

1-1-2010

# Broadcast News Organizations' Perceptions of Viewer Generated Content

Christopher L. Atkins  
atkins41@marshall.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://mds.marshall.edu/etd>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Atkins, Christopher L., "Broadcast News Organizations' Perceptions of Viewer Generated Content" (2010). *Theses, Dissertations and Capstones*. Paper 7.

BROADCAST NEWS ORGANIZATIONS' PERCEPTIONS OF VIEWER GENERATED

CONTENT

A Thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communication

By

Christopher L. Atkins

Approved by

Dr. Christopher Swindell, Ph.D. Committee Chairperson

Professor Janet Dooley

Professor Dan Hollis

Marshall University

July 2010

Copyright by  
Christopher L. Atkins

2010

ii

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
HISTORY.....	10
WEB BOOM.....	12
TRANSITION INTO NEWSPAPERS.....	15
TRANSITION INTO BROADCAST AND CABLE NEWS.....	17
RELATION TO THIS STUDY.....	20
3. METHODS.....	23
MANIPULATION.....	29
4. RESULTS.....	30
5. DISCUSSION.....	39
LIMITATIONS.....	53
FUTURE RESEARCH.....	54
APPENDIX I.....	56
RESUME.....	64

## ABSTRACT

# BROADCAST NEWS ORGANIZATIONS' PERCEPTIONS OF VIEWER GENERATED CONTENT

Christopher L. Atkins

Viewer generated content refers to the recent phenomenon of broadcast viewers taking to the streets and creating content for the stations they watch. This study surveys the managers in broadcast news organizations across the country gauging their thoughts and station usage of content produced by their viewers. This study shows how pervasive the use of viewer generated content is in the broadcast news industry today, and how it is utilized by not only some news organizations but by nearly all stations. The phenomenon of viewer generated content is not only widespread but also has broadcast news organizations rethinking the way they consider content. The results of this study will aid not only the broadcast news industry but also viewers on deciding if they should take the time to create content.

## INTRODUCTION

Consumers are no longer only the users and viewers they were just a few years ago. The term “prosumers” has now been coined to describe them. The term “prosumer,” according to dictionary.com, is a combination of the words professional or production and consumer (dictionary.com). The term “prosumer” was coined by author Alvin Toffler in his 1980 book *The Third Wave*. In his book, Toffler predicted that the role of producers and consumers would start to blur and even merge. Although Toffler coined the term, the transition from consumer to content producer was actually mentioned a year earlier in 1979 by Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt. In their 1972 book *Take Today*, the two suggested, with electric technology, the consumer would become a producer.

Setting terminology aside; the role of users has forever changed, and web formats are changing with them allowing for easier incorporation of the new user. It did not take long for “prosumers” to transition quickly into their new role. In 2006, Time Magazine named YOU person of the year. The article said,

“It’s a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It’s about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people’s network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It’s about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes” (Time 2006).

It is an individual making a difference for hundreds—putting their work out there for others to see. Be it comedy or an instructional video, the internet is full of content created by

people, who were once nothing more than users, including family, even neighbors. These creations have come to be known as user generated content (UGC)—content that was created by a person who at one point was only a user but now is involved in the site to a point they have become a creator of the content they consume.

“Prosumers” are creating content at a rate that, until this point, was unheard of. A Nielsen/NetRatings 2006 study showed that “five out of the U.S. top ten fastest growing websites from July 2005 to July 2006 were user-generated content sites” (Shao, 2009). YouTube was created in February 2005; since its creation, the site has continued to grow. In 2009, Nielsen announced, “YouTube continued to rank as the No. 1 video Web brand with 5.5 billion total streams in April” (Nielsen Reports, 2009). The information from Nielsen proves that the UGC era of content is not just a fad, and instead, a phenomenon that is continuing to grow.

During the past five years, the type of content that has been added to UGC sites such as YouTube is providing a boost to their credibility. Virtually all of the 2008 U.S. presidential candidates had advocated their candidacy on YouTube and other UGC sites. The addition of content on UGC sites did not go unnoticed; according to the Nielsen ratings, “On YouTube, Democrats are still dominating in the popularity of their politically-related video content, with 475,000 unique visitors in July, compared to the Republicans’ 275,000” (Nielsen Reports, 2007).

The power and future value of UGC can be seen in the recent purchase of YouTube by Internet giant Google. Even members of the objective news media worded their article to make it appear as if the \$1.65 billion dollar purchase was a bargain stating, “Internet search

leader Google is snapping up YouTube for \$1.65 billion, brushing aside copyright concerns to seize a starring role in the online video revolution” (Associated Press, 2006). YouTube co-founder Chad Hurley said the purchase meant the partnership will give the company the flexibility and resources it needs in order to pursue a goal of building the next-generation platform for serving media worldwide (Associated Press, 2006).

