EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Media or Press, plays a very crucial role in the effective functioning of any democracy, and is called as the Fourth Estate, a name coined by Edmund Burke in 1787 and popularised by Thomas Carlyle, an 18th century author. In the recent years, mass media has seen a remarkable growth, making it a transnational industry. Large conglomerates, own media units that control the flow of news and entertainment to all parts of the world. In such a scenario, it is possible, that the news flow may sometimes get polarized towards some countries and sections of population. Since the phenomenon is likely to grow bigger in terms of length, breadth and depth, media scholars are giving serious thought to the ramifications of industrial growth on its ultimate product i.e. news.

Taking a cue from the environment thus created, the stake holder who bore the brunt of the market forces and struggled to survive as a voiceless entity at the far end of the communication process model, started to contribute in the global dialogue. The receivers of information onslaught, misinformation, information overload, rumour, gossip, innuendo, and all types of communication, turned into a crucial unit of the communication model. The globalised world with its media behemoths had also brought about a remarkable change in the ubiquity and all pervasive presence of media. The technological changes provided each individual with the paraphernalia for global communication. The voiceless, not only found the voice but also the means to make their voices heard.

Thus the picture of a ‘Fifth Estate’ known as ‘Citizen Journalism’ began to emerge as a phenomenon. This has improved public participation in all areas of opinion generation creating a more thriving democracy. Armed with easy-to-use web publishing tools, always on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the ‘receiver’ has all the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information. The receiver is now rubbing its shoulders with the once mighty and powerful ‘sender’.

This act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information by using powerful communication tools, is termed as citizen journalism. The intent of this kind of participatory-participation by the receivers/audience, is to provide an independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a strong democracy requires. The present research studies this phenomenon of Citizen Journalism and its emergence as the ‘Fifth Estate’ in the
Indian context. It explores the nature and implications of the ‘Fifth Estate’, by highlighting why and how it has the potential to be important in the 21st century.

The objectives of this study include identifying the need/s of participating citizens using Internet as per Uses and Gratification Theory; finding relationship between level of participation on Internet by the civil society with its knowledge and practice of Citizen Journalism and opinion about the Emergence of Fifth Estate; identifying the citizen journalist/s in Citizen Journalism and understand the rationale behind their participation; studying the homepage (of Indian Citizen Journalism websites) in terms of length of the news stories, tone of the news stories published and their topics of discussion; and lastly, discussing the new dimension to the existing Berlo’s S-M-C-R Model of communication.

For this study, a systematic classification and description of communication content, both qualitative and quantitative, is conducted in two parts:

(i) Comparative Content Analysis: A comparative qualitative and quantitative inter-website content analysis for the years 2012 and 2014 (on selected dates), on four Indian Citizen Journalism websites using Fish Bowl Method, is undertaken in the first part of research design.

(ii) Survey through Cluster Sampling: A multi-stage random sampling of 747 respondents from Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula is undertaken in the second part of research design.

The results show a significant and positive correlation between variables investigated. The study proves that with increasing Level of Participation on Internet, there is an Emergence of Fifth Estate, leading to a change in the linear model of communication process.

This research studied the phenomenon of Citizen Journalism and substantiates the emergence of Fifth Estate in the Indian context. The emerging network of individuals in the online world is empowering a positive move towards bringing the phenomenon of Citizen Journalism into the forefront and making it an important aspect in the media scenario. Amidst the loud and powerful voice of the mass media conglomerates, every citizen who is digitally connected with modern paraphernalia also finds a voice to contribute.

Key words: Citizen Journalism, Fifth Estate, Internet, Citizen Journalism in India, Citizen Journalism websites, Participatory Journalism, New Media.