

Public Abstract

First Name:Jodi

Middle Name:McFarland

Last Name:Friedman

Adviser's First Name:Esther

Adviser's Last Name:Thorson

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2013

Department:Journalism

Degree:MA

Title:Uses and Gratifications Theory in Online Commenter Culture

While other research has focused on the effect that online commenting can have on news sites, little has addressed the reasons that online commenters participate, the needs that online commenting behavior meets and the emotions that commenters experience. Understanding online commenters is key to unlocking the reasons for their engagement. As news sites seek deeper connections with their audience, knowledge of those who contribute comments to the site is useful in understanding how to build loyalty. Uses & Gratifications Theory applied to online commenting culture provides key insights into the how, why and who of online news commenters. This qualitative research explores those questions among a selection of online commenters who agreed, anonymously, to answer online questionnaires. The commenters in this study were driven by the need for information/surveillance, with more than half requiring the news every day, as well as a desire for social interaction, exploration of personal identity and a desire for diversion. They have a high need for information. They feel informed and connected, along with powerful and angry, more than any other emotions when commenting. They feel more positive emotions than negative emotions. The act of commenting and engaging on the site feeds their sense of connectedness to the world.