

## **Gordon Sinclair Award Essay**

### **The Social Evolution of Citizen Journalism**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the social evolution of citizen journalism and seeks to develop a typology, using a uses and gratifications perspective, to understand why citizen journalists produce their work. By developing a further understanding of why they engage, mainstream media organizations can develop strategies to encourage and nurture citizen journalists in order to most effectively utilize the power of these new “producers.” Through the investigation of previous uses and gratifications typologies, the author suggests five categories for the motivations of citizen journalists: “personal gain,” “individual growth,” “societal interaction,” “information dispersal,” and “collective change.” The typology is then assessed by administering an electronic survey to 108 citizen journalists who produce journalistic content for three citizen media websites. The data of this survey determines that while each category of motivation fulfills a need for citizen journalists, motivations pertaining to “information dispersal” are deemed to be the most vital. In addition, the paper further investigates the citizen journalist population, including their demographics, how they use the pertinent website, their journalism training and confidence level in performing core journalism skills. The paper concludes by suggesting a model of integration between citizen and professional journalism that will increase the multiperspectivity of the mediascape.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1977, Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan discussed a revolutionary technology, one that would forever change the producer-consumer relationship and democratize access to the media’s means of production (McLuhan, 1964). Despite his status as a media visionary, he was not talking about the invention of Berners-Lee’s Internet and the later introduction of the World Wide Web. McLuhan was talking about the invention and mainstream use of the photocopier.

While the photocopier did provide audiences with the means to duplicate their textual and image-based work, the mainstream adoption of Internet technology and the World Wide Web provided a means for audiences to both replicate their work and, more importantly to McLuhan's publishing analogy, to effectively distribute their work to interested audiences around the world (Bruns, 2005, p1). With this ability, formerly passive audiences became active participants in media production and dissemination processes, becoming what Alvin Toffler termed "prosumers"<sup>1</sup> (1980, p277) - simultaneously both producers and consumers of content.

Within online journalism, this act is termed "citizen journalism," and is the subject for this study. Citizen journalism is defined as citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and (distributing) news and information" (Bowman & Willis, 2003, p9). For the purposes of this study, a differentiation must be made between citizen journalism and participatory journalism. While participatory journalism includes audience interactions with journalistic content such as commenting on an existing story, engaging with an interactive multimedia feature, involvement with a wiki, or large-scale collaborative open-source production, citizen journalism mirrors journalistic production processes, with citizens responsible for creating individual articles, photos, videos or audio content with the intent for it to be used by the public in the same way it uses the mainstream media.

This study will first explore more generally the media revolution caused by citizen journalism, along with a uses and gratifications perspective to media effects. Second, it will specifically investigate three different citizen journalism websites,

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<sup>1</sup> This has since been adapted for a media context by Axel Bruns to the term "produser", a portmanteau of producer and user.

engaging directly with the producers to discover their motivations for producing journalistic content. It is the aim of this study to develop a typology of motivations and gratifications felt by citizen journalists, with the hope that the understanding of why citizen journalists produce content will assist media professionals in encouraging the creation of high-quality citizen journalism in order to create a truly multiperspectival mediasphere.

The research question for this study has been identified as: What are the motivations and gratifications felt by citizen journalists to produce their work? Research is warranted into this question as citizen journalism has been characterized as a social revolution. Dan Gillmor, a prominent advocate of citizen journalism and author of one of the definitive texts<sup>2</sup> on the subject, wrote about this revolution:

It is a story, first, of evolutionary change. Humans have always told each other stories, and each new era of progress has led to an expansion of storytelling. [It] is also a story of a modern *revolution*, however, because [new] technology has given us a communications toolkit that allows anyone to become a journalist at little cost, and, in theory, with global reach. Nothing like this has ever been remotely possible before. (Gillmor, 2006, xii)

Not only does the introduction of citizens into a media-producing role change the mediascape, but the open dialogue it creates marks a “return to [a] Socratic Method where people learn by asking questions and discussing, rather than being presented with information” (Gans, 2005, p55). This has further implications beyond the media and into education and politics, which really proves how far-reaching this revolution will become.

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<sup>2</sup> *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism, By the People, for the People*. Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly. 2006.

There has been little academic study into the field of citizen journalism, let alone practitioners' motivations for becoming involved in media processes. One of the first large-scale studies into the area was conducted just six years ago<sup>3</sup>. Since that time, and especially recently, much media attention has been paid to the effects the revolution will have on mainstream media, but little consideration has been paid to the producers themselves.

It is important to note that a uses and gratifications perspective has been chosen very specifically as the methodology for this study. Through the examination of other perspective of audience research, including encoding/decoding and the "hyperdermic needle" approach, it was determined that none of these methods effectively addressed a producer/consumer relationship that had become non-linear. Therefore, a uses and gratifications perspective will be utilized as it acknowledges the audience as an active communicator, and thus, as a potential producer of media content.

While it is certainly true that technological developments have made it possible for citizen journalism to come to fruition at this point in media history, it is far from being the sole determining factor in its existence at this point in history. Citizen journalism is very much a social development, produced and shaped by the "former audience," (Gillmor, 2004) which now chooses to produce journalistic content. By studying the motivations they feel and gratifications they seek, the process of participation, the reasons for its popularity and current and future state of the media can be understood.

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<sup>3</sup> Bowman, S. and Willis, C. (2003) *We media: how audiences are shaping the future of news and information*. Reston, VA: American Press Institute.

Interestingly, when Tim Berners-Lee set about naming his new invention, he considered several other names before settling on the World Wide Web. Most important to our discussion was “Information Mine” (Carlson, 2003, p49). Although it would be 25 years before the technology would be widely adopted by mainstream users, this prospective name recognized the potential for the previously unseen phenomenon of user-generated content, and for users to truly take ownership of this new medium and for each individual to make their own contribution.

American sociologist Herbert J. Gans said almost 30 years ago that “the news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone” (1980, p322). While this statement may be even truer in the current mediascape, citizen journalism plays a vital role in reclaiming the balance of power between news organizations and audiences. By changing the relationship from a top-down lecture to a two-way conversation “news audiences have begun to reclaim their place in the news cycle” (Bruns, 2005, p9).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A) Definitions of Citizen Journalism

There are many, slightly differing, definitions for what constitutes citizen journalism. They all involve the audience as producers, but the degree of their participation, the importance of technology and their roles differ.

For the purposes of this study, the definition presented in the 2003 thinking paper *We Media*, is most effective. Here, it is presented in its complete form:

“The act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news of information...the intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant

information that a democracy requires” (Bowman & Willis, Chapter 1).

This description highlights some of the main advantages of the use of citizen journalism, and allows for both citizen journalism and participatory journalism.

New York University professor and citizen journalism expert Jay Rosen provides a very open definition of citizen journalism: “When the people, formerly known as the audience, employ the press tools in their possession to inform one another...that’s citizen journalism.” (2009, thinkpress.com) Rosen’s reference to “press tools” highlights the important role that technology has played in the cause of this phenomenon.

In a reference to the “bottom up” approach of this medium, Bruns refers to practitioners of citizen journalism as “producers” (2005, p23). He defines this term as “users of news websites who engages with such sites interchangeably in consumptive and productive modes (and often both at the same time)” (Bruns, 2005, p23).

Although the definition of citizen journalism is constantly evolving, these definitions provide a good overview for what constitutes citizen journalism and will be the working definitions for this study.

## **B) The History of Interaction and Participation in Mainstream Journalism and Modern Perspectives**

Although most academic fields of study have ignored the academic study of news production, it has become a “dominant force in the public construction of common experience and a popular sense of what is real or important” (Schudson, 2003, p13). Despite this neglect, it is important to recognize the historical events and cultural context of participatory journalism.

One of the earliest forms of participatory journalism was political pamphlets distributed throughout New York City, Philadelphia and Boston in the 1740s. (Schudson, 2003, p73). This practice was brought to its height by Thomas Paine's publication of "Common Sense" in 1776, of which an estimated 150,000 copies were distributed (Schudson, 2003, p73). These "pamphleteers" demonstrate one of the first times that the general public took the initiative to mass produce "journalistic" content and become part of the information dissemination process.

In the period between 1820 and 1833, journalism was not yet an identifiable career path (Schudson, 2003, p76). "Correspondents" at newspapers were merely what the word implies, acquaintances of the editor, "whose writing was that of an unpaid amateur" (Schudson, 2003, p76-7). In 1833, with the creation of New York City's *The Sun*, newspapers began seeking financial success, and hired individuals to work as professional journalists (Schudson, 2003, p.77). These first journalists became socialized in the profession, generating their own occupational pride and professional norms (Schudson, 2001, p152). By the 1900s, journalistic formulas and processes such as interviewing, copy-editing, note-taking and fact-checking identified it as a "distinct occupation with its own patterns of behaviour" (Schudson, 2003, p82).

With the establishment of "journalist" as a distinct profession, newsgathering and newsworthiness became routinized and led to news production relying on repeated formulas (Nel et al, 2007, p70). The three repeated formulas that reinforce this formulaic production within mainstream news are:

- 1) Story structure (inverted pyramid structure<sup>4</sup>) (Appendix A)

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<sup>4</sup> The inverted-pyramid structure is a traditional way of structuring a news story, with the most important details at the top, continuing down to the least important at the bottom. Stephens said,

2) Sourcing that emphasizes elite groups

3) News values that privilege events over explanation (Nel et al, 2007, p70)

This formulaic production of news presents issues as unchanging and static, contrary to Braudel's idea of "longue durée"<sup>5</sup> (Braudel and Matthews, 1982). It instead places news on Braudel's third stage of time (*histoire événementielle*), which becomes the history of people with names as opposed to historical structures and cycles. Braudel states that it is at this third level that events take on "deceptive" effects and also become increasingly shallow (Braudel, 1972, p21). Luckily, there are two ways in which alternative media forms, such as participatory and citizen journalism, challenge formulaic media production. First, alternative media monitor the news output from all providers simultaneously, including mainstream, commercial and other independent sources (see the later discussion on gatekeeping, Page 23) (Nel et al, 2007, p80). Second, as the monitoring is done by such a large and diverse group of people with the ability to "analyse, evaluate and discuss" (Nel et al, 2007, p80) the content, context and production of news items are further scrutinized.

