through surveying U.S. citizen journalists on their views of public relations professionals and their materials. Study findings point to ambivalence among citizen journalists: they are not sure of the value of public relations people or the usefulness of their material, but they voice a positive regard for public relations people the more they interact with them. These findings indicate that a more carefully considered outreach to citizen journalists can allow public relations practitioners to build better relationships with these non-traditional reporters and, therefore, enhance the opportunity for practitioners to be more effective conveying information within the online news ecology.

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1. Introduction

The rise of the Internet in the last two decades has provided a new medium through which news can be conveyed and, as such, has allowed journalists not affiliated with professional newsrooms to offer up news accounts. Known as "citizen journalists," these reporters have borne witness to many dramatically noteworthy news events in recent years, such as the 2014 race riots in Ferguson, Missouri, the sinking of a ferry in South Korea in April 2014 that killed hundreds, and the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. Accordingly, the role of citizen journalists in crisis situations like these and others (e.g., California wildfires, Superstorm Sandy, massive tornadoes in the U.S. Midwest and Southern states) has been receiving more attention in emergency management circles (Novak & Vidoloff, 2011; Watson & Wadhwa, 2013). In each of these instances citizen journalists were present, capturing video, gathering information, and transmitting accounts in real time. As such, citizen journalists are playing an increasingly important role in the news-gathering process, especially at a time when traditional newsrooms continue to cut their staffs (Jurkowitz, 2014; Total employment, 2013). There are now hundreds of citizen journalism sites providing news from non-professionals; according to a Pew Institute study, between January 2011 and March 2012 approximately 40% of the most viewed news videos came directly from citizens placing their videos on the Internet (Jurkowitz & Hitlin, 2013).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: bsaintjo@odu.edu (B. St. John III), johnsonka@etown.edu (K. Johnson).

Still, public relations literature has done little to examine citizen journalists as a rising stakeholder group within the wider news milieu. Certainly, public relations research has, over the last two decades, investigated how the Internet has affected the news ecology within which public relations practitioners attempt to convey news about their clients. Particularly notable is Ye and Ki's (2012) survey of 27 years of peer-reviewed public relations journal articles concerning the Internet. Significantly, they found that public relations scholarship was transmission centered: public relations literature focused heavily on how practitioners conceptualize and execute what they consider to be effective communication through the Internet. They pointed out that audience-centered public relations research was lacking. Not surprisingly, their study found no peer-reviewed research on citizen journalists as a separate stakeholder group within the news arena that has distinct perceptions of public relations people. This study addresses that gap, inspired by Ye and Ki's call that public relations scholarship should expand to move beyond "organizations' or practitioners' perceptions to also include publics' experiences" (2012, p. 426). As such, this works reports on a study of the viewpoints of citizen journalists about public relations practitioners and the materials they offer.

2. Relationships between citizen journalists and public relations practitioners

Public relations literature reveals scant information about the relationships between citizen journalists and public relations practitioners. One factor that might be complicating research about this relationship is a tendency, both in academic works and public relations trade publications, to identify citizen journalism as an example of social media, customarily classifying citizen journalists as "bloggers" who often engage in dialogic communication with other bloggers and commenters (Armon, 2008; Barlow, 2007; *Managing a crisis online*, 2008; Waters & Morton, 2010). Shedding further light on this blogging frame of reference was a recent study of the Internet-related content carried by 28 scholarly communication journals from 1992 to 2009. That work revealed that blogging was the second-highest research topic, appearing in almost 21% of Internet-focused pieces across these publications (Ye & Ki, 2012).

However, it is problematic to conceive citizen journalism as inherently linked to social media's discursive tendency. Social media is a broad term for digital platforms that offer "mediated opportunities for bringing people together and encouraging social networking and dialogic communication" (Sweetser & Weaver Lariscy, 2008, p. 180). Relatedly, Solis (2014) pointed out that social media, especially from a public relations perspective, is about "connections" and "emotions," characterized by "expressions" that "reveal the souls and personalities of online communities" (Solis, 2014, p. xv). While such a conversational dynamic can be a part of citizen journalism, it appears to not be essential as this emerging practice has not customarily been defined as primarily about dialogue. Instead, a closer look at specific definitions of citizen journalism reveals that it has been identified as a variation of news gathering and transmission practices rather than as a site of dialogue generation. More than 10 years ago, Bowman and Willis, in a seminal piece, defined citizen journalism as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information" (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p. 9). In the years since then, several scholars have defined citizen journalism by emphasizing that such reporting was done by non-journalists who now had access to affordable technologies that allowed them to capture, edit, and present news (Gillmor, 2006; Nip, 2006; Rosen, 2008). Nip (2006, p. 218) pointed out that, in fact, the dispersal of these tools outside of the traditional newsroom actually enabled citizens to produce news reports that could be disseminated beyond a blog, appearing, for example, in a "news website, community radio station, or newspaper." Most recently, citizen journalism has been characterized as "a range of amateur information reporting and sharing activities" (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014, p. 454).

