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## **ETHICAL ISSUES OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN CHINA - TAKING “HUMAN FLESH SEARCH ENGINE” PHENOMENON AS AN EXAMPLE**

### **Abstract:**

Media landscape in mainland China is generally considered as lack of freedom by many media critics, for the Chinese government and Communist Party control the mainstream media, manipulating the agenda setting and restraining citizens' expression (Emmons, 2001; Lu and Weber, 2007). However, recently, the advancement of new media technologies especially Web 2.0 technology has stimulated the flourishing of citizen journalism in China, for the new technologies empower ordinary citizens to actively engage in reporting, disseminating and deliberating public issues via social networking websites, which is challenging, developing and modifying Chinese media world (Nip, 2009). Nevertheless, with the rapid development of citizen journalism in China, a wide range of ethical issues such as inaccuracy, online violence and threatens to human rights are simultaneously rising. The ethical codes for citizen journalists are increasingly required to be developed even though there is still few of academic research focusing on this aspect. This research intended to explore main ethical issues of citizen journalism in China by analysing three cases caused by a web-based collaboration “Human Flesh Search Engine” (HFSE)(literally referring to online manhunt).

In China, citizen journalism has positively influenced the disclosure of social injustices and undercover of corruptive issues, which could be effectively demonstrated by the HFSE phenomenon. Narrowly speaking, HFSE is usually recognised as a process that Chinese netizens investigate and broadcast personal identity of people who are believed as involving in corruptions and behaving immorally (Ong, 2012). Although it is a positive illustration of citizen empowerment, civic engagement and practices of free speech, a large amount of significant HFSE events are condemned as overly antagonistic and immoral, resulting in reconsiderations of ethical and legal issues (Tao and Chao, 2011).

As a result, by analysing three significant events in the history of HFSE, including kitten killer, death blog and graffiti scandal, this research has been found that HFSE will cause certain ethical problems, such as mob violence, public shaming, humiliating and threatens to individuals' privacy. This essay firstly suggested that citizen journalists' self exposure of personal background can decrease the possibilities of cyber bullying; additionally, citizen journalists should be responsible for clarifying sources in order to ensure the accuracy of reporting; and finally, for avoiding invasion of objects' private rights, participants of HFSE should be sensible to minimise harms that might brought by their contribution.

### **Keywords:**

Ethics; Citizen Journalism; China; Human Flesh Search Engine