An important concept that has been made possible by the introduction of new technologies into the process of producing news is interactivity. While early interactivity occurred through the use of "Letters to the Editor" or "Man on the Street" interviews, it was typically in reaction to a story that had already been published, and was filtered through the existing editorial screening process (Jayaram, 2005, p.291). Interactivity, if

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"the inverted pyramid organizes stories not around ideas or chronologies but around facts. It weighs and shuffles the various pieces of information, focusing with remarkable single-mindedness on their relative news value." (2007, p. 253 - 4) It should also be noted that online, the use of hypertext and distribution through news aggregators has produced a further change in story structure, which forces it to be even further truncated to use hyperlinks.

<sup>5</sup> Longue durée is a school of historical writing, which favours historical structures over specific events. (Braudel and Matthews, 1982)

thought of at all, was incidental to the main job of information distribution, and was typically referred to as “feedback” (Morris, 2002, p3). The phrase has been a catchword of the age of Web 2.0, but the concept has its origins in English literature from the Restoration (1660 – 1689) (Briggs & Burke, 2005, p59). This early version encouraged the participation of readers by contributing questions, which would then be answered in print<sup>6</sup>.

Early media critics, such as Brecht, Enzensberger, and Kausch, condemned a producer-consumer structure with no interactivity, as it created a passive audience that would have very little involvement in the public sphere (Schultz, 1999, Introduction). By introducing technological applications into news production and consumption, the audience can interact with news content, share opinions, as well as contribute their own content. Interactivity allows the audience to become more involved in the public sphere by opening up platforms to share opinions and create discussion.

Morris says that beyond the simple changes caused by the introduction of technology into news production and the allowance for increased interactivity, the Internet is “fuelling a cultural ideological shift towards social construction of meaning” (2002, p15-6). This is as opposed to the linear delivery of information favoured by the historical and traditional media. By introducing the phrase “cosmopedia,” Levy presents the idea that the future new media environment, where collaboration, audience participation and open-source projects are used to their full extent, will create an “achievable utopia” (Jenkins, 2006, p136). In this information society, interactivity and collaboration “make(s) available to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge

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<sup>6</sup> The first such publication, *The Athenian Mercury*, was published in 1691 by John Dunton. It ran for six years and generated 6,000 questions. (Briggs & Burke, 2005, p.59)

available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation and development” (Levy, 1997, p217). The result of this open information environment is that absent information will produce “tension” in the cosmopedia, signalling areas to be investigated and where further innovation is needed (Levy, 1997, p217). As applied to a news media environment, voids in coverage and viewpoints can be explored by the alternative media, such as citizen journalists.

The literature suggests that there are several events that led to both the possibility, and then the promise, of citizen journalism in a modern sense. First, the introduction and popular adoption of weblogs (blogs) gave citizen journalists both the technological applications and access to a potentially worldwide audience (Hewitt, 2005). Second, the 1998 World Trade Organization conference in Seattle marked the first time that activists both actively organized themselves through computer-mediated communication and, more importantly, began posting their own news, realizing that they had the power to shape and control how they and their cause were being portrayed (Shirky, 2008, p38).

In a 2002 study, The Pew Center for People and the Press found that 53% of audience members have confidence and trust in the news that they read on the web (Boczkowski, 2004, p68). This rate is much higher than the confidence rate for any other format for news delivery (newspapers, television, radio). It is believed that this confidence comes from the multitude of news sources, the lack of obvious advertising, and most importantly, due to the fact that their own peers are producing their own content (Boczkowski, 2004, p69).

Less than 20 years ago, critics were disparaging the media for their dependence on technological expertise, thus allowing fewer chances for the public to participate. Due to lack of access to technology and publication platforms, interaction with the public was merely at an advisory level, especially in broadcast mediums (Rushton, 1993, p76). As technology has become more available and the public has become more capable at operating consumer versions of the technology used to create content, they have rapidly switched from consumers to producers. Initially, their participation began through simple posting to discussion boards, then by the creation of blogs, and eventually through the creation of multimedia content and posting through mobile applications (Nel et al, 2007, p121).

Along with traditional media forms that have moved into an online environment, citizen journalism (and user-generated content in general) has struggled to develop a monetization model that would make citizen journalism an effective business proposition and thus increase the quality and quantity of citizen journalism (Appendix B).

Another interesting element of business models for citizen journalism websites is profit-sharing with producers. There are a growing number of websites that are sharing revenue generated through advertising and syndication with their community. The distribution of the funds is systematically organized by the number of items a user produces and their relative quality<sup>7</sup>. The funds grow based upon the commercial success, thereby giving participants an interest in the overall success of the website. When combined with Gans' "1.5 tier" model, this model provides citizen journalists with both a

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<sup>7</sup> This is based either on traffic generated, syndication through news aggregators, or reader votes and recommendations. Two websites, DigitalJournal.com and GroundReport.com, involved in this study follow this model.

financial interest in producing quality work and audiences with the reassurance that professional journalists are screening the content.

There are two schools of thought about the place of citizen journalism in contemporary media. First, some believe that user-generated content is sub-standard and threatens other media formats, especially the newspaper industry. Since its practitioners are not trained professional journalists, these critics think that each person who posts a video or writes an article diminishes the overall quality of journalism. In his book *“The Cult of the Amateur: How the internet is killing our culture”* (2007) Andrew Keen writes that “citizen journalists have no formal training or expertise, yet they routinely offer up opinion as fact, rumour as reportage and innuendo as information (p37). He also cites a 2006 study by the Pew Center for Internet and American Life, which found that 34% of America’s estimated 12 million bloggers considered their online contributions to be a form of journalism (Keen, 2007, p37).

Don Gillmor, in his book *“We the Media: grassroots journalism for the people, by the people,”* believes that citizen journalists provide a voice for the public and a viable alternative to traditional journalism (2006). Another scholar, Rosen, doesn’t believe that the audience should have to choose between traditional and citizen journalism, but that the two should be able to co-exist and even complement each other. He even goes so far as to say that the advent of citizen journalism should make society question the role of traditional media in his book *“What are journalists for?”* (1999) While he still thinks there should be traditional media, he is encouraged that the existence of citizen journalism is making society question the role and purpose of professional journalists in our society.

The newspaper industry is concerned with the proliferation of online journalism and citizen media, as it is under the most direct threat. Newspaper readership has gone down 50% since 1996 (Pew Center for People and the Press, 2006), and is continuing to decline. Pablo Boczkowski notes that newspapers have missed an opportunity because they are mostly re-packaging print content, without providing the increased context and multimedia and interactive content that their audiences have come to expect (2004).

In a model that is being used by several citizen journalism outlets such as OhMyNews.com and NowPublic.com, Gans suggests a “tier 1.5” approach (2008, p259), which would involve collaboration between professional and citizen journalists. The professional journalists would be involved in the editing process, fact checking and copy-editing content and would also act as mentors. While this would remove some of the democratic and bottom-up approach that is an essential part of the citizen journalism experience, this gatekeeping may allow citizen journalism to become more acceptable to a mainstream audience and co-exist comfortably with traditional journalism.

### **C) Academic Citizen Journalism Research**

#### **I) Gansian Model and Multiperspectivity**

In 1980, long before the advent of the mainstream adoption of the Internet, American sociologist Herbert J. Gans proposed a two-tier media system. This model would consist of the first-tier media, which would be the professional mainstream media, and the second-tier media, which would be alternative media, whose purpose is to “continue where the central media leave off” (Gans, 1980, p322). The second-tier would devote themselves “primarily to reanalysing and reinterpreting” (Bruns, 2005, p25-6) the

work of the mainstream media, and would function as “monitors and critics” (Gans, 1980, p322).

The goal of a Gansian model of a two-tiered media system is to create a multi-perspectival news sphere, in which a voice is provided “to a public, which is usually locked out of direct participation in traditional journalism” (Gans, 2005, p76). This model also would prioritize multispectivalty over objectivity, a long-held news value.

Gans also suggests a switch from seeing the relationship of media and audiences as being linear, where journalists transmit information from their sources to the audience, to a circular model, further complicated by a “large number of feedback loops” (Bruns, 2005, p29)(Appendix C). It can be seen as audiences, sources and journalists living together in their own eco-system, but is “closer to being a tug of war than a functionally interrelated organism” (Gans, 1980, p80-1). This view of the social and political relationship between all members of the media leaves a greater possibility for the combination of professional and citizen journalists.

As stated previously, one of the goals of the Gansian model of two-tiered media is to provide multiperspectival, as opposed to objective, reporting. The possibility of creating multiperspectival coverage through citizen journalism depends on two circumstances: first, that users actually *are* participating, and second, *which* users are participating (Gans, 2005, p27). Gans also puts it another way, saying “multiperspectivalty depends on the condition that participating users do indeed represent a multitude of perspectives“ (Gans, 2005, p27). While citizen journalism does increase the number of perspectives available to audiences, this does not necessarily mean that these perspectives will provide diverse and divergent voices. If Gans’ two

conditions of multiperspectivity are not met, then the process of participatory journalism might actually lead to a *limiting* of perspectives (Bruns, 2005, p27, original emphasis). This is due to the fact that group dynamics within the community might cause the information gathered to “represent only an established majority view, and that opposing views are ignored as irrelevant, or suppressed by participants’ own self-censorship” (Bruns, 2005, p27). In cases such as this, Heikkila and Kunelius recommend a form of deliberative journalism that, whether it is “top-down or bottom-up” a level field is created to exchange views and “aims to develop rather than express opinions” (2002, n.p.). In this situation, the presence of professional journalists at the output phase would be embraced and encouraged “to introduce a critical perspective on commonly-held points of view (Bruns, 2005, p27-8).

The Gansian model supports quality citizen journalism production, as it encourages the presentation of users’ views by “skill, through careful and considered examination of and engagement with opposing views” (Bruns, 2008, p250). This is opposed to an alternative media approach, which focuses on creating “so much DIY<sup>8</sup> content that some of it must eventually make it into the mainstream” (Bruns, 2008, p250).