Still, the public relations scholarly literature has yet to clearly articulate the delineation between social media and citizen journalism. Furthermore, the field's trade publications, like *PR News* and *PR Week*, have displayed a haziness about clearly identifying the citizen journalist. One prevailing conceit about citizen journalism in these two prominent public relations publications is that this form of reporting is best understood as a variation of consumer empowerment, an emergence of customer commentary that complements other technological vehicles like blogs, Facebook, and podcasts. That is, citizen journalists can use social media tools to trumpet or criticize a company's products or services (Bernstein, 2006; *Managing a crisis online*, 2008; Toledo, 2008), demand changes to product quality (Washkuch, 2008), and point out bad business actors (Bernstein, 2006). Additionally, these trade publications repeatedly emphasize that this particular brand of consumer empowerment needs urgent attention because, with continual advances in portable and affordable technology, anyone can do citizen journalism (Granat, 2006; *Navigating the new media world*, 2009; Spielman, 2012).

Public relations and communication conferences that offer a mix of scholarly and professional research indicate a strong focus on the wider term "social media," but mostly elide study of citizen journalism. For example, the 17th International Public Relations Research Conference proceedings showed 12 papers (out of a total of 40) that include the term "social media" in their description and none for "citizen journalism" (IPRR, 2014). The proceedings from AEJMC's 2012 conference indicated 25 papers were scheduled that included the term "social media" in the title, but only six had "citizen journalism" (or "citizen journalist") in the paper's title (AEJMC, 2012).¹ Correspondingly, a recent qualitative study revealed that public

¹ Of course, many more papers at both conferences hit upon particular aspects of social media, but did not include "social media" in their descriptors. But, even then, these works investigated the modes of communication (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, etc.) instead of examining citizen journalism.

relations practitioners continue to view social media as a “key channel for communication in the future” because of its transparent and dialogic nature (MacNamara, 2014, p. 746).

The focus on social media is particularly compelling to public relations practitioners as they tend to see social media as a term signifying a larger arena where practitioners can engage a multitude of audiences (consumers, employees, regulators, investors) in a way that may provoke conversations between a public relations client and those various groups. *PR Week* quoted one top manager at a social media firm pointing out that social media allows a company to project a “digital persona” that displays a commitment to “better business processes” and happier customers (Cunningham, 2013, paras. 5, 15). Another incentive for public relations practitioners to focus more broadly on social media rather than citizen journalists is the increasing presence of traditional journalists in the social media sphere. This dynamic will likely continue as traditional journalism, laboring to reverse decreasing audience shares, is embracing social media as a medium for relaying news (Ananny, 2014). In the process, journalists at well-established news outlets reaffirm their salience to public relations people. Noted a CEO of a major public relations firm about the garnering of media coverage of their clients’ special event: “The thing clients were most wowed by was the fact that CNN retweeted it . . . Somehow, it gives them, in their minds, hundreds of thousands of . . . reaches [to customers]” (Bruell, 2011, p. 63).

The fact that traditional journalists on social media can still serve as a focus of attention from public relations practitioners is not surprising as the scholarly literature reveals a well-established, often tense but somewhat satisfactory relationship between traditional journalists and public relations practitioners. Scholarly studies since the 1980s have recurrently tracked what Gower (2007) has called a “troubled embrace” between the two fields. Since 2000, scholars have found variance in the quality of that relationship. Some scholars have found the overall dynamics as less adversarial, marked by agreements about role perceptions and generally constructive relationships (Neijens & Smit, 2006; Shaw, 2004), and some have found persistent stress points in the relationships about the sheer volume of public relations information (Hansuch, 2012), the manipulative potential of public relations (Hansuch, 2012) and the rise of a “necessary evil” view among journalists toward public relations (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). Most recently, Fredriksson and Johansson (2014) noted that a survey of Swedish journalists exemplified a similar tension within the journalistic field about public relations people: most of the surveyed journalists were wary of public relations practitioners who were former journalists, but those journalists who were less socialized to journalistic norms exhibited less skepticism toward public relations people.

