

‘NET GAINS:  
POTENTIAL CITIZEN JOURNALISTS USE TRADITIONAL MEDIA OFTEN AND  
HAVE A STRONG NEED FOR NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Even after more than 10 years, the Internet has not replaced the newspaper. In fact, research suggests a strong complimentary relationship between online and printed news. Information seekers or newshounds will seek out information in whatever form they can find it. The key to involving these people in the news is interactivity, or allowing people to choose and submit their own news and receive and offer feedback to newsmakers. Citizen journalism offers one highly interactive forum. Through a survey of the registered users of Northwest Voice, one of the first citizen journalism efforts in the United States, this study examines how traditional news use, such as reading newspapers and watching television news, influences whether a person will visit or contribute to an online interactive forum. A survey of the most active visitors and contributors suggests traditional media use will strongly predict whether a person will visit a citizen journalism site. In fact, the main reasons for visiting a citizen journalism site, the study suggests, are to find information not typically supplied by the mainstream news media, such as local and neighborhood news. Factor analysis indicated the two reasons people registered were to connect with their friends and neighbors and to have an alternative to the traditional media. Respondents also demonstrated their dissatisfaction with traditional media for not providing the feedback and interactive elements citizen journalism provides. No connection was found, however, between media use and likelihood to contribute.