In relation to Gans’ postulations on the future of participatory journalism, Gans suggests that the future of the medium rests on the following three questions:

- 1) How to guarantee a place for multiperspectivity, and therefore, for citizen journalism, in the long-term
- 2) How to create increased visibility for citizen journalism projects
- 3) How to create a greater balance between the two tiers (Gans, 2008, 257)

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<sup>8</sup> “Do It Yourself”

By cementing a future for participatory journalism by bearing these questions in mind, the proliferation of citizen journalism will be mutually beneficial for both tiers of the mediasphere.

## II) Gatewatching

Another aspect of participatory and citizen journalism studied by academics is “gatewatching.” This concept, formulated by Axel Bruns, involves the observation of the “output gates” (Bruns, 2005, p17) of news sources with the intention of “identify(ing) important material as it becomes available” (Bruns, 2005, p17). Gatewatching thus becomes an antidote to the established journalism practice of gatekeeping, which Bruns defines as “a regime of control over what content is allowed to emerge from the production process” of news media (2005, p11). This is a traditional tenet of journalism that posits the professional journalist as the “prime mediator” and “provider of the information and analysis required by the public to function effectively” (Nel et al, 2007, p121). As a process, participatory journalism allows “the working parts of journalism” to be “exposed” (Arnison, 2001, n.p.), which allows producers autonomy in the manipulation of news processes and creates a more dialogic environment (Heikkila and Kunelius, 2002, n.p.)

Gatewatching can take the form of creating original content based upon that produced within the first-tier of the media, including criticism of that content, or at its most simplistic, a practice called “news publicizing” (Bruns, 2005, p19). News publicizing involves not creating “complete, finalized” news reports, but in publicizing stories from other sources (Bruns, 2005, p19). Examples of this include news aggregators

and on a micro-level, the practice of “retweeting” hyperlinks leading to news stories through social networking platforms such as Twitter.

#### **D) Uses and Gratifications Perspective of Media Effects**

Although citizen journalism is having a huge impact on the way the traditional news media operates and how we receive information, very few studies have been done to determine why citizen journalists are motivated to produce their content, especially when much of the content could be produced by professional journalists. One study, conducted in 2006 by Shaun Sutton at the University of Leeds, looked specifically at the Korean-based website OhMyNews.com and the rise of citizen journalism in Korea. Sutton found that the number one reason why citizen journalists take the time to produce and publish content is that they feel a strong need to take part in the information dispersal process (2006). In a country such as Korea, which has strong governmental controls on information and journalism production, citizen journalists can play an important role in the distribution of news through their participation in local or internationally-based news sites.

Sutton’s study applied a uses and gratifications approach to determine the motivations and needs of the citizen journalists, which this study will also be using as a theoretical framework. Uses and gratifications theory was introduced into the tradition of audience research in the 1940s, and popularized in the mid-1970s (Blumler & Katz, 1974). I have chosen this perspective as I am interested in examining whether it is applicable to a media text that provides a non-linear relationship between user and producer. In addition, and particularly important to the study of citizen journalism, the perspective stresses that media use is inherently interactive (Blumler et al, 1972, p144).

Especially significant is the premise that media use does not “conform to the typical lineaments of a subject-object relationship, and should not be treated merely as a one-way tension-reducing relationship” (Blumler et al, 1972, p144). Although this was written before the advent of the Internet and indeed, open-source collaboration, it points to the eventuality of a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach to media production.

In a move away from prior media audience theories, which saw the audience as a homogenous group who were used *by* the media, uses and gratifications theory sees the audience as individuals who each have their own reasons for choosing to interact with various mediums and who, conversely to earlier thinking, were the ones *using* the media (Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1961). This additional element suggested that not only could you measure the size of an audience, but what individual members were getting out of the media interaction (McQuail and Gurevitch, 1974, p269). In the earlier mechanistic perspective, the audience was seen as being passive, reactive and homogeneous, and the available research focused on short-term, immediate and measurable effects brought on by media interaction (Rubin, 1972, p525). This mechanistic perspective was called into question in 1960 by Klapper, who projected that there are several elements that mediate between a media message and an individual’s response to it (Rubin, 1972, p525).

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch’s original objectives for formulating a uses and gratifications perspective for media uses was to meet the following goals:

- 1) To explain how people use media to gratify their needs
- 2) To understand motives for media behaviour
- 3) To identify functions or consequences that follow from needs, motives and behaviours. (Rubin, 1972, p527)

Blumler and Katz suggested five main uses that the audience is trying to fulfill when using any media text. These include: as entertainment, to initiate social interaction, to assist in the formation of identity, to be educated and informed, and lastly, to provide a means of mental escape (1974).

<b>Uses and Gratifications (Blumler and Katz, 1974) perspective of media effects</b>
As Entertainment
To Initiate social interaction
To assist in the formation of identity
To become educated and informed
To provide a means of mental escape

Figure 2.2: Blumler and Katz's uses and gratifications perspective of media effects presented this typology.

This way of thinking about audiences sees them as “motivated individuals who actively seek media content to fulfill cognitive and affective needs” (Lin, Salwen and Abdulla, 2003). The assumption that audiences are “active communicators,” (Rubin, 1972, p526) makes a uses and gratifications perspective apt for an exploration of motivations for producing content.

Despite the fact that this is an older theory being applied to a newer medium, these three differentials allow for vast thinking about uses and gratifications theory so that it can be applied to a media that its original practitioners could never have imagined the existence of. Ruggiero (2000) argued that uses and gratifications has been a “cutting edge theoretical approach” in the early stages of new communications media. Looking towards the future, uses and gratifications will be especially effective as we explore and

seek to understand new interactive media forms, such as citizen journalism (Rubin, 1972, p541).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### Introduction

In order to collect the data for my study, I will be administering an online survey of citizen journalists who create user-generated content. This chapter will explore the benefits and issues of electronic surveys and seek to limit the problematic issues of this methodology. In addition, I will investigate matters of electronic survey design and application, and introduce the websites utilized in this research study. Subsequently, previous uses and gratifications typologies and the Internet Motives Questionnaire will be presented as they influenced the creation of my typology. At the end of the chapter, the typology of motivations will be presented prior to it being tested on a sample group of citizen journalists.

Based on the requirements of this study, and time and resource limitations, it was determined that the most efficient methodology would be an electronic survey. An electronic survey allows users to complete the survey on their own time, and as the population has been identified as being quite computer literate and capable of expressing their feelings through virtual environments, it will be quite effective. Respondents for this survey will be sampled from the larger population, to concentrate exclusively on producers of citizen journalism, as opposed to self-selected (Corley, 2007, p3). It will be assumed that the entire population of respondents are self-identified as citizen journalists or producers.

I connected with my target audience by partnering with several citizen journalism websites. The websites agreed to distribute the survey to their registered users in return for a copy of the completed dissertation and survey results. Several citizen journalism websites were contacted through electronic mail and asked if they would assist by encouraging their users to participate (Appendix D). Several, (DigitalJournal.com, GroundReport.com and StreetCorner.com.au) were quite willing, as the resulting information will be beneficial to the websites in understanding the motivation and gratifications of not only their content producers, but of the greater citizen journalist community.

As the Internet has become increasingly used as a tool for conducting research surveys, first through e-mail and more recently through web-based platforms, there has been greater research conducted into the benefits of using this methodology. Compared to traditional (written) survey methods, electronic surveys have been found to be more cost effective, and provide both shorter response times and increased response rates (Corley et al, 2007, p1).

While a uses and gratifications approach has been criticized because it relies on self-reported data (Rubin, 1972, p531), Katz et al made an early assumption that dispels this. They determined that the audience is capable of verbalizing the reasons why they interact with a particular medium. Therefore, self-reports provide accurate data regarding personal media use (1973, p528). For this study, that is especially important, as survey results will be completed without further questioning by the researcher. As well, respondents will be asked not only why they engage with citizen journalism media texts, but why they produce it as well.

The survey was administered during the month of June 2009. The survey was distributed by the CEOs of each of the websites<sup>9</sup>, through newsletters sent to users, posts in user groups and banner advertising (Appendix E). There was no closing date of the survey, to allow for the maximum number of responses.

The following are historical and business profiles of the websites that distributed the survey to their citizen journalists:

**DigitalJournal.com** – This website is based in Toronto, Canada, and started as a technology news website in 1998. It has since evolved into a citizen journalism website, with what it terms “digital journalists” in over 140 countries. It allows users to upload text, photos, videos and audio files, and also has .tv and mobile platforms.

DigitalJournal.com was one of the first websites to use a revenue-sharing business model, which allows citizen journalists to earn money from a communal “moneypot” of advertising revenue. The money is distributed based on quantity of work published and the number of recommendations from other users. (Appendix F)

**StreetCorner.com.au** – As opposed to other websites, which pride themselves on contributions from all over the world and also have a global perspective, StreetCorner.com.au is hyper-local. It focuses exclusively on Sydney, Australia, with the site sub-divided between Eastern and Western Sydney. Users can post news stories, photos and video, and there is also an event listing. The site is free for citizen journalists (called community members), with revenue being generated by business members, who pay a subscription fee in order to be included in the business directory and for advertising on the site. The website plans to expand across Australia over the coming year.

(Appendix G)

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Hogg, Rachel Sterne and Mal Jago

**GroundReport.com** – Named by Business Week as “one of the top social enterprises” of 2009, GroundReport.com was founded in 2006 by former reporter Rachel Sterne. It has over 5,000 registered users, and recently adopted a “1.5 tier” system, having reports vetted by professional journalists. Citizen journalists earn money from advertising and syndication revenue based on the amount of traffic generated by each report. Although it has reporters around the world and is globally focused, GroundReport.com terms itself as “hyper-local” as the citizen journalists are reporting on their own communities and experiences. (Appendix H)

The survey will collect both qualitative and quantitative information about citizen journalists, and will focus on why they produce user-generated content for news sites. The survey is 18 questions long and will include both open and closed-form questions. The question styles will include multiple choice, short-answer and a ratings matrix scales.