Although both the scholarly and public relations trade publication literature reveals scant specifics about the dynamics between citizen journalists and public relations people, the well-established scholarly literature on relationships between traditional journalists and public relations practitioners offers a solid point of departure. Accordingly, this study, using key questions from that scholarly literature, examined how citizen journalists viewed: (a) public relations people as sources of information (cf., Hansuch, 2012; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Shaw, 2004); (b) the usefulness of public relations material (cf., Hansuch, 2012); and (c) how public relations people try to influence them (cf., Neijens & Smit, 2006; Sallot & Johnson, 2006; Sallot, Steinfatt, & Salwen, 1998). Additionally, this study examined how citizen journalists’ views of the impact of public relations were shaped by (a) the amount of time citizen journalists interacted with public relations people and (b) if the citizen journalist had prior previous traditional (professional) journalistic experience.

3. Research questions

As the news ecology increasingly includes citizens acting as journalists, this study was interested in discerning how citizen journalists see (1) public relations people as sources, (2) the quality of public relations materials, and (3) the extent of influence public relations people have on them. Since there is a gap in the scholarly literature on this subject, and public relations trade literature tends to conflate the wider notion of social media (which the public relations field sees as dialogic) with the practice of citizen journalists (which scholars see as a variation in news gathering and transmission), this study will help scholars and practitioners better identify the terrain between citizen journalists and public relations practitioners. Accordingly, this study pursued five research questions.

RQ 1: Will citizen journalists indicate that public relations people are a valuable source for information?

RQ2: Will citizen journalists indicate that public relations material is useful?

RQ3: How do citizen journalists perceive attempts made by public relations people to influence them?

RQ 4: Does the amount of time citizen journalists spend interacting with public relations people impact their perception of public relations people?

RQ 5: Will the amount of time citizen journalists previously spent working in traditional media impact how they view the influence of public relations people?

4. Method

This study embarked on a survey of citizen journalists in the United States. Informed by the scholarly literature, for the purposes of this study citizen journalists were defined as (1) citizens who report, and/or manage others who report news stories, primarily online and, (2) do so while not employed at traditional for-profit news organizations (but may have previously worked in such news operations). In January 2014, we obtained lists of citizen journalism sites from the Knight Community News Network, as well as two other prominent researchers in the field of citizen journalism. From these lists we eliminated sites that: (a) did not fit this study’s definition of citizen journalism, (b) were based outside of the U.S., and (c) were

Table 1
Public relations people as a valuable source of information.

Question	M	SD	N
I have a positive relationship with public relations people	3.49	.77	82
Good working relationships with public relations people are necessary for me to do my reporting	2.96	1.12	84
In general, I think public relations people are a necessary evil	2.88	.90	83
Public relations practitioners and citizen journalists are partners in the dissemination of information	2.73	1.05	84
The abundance of free and easily available information provided by public relations practitioners has, on balance, improved the quality of reporting	2.45	.93	82

inactive. Three-hundred and eight survey invitations were sent via email to citizen journalists in April of 2014. Thirty-seven of the emails were unable to be delivered, resulting in a total of 271 emails that were successfully delivered. Thirteen of those emailed contacted the researchers to tell them that they did not consider themselves to be citizen journalists. This resulted in a total sample size of 258. Eighty-four citizen journalists responded to the survey on SurveyMonkey.com, resulting in a response rate of 33%.

All responses were measured on a 5 point Likert scale, where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. A significance level of .05 was used for all tests.

To supplement the findings a limited number of one-on-one interviews were conducted to add richness and clarify findings (Lindlof, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Four citizen journalists were selected from those who responded to the survey and were interviewed in May and June 2014 via telephone. They were asked questions about their relationships with public relations practitioners, the usefulness of the information they receive, and the public relations role in the journalistic process. The interviewees were selected because they represented diversity in terms of age, geography, and previous journalistic experience. A brief description of each of the citizen journalists can be found in Appendix A. In order to maintain anonymity, those interviewed have been assigned a letter (A–D) that will be used to refer to them.

4.1. Survey participants

Respondents were predominately older, male, well-educated, and from the northeastern United States (half of respondents came from that region and, overall, 70% were male). Forty percent were between the ages of 51 and 65. Respondents had significant higher education: about slightly over one-quarter had a master's degree with almost one in ten having a doctorate.²

Across all respondents, the average level of experience as a citizen journalist was approximately six and a half years. At the low end of the range were citizen journalists with less than a year experience; the high end was marked by those who worked as citizen journalists for 17 years. A significant portion of respondents had prior experience working in a traditional newsroom: 41% said they were former professional journalists. The average length of time these individuals had worked in traditional news operations was 16 years.

5. Findings

5.1. Public relations people as useful sources for information

When citizen journalists were asked if they consider public relations people to be a valuable source for information (RQ 1), as a group they tended to not consider them to be very valuable or were uncertain as to their value (see Table 1).

It is interesting to note that 51% of the citizen journalists surveyed indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I have a positive relationship with public relations people,” while only 11% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The abundance of free and easily available information provided by public relations practitioners has, on balance, improved the quality of reporting.” One reason why public relations people may not be seen as valuable sources is that they do not understand how to interact with citizen journalism sites. For example, D, a citizen journalist in a town of approximately 16,000, indicated that he has limited contact with public relations people, and those he interacts with are “unsophisticated.” He said that he has “attempted to train some of them, so I can use them as sources” but has not experienced much success. Other respondents offered that public relations people could be helpful. C, a staff member for a civic affairs-focused citizen journalism site in a large city in the lower Midwest, said that citizen journalists only find

² Twenty-one percent were older than 66 years-old, 40% were between the ages of 51 and 65, 20% were between the ages of 41 and 50, 13% were between the ages of 31 and 40, and 6% were between the ages of 25–30. Nine percent had Ph.D.'s, 26% had Master's Degrees, 50% had Bachelor's degrees, 4% had Associates Degrees, and 12% had a high school diploma. In terms of what region of the U.S. the website is located, 50% were located in the Northeast, 22% in the West, 15% in the Midwest, 9% in the Southeast, and 6% in the Southwest. A majority of the respondents, 43%, reported that their site served a community of more than 100,000 people, 36% reported their site served between 10,000 and 50,000 people, 16% reported their site served less than 10,000 people, and 4% said their site served between 50,000 and 100,000 people.

Table 2
 Perceived usefulness of public relations material.

Question	M	SD	N
There is too much public relations material	3.28	.93	83
Public relations material provides a good starting point for finding new story ideas	3.17	1.00	83
Press releases increasingly replace stories which used to be researched by journalists	3.07	1.07	83
Public relations material has a large influence on how stories get covered	2.82	1.11	84
Public relations material saves time when researching stories	2.78	.86	82
Public relations material offers necessary information for me to do my reporting	2.78	.99	83
Information in public relations material is reliable	2.63	.91	82

Table 3
 Perceived influence of public relations people.

Question	M	SD	N
Public relations people manipulate information	3.66	.86	82
I anticipate that future interactions with public relations people will be helpful	3.28	.86	82
Public relations people try too much to influence how I present news to the public	3.01	.95	82
Public relations people try to be as transparent as possible	2.29	.97	83
Public relations people have a strong impact on the way I present news	2.10	.91	82
Public relations people have a strong impact on what news I present	2.10	.91	82

valuable those public relations people who have specific info that is narrowly tailored to their site. For example, he said, they find helpful public relations people who: (1) are in attendance at community events and (2) can provide background material for those events. A, the owner of a citizen journalism web site in Alaska, said that he had several public relations contacts in both industry and local government who felt comfortable reaching out to him to offer news releases and chat informally; “they are regulars who call us and offer fairly common content,” he said. Still, the quantitative results across this study show that, while citizen journalists indicate that they have a positive relationship with public relations practitioners, they are not entirely convinced that public relations people are vital sources for generating stories.

5.2. Public relations material usefulness

Research question 2 asked about the usefulness of public relations material to citizen journalists. Survey results indicate that they were uncertain as to its value (see Table 2).

Only 16% of those surveyed said they either agreed or strongly agreed that information in public relations material is reliable, and 32% were uncertain, possibly indicating that because citizen journalists do not have a lot of contact with public relations people, when they do get material from them, they are not sure whether it can be trusted. Still, individual comments from some respondents indicated that public relations material could fill a need. For example, C said that public relations people provide information concerning upcoming events that help fill the site’s community calendar, but also tend to offer information they cannot use because it does not concern their local readership. In contrast, A indicated that, when a railroad was washed out, he received several news releases that he immediately used. Conversely, his outlet sometimes receives too much material that appears to overtly push a product or service without a clear local angle—he said he rejects much of that information. B, a citizen journalist from a small town of approximately 12,000 people, said that some public relations people provide material that, after some slight editing, is suitable for running on his site. He indicated that small-city news operations often appreciate stories from public relations people; some of the news release information from certain practitioners is so useful that these particular public relations people act as “free employees” of his news outlet, he said. Still, in the main, this study found uncertainty regarding citizen journalists’ perceptions of the importance of public relations material, its reliability, and whether it is an efficient source of news.