While designing the survey, I followed Lumsden’s suggested design process for electronic web-based surveys (2007, p46):

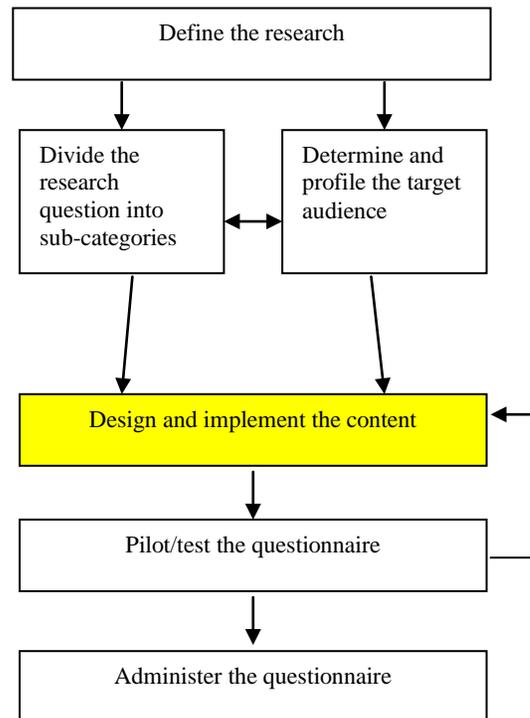


Figure 3.1: Lumsden's process for designing an online questionnaire.

The research was first defined through the proposal and early research process, and thus the objectives and the goals of this study were established. By determining the intent of the study, it was then determined what kind of information would need to be gathered from the respondents. This was done by analyzing previous studies that were informed by a uses and gratifications perspective. Once the survey was designed, I had the benefit of being able to send it to the CEOs of the three websites, so they could advise further regarding the content, format and language that would be most suitable to their users. This process was also part of the pilot procedure, as the website administrators were not only evaluating the content, but technical aspects of the electronic survey as well. Once both I, as the researcher, and the CEOs, were satisfied with the content and technical aspects of the questionnaire, they began the administration process.

As the main aim of my dissertation is to produce a new typology of media audience research through a uses and gratifications perspective that will succeed when the audience is both the producer and the consumer, I will mainly be focussing on the data regarding why citizen journalists produce content and what gratifications they seek in creating content. As Blumler and Katz's uses and gratifications perspective presents five categories as to why traditional audiences engage with a media text, I will be aiming to use the data I receive from the respondents to create my own categories. This will require the analysis of my data to look for patterns or trends to understand the participation habits and incentives for citizen journalists. Through the quantitative analysis provided by SurveyMonkey.com, the popularity of responses will be able to be quantified.

Primary to the findings of this study is the matrix of possible media uses and gratifications for creating citizen journalism content. In order to create a comprehensive matrix, research was conducted into uses and gratifications presented in previous studies. It was determined that a fixed matrix should be presented for two reasons. First, for the purposes of analysing the data, uses and gratifications presented by survey respondents would need to be able to be quantified and compared. Second, while research suggests that users have the personal insight to articulate their reasons for interacting with a piece of media (Katz, 1973, p528), they may not recognize possible uses unless they are presented to them as options. To allow for additional possible answers, an open comment box was placed beneath the matrix to allow respondents to submit additional reasons why they create citizen journalism.

This matrix will be created using a Likert-scale, with four points, allowing the information to be quantified.

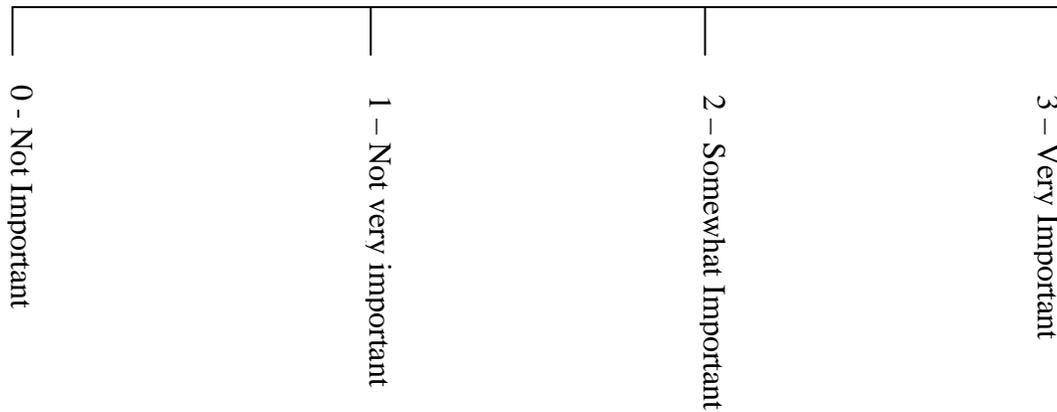


Figure 3.2: The Likert scale displaying the spectrum of importance of each motivation.

The matrix was created by evaluating and synthesizing several typologies for media uses and gratifications to create one that would best apply to the producers of citizen journalism content. The first typology is taken from McQuail, Blumler and Brown's 1969 study of the television audiences, which reduced motivations of this particular audience to four gratifications (figure 3.3). This was the first typology to take media functions and sufficiently reflect the full range of possibilities (Katz et al, 1974, p23) and, although compartmentalizing each gratification, provides a rationally structured framework to measure the relative influence of motivations for media use.

<b>McQuail et al Typology of uses and gratifications (1972)</b>
Surveillance
Personal identity
Personal Relationships
Diversion

Figure 3.3: McQuail et al uses and gratifications typology.

As the goal of this study is to establish a new typology for the uses and gratifications felt by producers of citizen journalism, new motivations will need to be established as this medium represents a non-linear and non-traditional relationship between consumers and producers. It is assumed that practitioners will have different or additional uses and gratifications, as the dimension of production, and not just consumption, is added.

<b>Jack's Proposed Uses and Gratifications Typology for Citizen Journalism Production</b>
Personal Gain
Individual Growth
Societal Interaction
Information Dispersal
Collective Change

Figure 3.4: Jack's proposed uses and gratifications typology, which will be evaluated and applied to a spectrum of importance in the next chapter.

## FINDINGS

### Demographics

In order to fully understand the sample group, the respondents were posed a series of questions in order to identify any trends or patterns within their demographics. These demographic indicators will also serve to conduct a more thorough analysis of the motivations and gratifications matrix, and potentially serve in further defining and explaining the tested typology.

Website	Gender	Age	Employment Status	Highest Degree of Education	Location by Continent
<b>DigitalJournal.com</b>	Female 34.4% Male 65.6% Other 0.0%	Teenager 7.8% 20 – 24 10.9% 25 – 35 21.9% 36 – 44 14.1% 45 – 54 25.0% 55 – 64 14.1% 65+ 6.3%	Student 15.6% Working 42.2% Unemployed 9.4% Retired 9.4% Other 23.4%	High School 21.9% Assoc. degree 9.4% U degree 34.4% PG degree 10.9% Doctoral degree 1.6% Other 21.9%	N. America 70.0% S. America 0.0% Europe 12.5% Asia 9.3% Africa 3.6% Australia 4.6%
<b>GroundReport.com</b>	Female 33.3% Male 66.7% Other 0.0%	Teenager 18.5% 20 – 24 22.2% 25 – 35 22.2% 36 – 44 11.1% 45 – 54 22.2% 55 – 64 0.0%	Student 29.6% Working 55.6% Unemployed 3.7% Retired 3.7% Other 7.4%	High School 18.5% Assoc. degree 14.8% U degree 33.3% PG degree 29.6% Doctoral degree 0% Other 3.7%	N. America 37% S. America 0% Europe 14.8% Asia 40.7% Africa 7.4% Australia 0%

		65+ 3.7%			
<b>Streetcorner.com.au</b>	Female 41.2% Male 52.9% Other 5.9%	Teenager 0% 20 – 24 11.8% 25 – 35 23.5% 36 – 44 17.6% 45 – 54 11.8% 55 – 64 29.4% 65+ 5.9%	Student 5.9% Working 47.1% Unemployed 11.8% Retired 23.5% Other 11.8%	High School 52.9% Assoc. degree 0.0% U degree 23.5% PG degree 5.9% Doctoral degree 5.9% Other 11.8%	N. America 0% S. America 0% Europe 0% Asia 0% Africa 0% Australia 100%
<b>Total (mean)</b>	Female 36.3% Male 61.7% Other 1.9%	Teenager 8.76% 20 – 24 8.30% 25 – 35 15.86% 36 – 44 14.26% 45 – 54 19.66% 55 – 64 14.5% 65+ 5.3%	Student 17.03% Working 48.3% Unemployed 8.3% Retired 12.2% Other 14.2%	High School 31.1% Assoc. degree 8.06% U. degree 30.4% PG degree 15.5% Doctoral degree 2.5% Other 12.47%	N. America 51% S. America 0% Europe 11% Asia 16% Africa 3.5% Australia 18.5%

Figure 4.1: Chart displaying the individual demographics for each website as well as the mean for the entire respondent group.

By analysing the data, several observations were made about the respondents of the survey that may be indicative of the larger citizen journalist population. As this small sample is not statistically relevant to the larger group, a more comprehensive study is needed to demographically quantify and identify citizen journalists. As 1/3 of Internet users have posted or uploaded content to the World Wide Web, the number of people

who self-identify as citizen journalists will only grow, and thus the future study of this group is necessary.

An unanticipated finding was that the majority of content producers are male. While I anticipated the results to be more equally divided between the genders, these numbers more closely mirror that of a current mainstream daily newsroom. In 2008, the American Society of Newspaper Editors found that American newsrooms are staffed by 37.36% female journalists, with even fewer in supervisory roles (35.8%). I expected that the results of this survey would indicate a greater number of females due to the fact that the citizen journalism environment would not seem to have the same institutionalised sexism as mainstream journalism. Sutton's study (2006) into uses and gratifications felt by Korean citizen journalists also indicated a vast majority of male respondents<sup>10</sup>. Based on these results, I suggest that further study be completed to discover if the trend is applicable to the greater citizen journalist community and the reasons for the wide differential.

It can also be observed that the majority of respondents fall in the 45 – 54 age bracket. It can be assumed that these respondents are not digital natives<sup>11</sup>, that they mainly had access to top-down linear producer-consumer models prior to 1980, and they have been largely socialized by the practices and regard attached to the institution of mainstream media. While popular belief holds that it is digital natives that are becoming producers through blogging and social networks, this survey indicated that most citizen

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<sup>10</sup> 81.8% of Sutton's respondents were male, and 77% of the OhMyNews population is male.