5.3. Public relations practitioners’ influence

The findings for research question 3 indicate that citizen journalists do not consider public relations influence to be particularly strong (see Table 3).

It should be noted that the means for “Public relations people have a strong impact on what news I present” and “Public relations people have a strong impact on the way I present news” were particularly low, indicating that citizen journalists do not feel the news they report is greatly impacted by public relations people regarding both the news they choose to report and how they report that news. For example, B and C said that public relations people simply do not reach out to their news sites. In particular, B contacts public relations people to create an account so that they can submit material, but many fail to follow through.

There is also healthy skepticism from citizen journalists when it comes to the information presented by public relations practitioners. When asked, 51% of citizen journalists either agreed or strongly agreed that public relations people manipulate information, while 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4
 Significant positive correlations for time spent with public relations people.

Question	r	p	n
I have a positive relationship with public relations people	.60	.00	78
I anticipate that future interactions with public relations people will be helpful	.43	.00	78
Public relations material provides a good starting point for finding new story ideas	.42	.00	80
Good working relationships with public relations people are necessary for me to do my reporting	.25	.03	80
Public relations material offers necessary information for me to do my reporting	.24	.03	79

5.4. Time spent with public relations people and perceptions

Research question 4 examined if time spent interacting with public relations people had an influence on their perceptions of them. This study found that a Jeffers Syndrome effect is in play among citizen journalists. That is, in line with Sallot and Johnson’s (2006) findings concerning traditional journalists, those citizen journalists who reported spending more time with public relations people reported that they were more likely to view public relations more favorably in some areas like providing story leads, the offering of necessary information, and the helpfulness of public relations practitioners (see Table 4).³

5.5. Traditional journalism experience and views of public relations

Research question 5 examined differences between those who have, and have not, previously worked in traditional journalism as regards perceptions of the influence of public relations. When it came to public relations material, those who have never worked in traditional media were more likely to think that public relations material has a significantly larger influence on how stories get covered ($M = 3.08$) as compared to those who have worked in traditional media, $M = 2.44$, $t = -2.68$, $df = 82$, $p = .01$. No other significant differences were found between the groups on any of the measures.

Additionally, those who reported working in traditional journalism newsrooms longer reported their interactions with public relations people in a more favorable light ($r = .47$, $p = .01$). That is, those with more traditional newsroom backgrounds were more likely to indicate a positive relationship with public relations people and favorably anticipate future dealings with public relations professionals. This result aligns with Sallot and Johnson’s (2006) findings of a positive correlation between the number of years of professional journalism experience and the degree of positive regard for public relations people. No other significant correlations were found on any of the other measures.

6. Discussion/conclusion

This study sought to understand how citizen journalists view relationships with public relations practitioners as well as the material they provide. Citizen journalists are unsure as to the utility of public relations material in improving the quality of their stories and the value of public relations people in helping them to generate or cover stories. The citizen journalists we surveyed indicated that they did not feel that public relations people have a strong influence on the way they choose to tell stories. In fact, despite avowed positive regard for public relations practitioners, citizen journalists also reveal some skepticism of public relations people, as 51% of citizen journalists either agreed or strongly agreed that public relations professionals manipulate information, while 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Despite the fact that many citizen journalists report they are doubtful of the value of public relations people, citizen journalists exhibited a positive correlation between the number of years they reported working in a traditional newsroom and how positively they perceived their relationships with public relations people ($r = .47$, $p = .01$). Additionally, all respondents, whether or not they had previous professional journalistic experience, revealed that the Jeffers’ Syndrome appears to be at work. That is, there was a positive correlation between the amount of time spent with public relations people and a favorable regard for public relations practitioners ($r = .60$, $p = .00$). Accordingly, there appears to be a willingness to be open to the building of a rapport between citizen journalists and public relations people. C revealed as much when he exhibited frustration that the public relations material he received did not address the civic-issue focus of the site he worked at, saying:

We find it disappointing when we receive public relations information and it doesn’t really connect to anything useful or educational regarding our local readership. It sucks to read through an entire article or whole press release just to realize there was nothing we could use in there. . . . It’s apparent that too many public relations people don’t see themselves as providing value to citizen journalists as much as they see an opportunity to get their information out.