<sup>11</sup> A "digital native" is an individual for whom digital technologies have always been available, generally defined loosely as individuals born since 1980. Technology users born since 1980 are referred to as "digital immigrants;" they are conversant in the language and practices of digital media, but may fall back on analogue practices, for example: telephoning someone to inquire if their e-mail was received.

journalists are digital immigrants navigating technologies and mediums that are relatively new to them and they have not spent the majority of their lives immersed in digital culture.

The location of the citizen journalists who participated in the survey indicates the impact that a hyper-local website has on the target audience. Purposely, respondents from Australia were counted separately from their Asian counterparts, as the use of a hyper-local website presented skewed location results. While respondents from DigitalJournal.com and GroundReport.com were spread across the globe, respondents from StreetCorner.com.au were exclusively located in Australia. I think this speaks to the success of the website in building an active community of contributors to assist them in their mission to provide local coverage of Eastern and Western Sydney and surroundings. Although the Internet does provide the opportunity to create a “global village” (McLuhan, 1964, p6) it should not be overlooked as a platform for connection and sharing on a local level as well.

As expected, a majority of respondents identified their location as North America, which was anticipated as these three websites publish content exclusively in English. There are many other citizen journalism websites that publish in other languages, and the surveying of these producers may have formed likewise skewed results. Within the respondents that identified as being in Asia, a majority of these were based in India. Only a small segment of respondents were located in Africa, and were equally split between South Africa and Nigeria. As previously discussed, this may be due to language barriers, or particularly in the case of Africa, the digital divide will be limiting access to computer and production hardware as well as Internet access.

### **Motivation Matrix**

As the goal of this research study is to test a typology for the uses and gratifications felt by citizen journalists, the vital results are those of the motivations and gratifications matrix. The aggregate means of the responses will give an indication of the reasons why citizen journalists produce their work, and therefore how they can be nurtured, encouraged and educated to assist in creating a multiperspectival mediascape.

Responses were indicated using a Likert scale, with options including: not important at all, not so important, somewhat important and very important. These options were respectively assigned the numbers 0, 1, 2 and 3, in order for the responses to be quantified and compared. A conscious decision was made not to provide a neutral response. The mean for each motivation (both for each individual website, and an overall total) is therefore expressed as a number between 0 and 3, indicating where on the spectrum between “not important at all” and “very important” the motivation was placed by respondents.

Gratification	Motivation	DJ n= 56	GR n= 25	SC n= 15	Mean n=96
<b>Personal Gain</b>	I enjoy writing and producing content.	2.80	2.63	1.29	2.24
	To pass time while I am bored.	0.81	0.57	0.34	0.57
	To watch reactions to my articles.	1.96	1.96	1.50	1.81
	To see my articles published online.	1.87	1.71	0.86	1.48
	To generate income/revenue. <sup>12</sup>	x	1.54	x	1.54
	To track traffic to my work.	x	1.72	x	1.72
<b>Individual Growth</b>	To gain status and build my reputation online.	1.84	1.67	1.29	1.60
	I have a sense of responsibility to produce content	2.00	2.42	1.57	2.00
	To develop an Internet identity.	1.55	1.63	1.47	1.55
	To display my passion.	2.19	2.13	1.67	1.99
	To articulate my own ideas.	2.24	2.50	1.64	2.13
	To create with multimedia.	1.44	1.25	1.00	1.23
<b>Societal Interaction</b>	To develop connections with other people.	1.84	1.96	1.86	1.89
	To debate other users.	1.18	1.50	1.50	1.39
	To take part in an interactive community.	1.95	1.92	2.57	2.15
	To take a role in an online community.	1.83	1.96	1.71	1.83
<b>Information Dissemination</b>	To inform others about news and events.	2.48	2.75	2.14	2.46
	To inform others about my first-hand experiences.	1.54	2.04	1.64	1.74
	To create and share knowledge with others.	2.57	2.75	2.57	2.63
	To inform others about current events.	2.49	2.75	2.50	2.58
	To exercise my right of freedom of expression.	2.22	2.75	2.29	2.42
<b>Collective Change</b>	To set an agenda about a particular issue.	1.15	2.04	1.50	1.56
	To support/protest about a particular issue.	1.35	2.04	2.29	1.89
	To mobilise citizens for support or protest.	1.27	1.96	2.00	1.74
	To change the mainstream media.	1.70	2.00	2.14	1.95
	To reject the ordinary and offer alternative ideas to society.	1.65	1.88	1.64	1.72

<sup>12</sup> GroundReport.com requested that its users be surveyed regarding their financial and traffic-generating motivations for producing citizen journalism.

<b>Totals</b>	<b>Personal Gain</b>				<b>1.53</b>
	<b>Individual Growth</b>				<b>1.75</b>
	<b>Societal Interaction</b>				<b>1.82</b>
	<b>Information Dissemination</b>				<b>2.37</b>
	<b>Collective Change</b>				<b>1.77</b>

Figure 4.2: Matrix representing the relative of each motivation for both each website and the total respondent group.

Overwhelmingly, respondents selected the items located in the category of Information dissemination as being important motivations for their participation in citizen journalism. I find this especially interesting, as the spread of information is not a part of the typical media uses and gratifications typology. By giving citizen journalists the necessary resources to create and share information, they are finally getting the opportunity to fulfill this motivation.

The single most important motivation is “to share and create information with others,” with respondents placing it as 2.63 on the motivations spectrum. While this might seem like a simple-enough motivation, it is only in the last 15 years that consumer audiences had the necessary technology and platforms to fulfill this desire. The popularity of this motivation may also be indicative of the trend the author noticed earlier of producers being digital immigrants as opposed to digital natives. The fact that the technology to fulfill this potentially long-felt motivation for interacting with a media text is now available may be encouraging this 45 – 54 year old audience to produce journalistic content.

The least important motivation for the respondents was “to pass time while I am bored” at a mean of 0.57 of the spectrum. This indicates that creating citizen journalism content is a purposeful activity for producers, and they attach an importance to their participation relegating it beyond something to merely pass time.

Respondents have also indicated a high level of importance to motivations such as “to inform others about news and events” and “to exercise my right to freedom of speech.” Again, these findings show the aptness for using a uses and gratifications approach for evaluating motivations for a medium with a non-linear relationship between producer and consumer. Although Blumler and Katz’ original suggested media use motivations did not include a category regarding information dissemination<sup>13</sup>, the greater concept of a uses and gratifications perspective allows for adaptations for future forms of media and motivations felt by new audiences as technology allows.

Between the three websites, there were some differences as to which motivations were rated the most important, some of which can be explained by differences between the three respondent groups. Respondents from GroundReport.com rated the five motivations within the category of information dissemination higher than respondents from the other two websites. One reason for this could be that a greater number of contributors to GroundReport.com self-identify as having worked as professional journalists, and thus, having made that career choice, might be more intrinsically driven to produce by a need to share information and inform others.

Respondents from StreetCorner.com.au rated “to take part in an interactive community” as more important to their motivation to produce citizen journalism than the other respondents. This may have to do with the hyper-local focus of the website, which may increase involvement and engagement as the online community is a virtual representation of the geographic community. Therefore, users have at least one thing (geographic location) in common with other users.

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<sup>13</sup> Blumler and Katz’s original categories were: as entertainment, to initiate social interaction, to assist in the formation of identity, to be educated and informed, and as a means of mental escape (1974).

Respondents from DigitalJournal.com rated “because I enjoy writing and producing content” as very important (2.80). This theme also reoccurred in their written comments (see page 61 and Appendix L).

Another interesting point that was made apparent through the high rating assigned to the motivations “I enjoy writing and producing content” and “To display my passion” is that citizen journalists produce content for the simple fact that they enjoy it (see respondent comments). While previous creative production may have been limited to personal articles and photos created merely for the passion felt through the act of production, citizen journalists are now motivated to produce by the promise of sharing their work with an audience.

### Journalism Training and Core Skill Confidence

In an effort to further understand who citizen journalists are and why they produce their work, respondents were asked about the level of their journalism training and self-identified competencies in various journalistic and multimedia skills. This information is important to evaluate how citizen journalism can be improved and what future actions need to be taken in order to support high quality content.

		<b>DJ n=52</b>	<b>GR n= 26</b>	<b>SC n=12</b>	<b>Mean n=90</b>
<b>Journalism Training</b>	None	26.9%	15.4%	66.7%	36.3%
	I participated in high school	5.8%	11.5%	0.0%	5.7%
	I participated in University or College	13.5%	15.4%	16.7%	15.2%
	I am/was a professional journalist <sup>14</sup>	25.0%	30.8%	0.0%	18.6%
	I participate in journalism as a	17.3%	19.2%	0.0%	12.2%
		11.5%	7.7%	16.7%	11.9%

<sup>14</sup> Defined as “earning the majority of your income from journalistic production”

	hobby Other				
<b>Confidence in Journalism Skills</b>	Using a digital video camera	47.1%	48.0%	41.7%	45.6%
	Editing digital video	27.5%	16.0%	16.7%	20.1%
	Using a digital still camera	70.6%	52.0%	41.7%	54.8%
	Simple photo editing <sup>15</sup>	66.7%	60.0%	58.3%	61.7%
	Advanced photo editing <sup>16</sup>	51.0%	32.0%	16.7%	33.2%
	Using an audio recorder	56.9%	44.0%	50.0%	50.3%
	Editing audio	31.4%	16.0%	16.7%	21.4%
	Creating a photo slideshow	43.1%	44.0%	58.3%	48.5%
	Conducting an interview	78.4%	60.0%	58.3%	65.6%
	Copy editing text	78.4%	72.0%	50.0%	66.8%
	Using a mobile device <sup>17, 18</sup>	N/A	76.0%	N/A	25.3%
	Flip camera or similar	N/A	44.0%	N/A	14.7%

Figure 4.3: Respondent journalism training and confidence in core journalism skills.

In regards to the acquired training and journalism education of citizen journalists, it is clear that a large group (36.3%)<sup>15</sup> have received no training in journalism skills. Amongst the three websites, this number differs largely, with 15.4% of GroundReport.com and 66.7% of StreetCorner.com.au respondents having no journalism training. If citizen journalism is going to become a bigger player on the multiperspectival mediascape, greater attention should be paid to how citizen journalists can receive training. This training could take place in many forms, including peer-to-peer support, professional-to-amateur support, or webinars. For example, DigitalJournal.com holds webinars to educate their producers about journalistic and multimedia skills. Other websites provide guidelines for citizen journalists, but no formal training.