C’s comments highlight a seeming contradiction within our findings: citizen journalists are skeptical of the information that public relations people offer, yet they tend to voice a positive regard for public relations practitioners. MacNamara’s (2014) study of journalists and public relations practitioners appears to explain this seeming dichotomy in citizen journalists’

³ The survey item gauging how much time was spent with public relations people was a five-point Likert scale question, with “1” equivalent to “never” and “5” equivalent to “always.”

views of public relations people: the more a journalist becomes acculturated to a trusted public relations person, the more that public relations person is seen as a valuable expert, and not a person doing “PR.” His observation adds weight to this study’s finding that there is much potential for building a valuable rapport between these particular citizens and public relations people. For example, this study found that the mean for the question “I have a positive relationship with public relations people” was 3.49, while Sallot and Johnson (2006) found that traditional journalists’ mean response to this same question was 3.3. In fact, 51% of respondents to our survey said they have a positive relationship with public relations people.

These findings indicate that a more carefully considered outreach from public relations people to citizen journalists—especially those citizen journalists with significant traditional newsroom experience—will likely lead to a positive regard from citizen journalists toward public relations practitioners. In other words, public relations people may want to consider first how they can better identify citizen journalists and the audiences they serve within the news environment, rather than first concentrating on how to present themselves as beneficial story sources or how to improve the usefulness of the information they would convey to citizen journalists. As this study has established, there is a dearth of literature in public relations scholarship concerning the discrete identification of citizen journalists. Compounding this challenge is public relations trade literature which has tended to conflate citizen journalists with individuals who, for example, stake out a “customer-as-critic” role on social media—the two are not synonymous as citizen journalists (a) may be more focused on information gathering and transmission and, (b) may work on sites that are not primarily interlinked with the wider social media ecology.⁴ Instead, the public relations profession can work to improve its impact in the wider news milieu by doing one of the things it can do best: identify the needs of citizen journalists as an underconsidered stakeholder group, and reach out accordingly. Granted, citizen journalists can, at first, appear to be an amorphous category, but, by more deeply surveying the landscape in the communities in which they operate, and moving beyond social media, public relations practitioners will be able to build better relationships with these non-traditional reporters and, therefore, enhance their opportunity to be more effective conveying information within the online news ecology.

As with any study there were limitations. One limitation was that only U.S.-based citizen journalism websites were included. A survey of sites in places other than the U.S. may produce different results. A majority of those who responded (70%) were males. While this is close to the national average (64%) for males working in newsrooms (Census, 2013) this could have impacted the results. Also, all four respondents who participated in one-on-one interviews were male. Future studies may wish to include females in the interview process. Finally, a majority of the respondents were from the Northeast, so care should be taken in future studies to include a more geographically diverse sample.

This study opens up a significantly understudied aspect: the relationships between citizen journalists and public relations practitioners. As such, it invites future studies that can clarify dynamics of these relationships. For example, quantitative studies could address, through content analysis, how many public relations messages appear in citizen journalist stories. A similar approach could be taken by identifying those citizen journalists who have a strong presence on social media outlets (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and measuring the appearance of public relations messages within those citizen journalists’ social media platforms. From a qualitative perspective, interviews with public relations practitioners and citizen journalists who are active in social media could also provide more insights into where public relations people effectively make inroads in developing rapport with citizen journalists, and, conversely, where practitioners may be failing to find effective routes to building such relationships. The findings from this study indicate there is much more to be understood about an underconsidered stakeholder in today’s news ecology: citizen journalists.

Appendix A.

A is the editor of a citizen journalism site based in a western state. He has been the editor for one year and he has no traditional journalism experience (his background is in web development). He is between 41 and 50 years old.

B is the co-founder of a citizen journalism website based in the northeast. He founded the site 11 years ago and has never worked in traditional journalism. He is between 41 and 50 years old.

C works at a website in the southwest. Coming from an IT background, and with no journalism experience, he has four years’ experience as a videographer. He is in his fourth year at the site and is between 25 and 30.

D is the founder of a website based in the northwest. He founded the site 8 years ago. He worked in traditional journalism for about 30 years in both radio and television. He is 66+ years old.

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⁴ Some of these sites include: westportnow.com, vineyardvoice.org, thedigitel.com, and shorelineareanews.com.

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