<sup>15</sup> Defined to respondents as cropping and rotating still images

<sup>16</sup> Defined as colour correction and content editing

<sup>17</sup> cell phone, smartphone, iPhone, Nokia N95

<sup>18</sup> Only GroundReport.com users were specifically asked about their competency regarding mobile devices and flip cameras.

Within the citizen journalism community, there is a portion of practitioners who, at some point in their lives, have been employed as professional journalists. Among the respondents from GroundReport.com, 30.8% have at some point worked as a journalist, which has the potential to effect the quality of their work, relationship to mainstream media, as well as their computer-mediated communication with the rest of the group.

As citizen journalism matures, more attention will need to be paid to both institutionalised and open-source ways in which citizen journalists can receive continuing education in both journalism theory and production techniques.

### Website Involvement

In order to ascertain the levels of involvement between the respondents and the individual websites, users were asked how long they had been members, how often they post, in which mediums they post, how often they visit they website and for how long each day they are connected to a high-speed Internet connection. By gaining insight into *how* citizen journalists are using media-production websites, operators of these pages will understand what kind of Internet user their target produser is, and will be further able to concentrate their recruiting and development to promote production and participation.

Website	Date Joined	%	Post Frequency	%	Medium	%	Site Visits	%	Internet connection	%
<b>DigitalJournal.com</b> n= 59	Today	1.7	Daily	37.	Text	94.	>	50	< 1	0.0
	This	8.5	Weekly	3	Video	9	daily	25.	hour	15.
	Month	39.	Monthly	25.	Images	15.	Daily	9	1 – 3	3
	+6 mnths	0	few	4	Comme	3	Weekl	17.	hours	25.
	1 year ago	6.8	times/ye	22.	nts	47.	y	2	4 – 6	4
	>1 year	44.	ar	0	Groups	5	Mont	5.2	hours	59.
	1		15.	<sup>19</sup>	44.	hly	1.7	> 6	3	
					1	first		hours		

<sup>19</sup> Groups are only an applicable medium to DigitalJournal.com users

				3		20.3	visit			
<b>GroundReport.com</b> N= 27	Today This Month +6 mnths 1 year ago >1 year	0.0 18. 5 33. 3 18. 5 29. 6	Daily Weekly Monthly few times/year	11. 1 37. 0 3.7 48. 1	Text Video Images Comments	96. 3 11. 1 22. 2 3.7	> daily Daily Weekl y Mont hly first visit	11. 1 33. 3 33. 3 18. 5 3.7	< 1 hour 1 – 3 hours 4 – 6 hours > 6 hours	3.7 14. 8 29. 6 51. 9
<b>StreetCorner.com.au</b> N= 17	Today This Month +6 mnths 1 year ago >1 year	35. 3 11. 8 47. 1 5.9 0.0	Daily Weekly Monthly few times /year	26. 7 20. 0 20. 0 33. 3	Text Video Images Comments	81. 3 0.0 18. 8 43. 8	> daily Daily Weekl y Mont hly first visit	37. 5 25. 0 6.3 6.3 25. 0	< 1 hour 1 – 3 hours 4 – 6 hours > 6 hours	11. 8 11. 8 23. 5 52. 9
<b>Mean</b> N=103	Today This Month +6 mnths 1 year ago >1 year	12. 3 12. 9 39. 8 10. 4 24. 6	Daily Weekly Monthly few times /year	25. 1 27. 5 15. 3 32. 3	Text Video Images Comments	90. 8 8.8 22. 8 30. 6	> daily Daily Weekl y Mont hly first visit	32. 9 28. 0 18. 9 10. 0 10. 1	< 1 hour 1 – 3 hours 4 – 6 hours > 6 hours	5.2 14. 0 26. 2 54. 7

Figure 4.5: Chart representing how citizen journalists are interacting with their respective website.

There are four crucial pieces of information presented in this table. First, the majority of citizen journalists are only posting to individual websites several times per annum. While a comparable amount are posting on a daily or weekly basis, an effort should be made to encourage the producers who are posting less frequently to post more often and to become active in their online communities, either through commenting, or acting in peer-editor roles (depending on the production model). By posting more

frequently, users will become more engaged with current events content, gain more confidence in their competencies in the core citizen journalism skills. Second, a relatively low number of respondents are producing multimedia content in the form of images (22.8%), and even fewer are acting as video-journalists (8.8%). I expect that these numbers will increase as ownership and capabilities involving the necessary technologies and the increased proliferation of prosumer versions of digital and video cameras. For digital immigrants, who have not grown up with the necessary technology to easily produce digital images and video, they may require further encouragement to take on these roles that were previously only the territory of media professionals. This encouragement could take place in the form of online tutorials, featured examples of video reports, and easily manipulated uploading interfaces. Third, many members of the sample group have been users of the individual websites from anywhere from six months to more than one year. This may be indicative that the “lurking” phenomenon (Katz, 1998, n.p.) is equally applicable to a community of citizen journalists as to any other virtual participatory community. Lurking is the inclination of users of interactive websites to observe the adopted conventions and practices of an online community before becoming an active participant. It is thought that 90% of website users “lurk” rather than participate, engage and submit content (Katz, 1998, n.p.). Citizen journalism website operators could attempt to decrease the time members spend as a “lurker” by encouraging the participation of recently-joined members through increased early outreach, suggestions of potential story ideas, interaction through social media and encouraging contact between new and seasoned citizen journalists<sup>20</sup>. Fourth, many citizen journalists

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<sup>20</sup> DigitalJournal.com allows members to apply and be identified as “ambassadors.” They are charged with the responsibility of welcoming new contributors and being available to answer

are visiting individual websites on a daily or more than daily basis. This means that they will be expecting constantly updated content, and that, mirroring the circular audience/producer relationship, the audience for citizen journalism includes many of the producers. While few producers are posting content on a daily basis, many are engaged with citizen journalist-produced content each day, thereby strengthening the interaction with and participation between community members. By identifying the manner in which citizen journalists engage with host websites and content, it lends greater context to *why* journalistic producers are creating content and how they can be further encouraged in their endeavours.

### **In Their Own Words**

In an effort to gain additional insight to why citizen journalists produce their work, respondents to the electronic survey were given several opportunities to provide comments as to why they produce citizen journalism and how they think that this content differs from that found in the mainstream media.

A female citizen journalist, 35 – 44 years old, working for DigitalJournal.com located in Malaga, Spain recognizes the potential for Gans' "1.5 Tier" model. She writes " I feel that in the future, citizen journalists will collaborate with traditional print media to produce their content for them. Hence, I feel it is important to have some sort of qualification to boost my credentials to offer this. I am starting to see more and more news sites who are 'cashing in' on the current wave of popularity of citizen journalism and believe ultimately they will work with more citizen contributors as opposed to

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questions.

staffers or freelancers. There may even be room for major news organizations such as Reuters and the Associated Press to work with citizen journalists.”

A 20 – 24 year old male contributor for DigitalJournal.com from Singapore thinks that the increase in citizen journalism will push professional journalists to aim to produce better-quality content. He writes: “Platforms like DigitalJournal.com enable a layman to be a journalist in his/her own right, which is a good thing for the industry. Now the heat is on for the working journalist or even veterans to differentiate themselves with the quality of their content and analysis.”

A 25 – 34 female student from Antwerp, New York uses citizen journalism to mend an aspect that has always disturbed her about newspapers: “It always annoyed me that when you read the newspaper that they did not cite where they received the information. I love to include links to my information in the articles.” Citizen journalism has allowed her to take journalistic norms into her own hands and to shape the mediascape.

One respondent drew the connection between citizen journalism and democracy, citing it as another motivation for him to participate: “the next paradigm in journalism is the full democratization of information. This will be messy, as all democracy necessarily is, but it will lead to a revolution in human freedom. Being here to engage with that evolution feels like a necessary part of the development of humanity.” This respondent was a 35 – 44 year old male from Thailand.

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, GroundReport.com has a large portion of their citizen journalists who self-identify as former journalist. Here is a comment from a 35 – 44 female from Thailand who previously worked as a journalist: “I worked at a

major metro daily for five years and was sickened by what I saw there. In my brief time creating content as part of the new democratization of journalism, I have felt I was part of something important and useful to the world in a way I never experience in a corporate newsroom.”

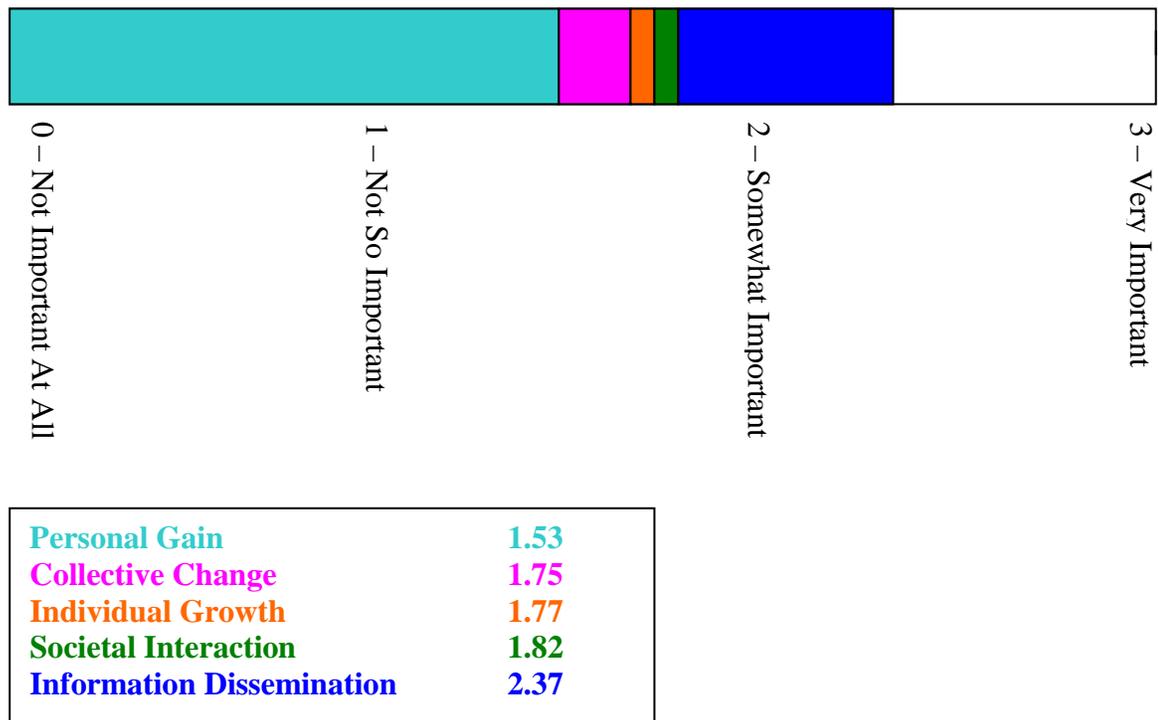


Figure 4.6: The importance of various categories of motivations for a population of citizen journalists to produce content.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to determine why citizen journalists are motivated to produce their content, and, in addition, to develop a clearer idea about *who* is engaging in the practice. Through the electronic surveying of producers from three citizen journalism websites, it was determined that citizen journalists are motivated most strongly by an need to be involved in the information dispersal process. Many are also motivated by their desire to take part in a creative process and to share that with a wider audience. As these websites become financially viable news-production businesses and enter into a profit-sharing relationship with their producers, a growing number of citizen journalists may become motivated by earning income from their writing and multimedia production.

By having a greater understanding of who they are and why they produce their work, the administration of citizen journalism websites will have improved data to target their audience, and provide them with the resources necessary to produce a quality journalistic product that will not merely complement the mainstream media, but compete with it.

### Future Action – Industry and Academic Research

Within mainstream journalism, changes to process and attitude must be made in order to encourage the participation of their audiences. In a 2005 speech, media owner Rupert Murdoch said that in the current (and presumably near-future) participatory media climate, journalists “must challenge – and reformulate – the conventions that so far have driven (their) online efforts” (Gans, 2008, p259). What Murdoch’s comment highlights is that while audiences are adapting to a mediascape that includes them as content

producers, online journalists need to adapt their practices to both include audiences and produce content that takes full advantage of the online medium and moves beyond simply reproducing print or broadcast material. Not only do news organizations need to consider how they will journalistically and technically include the audience as an active producer, but industry-wide they need to change how they imagine the “audience.”

While this study has produced a better representation of whom a citizen journalist is, this knowledge has to be used correctly. Instead of seeking out the audience that is *already* producing their own content, this knowledge needs to be used to target those who have yet to become involved in citizen journalism, or are involved in fewer numbers. Ideally, a citizen journalism pool needs to be created that includes people of all genders, ages, education levels, geographic locations, income levels and political ideologies. Recalling Gans’ conditions for multiperspectivity, this can only be achieved if these alternative voices are participating in the mediasphere and if they indeed represent diverse viewpoints.

Moving forward, the author recommends Gans’ “1.5 tier” model as a citizen journalism model that can fulfil the needs of news organizations, professional journalists, citizen journalists and society. This model allows for an unlimited amount of citizen-produced content, but society can be more confident in its quality, as it is checked for accuracy, content and copy errors by professional journalists. If there can be processes put in place to ensure a lack of censorship and the encouraging of multiperspectivity<sup>21</sup> by professional journalists towards citizen journalism in this process, then Gans’ approach will substantially improve the journalistic content available to society. While

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<sup>21</sup> By this, the author means Gans’ definition of multiperspectivity, which, to be fully adopted, requires the sharing of all views and from all segments of society.

this will not solve all of the financial challenges faced by the industry, including declining newspaper readership and an effective model for the monetisation of online content, it will produce multiperspectival and well-rounded content while removing a distinct strata and tension between professional journalists and their “former audience.”

As previously stated, mainstream journalists are still navigating their new relationship with their audience; a relationship that provides reciprocal feedback and interaction. Almost 25 years ago, Gans discovered that journalists had very little knowledge of audience preferences or motivations for engaging with media and assumed that “what interested them would interest the audience” (Gans, 1979, p230). Until very recently, reporters have still been operating under this assumption, (Schudson, 2003, p173) until the introduction and encouragement of feedback and commenting. A greater understanding of what needs the audience is trying to gratify by their participation in production and consumption processes will further professional journalists’ understanding of their audience.

Academically, there are many directions in which to conduct further research on citizen journalism. As this study generally examined citizen journalists through a uses and gratifications approach, further research could be done on producers of content in specific mediums. As is clear from both the demographics of this study and the use of citizen journalism during events such as the recent Iran elections, and the 7/11 London attacks, citizen journalism is a global phenomenon. It would be beneficial to study how citizen journalists behave around the world, and how news organizations incorporate their content. It would also be interesting to compare motivations and gratifications between professional and citizen journalists for producing their work. When more news

organizations begin featuring citizen journalism content more predominantly, further study will be necessary into how professionally- and citizen-produced content is complementing and being utilized together to produce a fully-formed mediascape. Additional study into the technological and journalistic training of citizen journalists and their recruitment will also be necessary for a successful future for the medium.

### **Conclusion**

Recalling Gans' earlier statement that, perhaps, "news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone," (1980, p322) this study has found, both through a review of the available literature, and through interaction with the community, that the use of quality citizen journalism produces journalistic content that is multiperspectival, and has positive effects of the relative democracy of a society. By understanding the reasons citizen journalists make the effort to produce their content, specifically the individual motivations and gratifications they are seeking, mainstream news organizations can better understand how to encourage their audiences to become more participatory. Once news organizations recognize that they need to reshape their relationship with their audience, as the audience has already changed their expectations about the role of and their relationship with news organizations, then they will be in a better position to begin a mutually advantageous relationship, where both tiers of the mediascape work together to provide the best journalistic content possible.

While the technology is in place for the "former audience" to interact with and produce journalistic content, fundamental changes to the relationship between mainstream media and their audiences need to occur. Namely, that the audience will no longer be a traditional audience, but instead, "participants and partners" (Thompson,

2006). The first step in this process is developing an understanding of why citizen journalists are motivated to produce their work so that they can be recruited, supported and encouraged to become a vital part of creating a multiperspectival mediascape.

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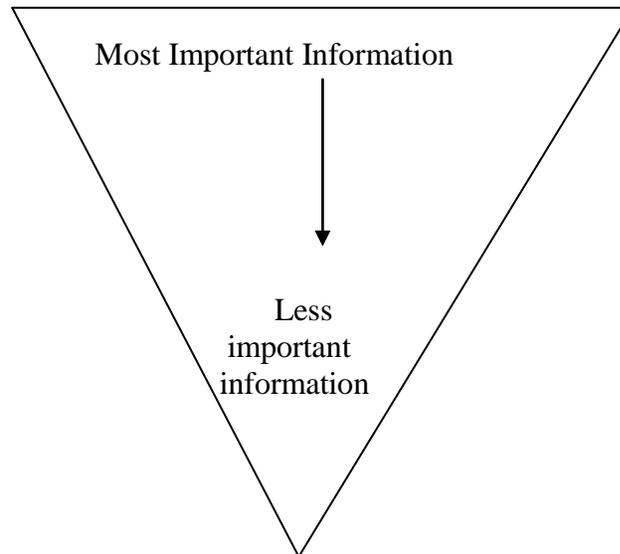
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## APPENDIX

**Appendix A:** Inverted pyramid story structure.



**Appendix B:** Potential business models for the monetisation of citizen journalism content

<b>Business Model</b>	<b>Description</b>
Voluntary donations	User make a donation in order to fund the website
Pay-per-item	Readers pay to have access to a specific news report or item
Subscription model	Reader pay to have access for a certain period of time
Monetising the audience via advertising	Advertising can take the form of web banners, direct-to-user emails
Licensing of content	Revenue can be generated through the syndication of content
Monetising the audience via online sales	Products can be sold to the target audience via a related online e-commerce site.

**Appendix C:** Gans' view of audience/media relationship is circular, as opposed to the previous view, which was linear

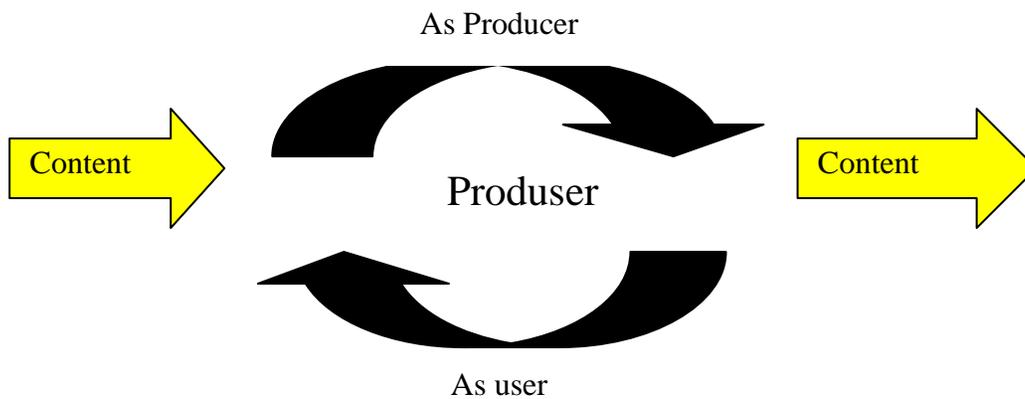


Figure 1: Similarly to Gans, Bruns sees the audience as engaging both as producer and user, and thus affecting media content.

INPUT	OUTPUT	RESPONSE
News gathering only by staff journalists	Closed editorial hierarchy	Editorial selection of letters/calls to be made public
	→	→

Figure 2: The traditional media/audience cycle, as seen by Bruns, is linear. (2005, p12)

**Appendix D:** Original e-mail sent to Chris Hogg, Rachel Sterne and Malo Jago proposing my research study.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently working on my MA in digital media at London Metropolitan University, and am about to start writing my thesis on the subject of why citizen journalists produce their content.

For part of my thesis, I need to conduct original research into the attitudes of citizen journalists. I was wondering if it would be possible to partner with your website to conduct this research? The study will be in the form of a short survey, and those who complete the survey will remain anonymous. DigitalJournal.com will receive all results of the survey for its own use, and a bound copy of my paper. Part of this research paper will also be published in the Canadian Journal of Communication next winter.

If this is something you would be interested in, or would like to discuss further, please get in touch with me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely, Martha Jack

---

Martha D. Jack  
MA Candidate – Citizen Journalism and Audience Research  
Digital Media  
London Metropolitan University  
mdj0021@londonmet.ac.uk

**Appendix E:** Table representing how each website contacted their users to encourage them to partake in the electronic survey.

Website	Method	Responses
DigitalJournal.com	CEO Chris Hogg posted a blog on several on DJ group sites. It was also posted to the website's Facebook page.	64
GroundReport.com	Included the link to the survey in an electronic newsletter distributed to their 5,000 registered users.	27
StreetCorner.com.au	Posted a square button on their homepage encouraging users to participate	17

**Appendix F:** A blog from DigitalJournal.com CEO Chris Hogg, advertising the survey to citizen journalists

### **London Metropolitan University researcher looking for help from Digital Journalists**

Posted May 29, 2009 by ■ Chris Hogg in Internet 9 comments

DigitalJournal.com was recently contacted by a woman named Martha Jack who is conducting her MA in digital media at London Metropolitan University.

Jack is about to start writing her thesis on the subject of why citizen journalists produce their content and for part of her thesis she is conducting original research into the attitudes of citizen journalists.

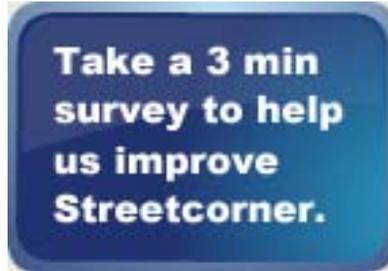
Jack has asked for permission to conduct a survey of Digital Journal contributors and we're happy to help where we can. She has posted a short survey online and those who complete the survey will remain anonymous.

Part of this research paper will also be published in the Canadian Journal of Communication next winter and on DigitalJournal.com.

If you have a few minutes to spare, please fill out the short survey. Thanks in advance to everyone and Jack for her interest in DigitalJournal.com

The survey can be found here and please feel free to share it with other citizen

**Appendix G:** A button that was placed on the StreetCorner.com.au homepage advertising the survey.



**Appendix H:** A newsletter sent by GroundReport.com CEO Rachel Sterne introducing the study (see bottom)



A lot has happened both in the political world and here at [GroundReport](#) since our last update.

As Iran shut its doors to foreign press, citizens became reporters. On GroundReport, [Iranian contributors](#) are showing the world through [articles](#), [photos](#) and [tweets](#) what's really happening on the ground.

With Iran, citizen journalism reached its tipping point. Now comes the hard part: how to separate the rumor from the fact?

**Now our big news.**

**In response to the explosion of grassroots reporting, GroundReport is raising the bar with the highest standards in citizen journalism.**

For our contributors, reporting on GroundReport.com is still simple. It's what happens next that's different.

From now on, every news item submitted to GroundReport must be approved by our [Editorial Team](#) prior to publication.

After you publish, your work will wait in a submissions queue until our team [checks and approves it](#).

The exception? Contributors with proven, internal fact-checking policies are added to our Pro List and get instant publication each time.

**Bottom line: Every news item on GroundReport will be credible and trusted.**

This is radical for the citizen journalism space, but we think it's long overdue. [Learn more about our editorial process here](#).

In line with this change, we're excited to announce that GroundReport is now officially syndicating news to Huffington Post and Newstex partners.

**Lastly, we need your help.** GroundReport has caught the attention of the academic world and researcher [Martha D. Jack](#) wants to know why you contribute. Help her by [completing the quick, private survey here](#).

**Appendix I:** The standardized Internet Motives Questionnaire, in both IMQ-45 and IMQ – 12 formats (Sargent, 2007, p374-5).

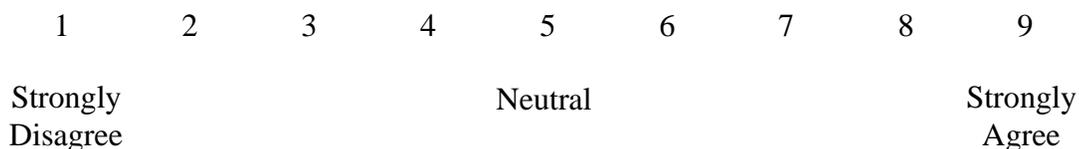


Figure 1: Internet Motives Questionnaire, IMQ-45 version

- |  |
|--|
| <p><b>I USE THE INTERNET</b></p> <p>Because I can remain anonymous</p> <p>Because I can avoid meeting/talking to people</p> <p>Because it is cheaper</p> <p>Beacause it is fun</p> <p>Because it makes me feel less lonely</p> <p>To participate in discussions</p> <p>Because it calms me down</p> <p>To leave messages</p> <p>To read what other users have to say</p> <p>When I have nothing better to do</p> <p>Because it passes the time away</p> <p>Because I do things online I wouldn't do in person</p> <p>To see what is out there</p> <p>To get information for free</p> |
|--|

Because it's a new way to do research  
So that I can learn about what could happen to me  
So that I can learn how to do things I haven't done before  
To find information I can find anywhere else  
Because it is enjoyable  
When I am bored  
To express myself freely  
Because it relaxes me  
To meet new people  
Because I feel more comfortable talking to people online  
Because I just like to use it  
Because it gives me something to do  
Because people don't have to be there to receive a message  
To communicate with friends and family  
Because I can say things I wouldn't normally say  
Because my friends use it  
Because it allows me to do things without leaving my home  
So I can learn about what is happening in the world  
It is entertaining  
When I just want to get away from everything  
Because it's easy to find things online  
Because it excites me  
Because I can always find a computer connected to the Internet  
When I need to have a short conversation  
Because sometimes it's easier to talk online than to tell people  
To look for information  
To let people know what I think  
Because it is a comfortable environment  
To belong to a group  
Because it's thrilling  
To purchase products or services

**Figure 2: Internet Motives Questionnaire: IMQ – 12.**

**I USE THE INTERNET**

Because I can remain anonymous  
Because I can avoid meeting/talking to people  
Because it makes me feel less lonely  
To participate in discussions  
To leave messages  
Because I can do things online I wouldn't do in person  
To meet new people  
Because people don't have to be there to receive a new message  
Because I can say things I wouldn't normally say  
Because my friends use it  
When I need to have a short conversation  
Because sometimes it's easier to talk online than to tell people

**Appendix J:** The ethical statement that was placed at the beginning of all three surveys.

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

This survey is being conducted in conjunction with London Metropolitan University to fulfil the requirements of a MA in digital media. The study is investigating the reasons why citizen journalists produce their work.

The survey is voluntary and the results will remain anonymous. All participant information will remain strictly confidential. You will not be contacted regarding this survey in the future. The results will be used for academic purposes but may be used in further published research at a later date.

If you have further questions or comments regarding this survey or your experience with citizen journalism, the researcher can be contacted at [cjresearcher@gmail.com](mailto:cjresearcher@gmail.com).

**Appendix K:** The complete text of the electronic survey.

## **1. Demographic Information**

### **1. Which gender do you identify with?**

Female  
Male  
Other

### **2. How old are you?**

Teenager  
20 - 24  
25 - 34  
35 - 44  
45 - 54  
55 - 64  
65+

### **3. What is your current employment status?**

Student  
Working  
Unemployed  
Retired  
Other

### **4. What is your highest level of education?**

High school  
Associate degree  
Undergraduate degree  
Master's degree  
Doctoral degree  
Other (please specify)

### **5. Where do you live? (Country and/or City)**

## **2. Website Usage**

### **1. When did you join Digital Journal?**

Today  
This Month  
The last 6 months  
A year ago  
More than a year ago

**2. How often do you post content?**

Daily  
Weekly  
Monthly  
A few times a year

**3. Which sections do you most often post content to?**

Arts  
Religion  
Business  
Science  
Crime  
Sports  
Education  
Technology  
Entertainment  
Travel  
Environment  
World  
Food  
Blogs  
Health  
Images  
Internet  
TV  
Lifestyle  
Groups  
Politics

**4. In which mediums do you create content?**

Text Article  
Video  
Images  
Comments on other stories  
Participation in Groups

**5. How often do you visit the website?**

Several times a day  
Daily  
Weekly  
Monthly

My first visit

**6. How long are you connected to the Internet each day?**

- Less than 1 hour
- 1 - 3 Hours
- 3 - 6 Hours
- +6 Hours

**3. Content Production**

Why do you produce content?

**1. Please rate the following options for why you produce content for Digital Journal**

- I enjoy writing and producing content
- To watch reaction to my articles
- To mobilise citizens for support or protest
- To exercise my right of freedom of expression
- To inform others about news and events
- To articulate my own ideas
- To see my work published online
- To support or protest an individual/group or idea
- To gain status and build my reputation online
- To develop connections with other people
- To inform others about current events
- To create with multimedia
- To take part in an interactive community
- To develop an internet identity
- To inform others about my first-hand experiences
- To display my passion
- To create and share knowledge with others
- To set an agenda about a particular issue
- To pass time while I am bored
- I have a sense of responsibility to produce content
- To reject the ordinary and offer alternative ideas to society
- To challenge the mainstream media
- To debate other users
- To take a role in an online community

**2. Are there any other reasons for why you are motivated to produce content?**

**3. What makes the content on Digital Journal different from content traditionally produced for mainstream newspapers, television and radio?**

**4. Journalistic Training**

**1. What is your highest level of journalistic training?**

None

I participated in High School

I participated in University or College

I am/was a Professional Journalist (the main source of my income comes from producing content)

I participate in journalism as a hobby or personal project

Other (please specify)

**2. In which of the following do you feel competent? (Choose all that apply)**

Using a digital video camera

Using an audio recorder

Editing digital video

Editing audio

Using a digital still camera

Creating a photo slideshow

Simple photo editing (cropping/rotating)

Conducting an interview

Advanced photo editing (colour correction/content)

Copy editing text editing)

**3. Which news sources do you use most often? Please choose the top five.**

RSS Feed

Local television

Alternative news website

National newspaper

Social Media Network (Twitter, Facebook)

News aggregator (Google News, etc.)

Local news website

24-hour news channel

Local radio

National television

Local newspaper

National news website

National radio

Other (please specify)

**4. Any final thoughts on your experiences creating journalistic content**