It has been shown that the prosumer does have power, and certain organizations like Google believe there is a future in the UGC phenomenon, but what role will it play in the mainstream media? Prosumers have broken into the mainstream media as their content is published and aired across the nation. Ultimately it will be up to news organizations (and their opinions and perceptions of viewer generated content) to decide if it will remain in the media or if UGC is simply a phenomenon that will pass. The research conducted in this study will seek to answer not only the question of what news organizations think as they receive UGC but also what stations hope to gain from airing UGC.

The move from the keys on the computer onto television sets and the front pages of newspapers worldwide started slowly but has since grown rapidly. The incorporation of individuals into the mainstream media and everyday lives of people continues to gain recognition. Citizen journalism is the name that has been given to the work of everyday people who record video, snap photos, or even tweet live from breaking news or community news events. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was the first news organization willing to work with this new viewer based content. The BBC hoped that it would be able to harness the power of thousand of citizen journalists who could share their stories of world events. First, it was the Asian Tsunami, then the London bombings—throughout which

citizens made clear to the BBC that millions of people from all over the world wanted to tell what they had seen and done not just what they thought (Eltringham, 2006). In response, the BBC was willing to “risk” valuable resources on the work of citizen journalists. The risk paid off in just a few days when scaffolding on a building in Milton Keynes collapsed. “Within minutes a trickle then a flood of pictures of the incident came into our inbox. While others were left with maps of the area, News 24 was able to show scores of images of the wreckage” (Eltringham, 2006). In response to this incident, the BBC quickly dedicated even more resources, doubling the initial small team of three producers to a team of six, allowing for quicker filtering. Furthermore, their hours were also expanded to allow for a better flow and intake of more information, more often.

The BBC’s early move to UGC quickly proved that the information from some could prove helpful. According to the BBC’s Assistant Editor of Interactivity, Mathew Eltringham, two things are clear:

“the more user generated content we publish, the more we get sent—the demand from our viewers, listeners and readers to participate, debate and comment is growing every day. Secondly that user generated content is not a 'cheap alternative' to conventional, traditional journalism” (Eltringham, 2006).

The BBC is now trying to take advantage of the full range of user-generated services provided, as long as it fulfills the organizations’ public purposes and can match the standards that the users expect of the BBC’s presence on the Internet. The current study supports the case that the BBC best outlines the future of UGC, and the overall news organizations’ perceptions of the UGC that they receive. Not all content will be worthwhile, like the

millions of people world-wide who wanted to share what they had seen or done in the relation to the Asian Tsunami or the bombings in London. Not everything will serve a purpose for the news organization, but it will be on those specific occasions, such as the incident with the scaffolding, that a station willing to incorporate UGC will become the dominant station.

As shown with the usage of UGC by the BBC, large news organizations are more than willing to incorporate this form of content into their product. However, an understanding of how news organizations work and if the size of the news organization has any impact on their usage of UGC is needed. News markets in the United States are based on population and ranked 1 to 210. Although population is the determining factor for how large a market is, there is a difference in both resources and money allocated to organizations that operate in areas of large populations as opposed to those in smaller populations. Therefore it would be important to note if there is a difference in the usage of UGC used in the different markets and if that amount changes based on the resources and money provided to a news organization.

Another important element of UGC that news organizations need to understand is the theories associated with UGC and its use. The primary theory that UGC is based on is Jay Blumler and Eli Katz's Uses and Gratifications Theory. Blumler and Katz presume audiences consciously choose the medium that could best fulfill their needs, and that they are able to recognize their reasons for making media choices (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Citizen journalists who create content are fulfilling their own needs and gratification, meaning they gain the gratification desired; by the same token, stations in a ratings race should consider

using UGC—if the theory often associated with UGC is correct and stations are willing to incorporate their viewers’ content, then the theory suggests viewers will continue to come back for more information as the station will best be meeting their needs. The viewers/readers/users are the key to sustainable journalism. If the product being offered to the public is not deemed sufficient the uses and gratifications theory argues that the users will turn to another source for the information. The theory puts pressure on journalists and the new industry in general to give the viewers what they want and when they want it to be successful in the news industry.

Perhaps, to fully understand the Uses and Gratifications Theory a look at newspapers would be helpful. Newspapers have been “changing” for years to try to give their readers what they want, and a lot has changed. One study conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism shows,

“Papers both large and small have reduced the space, resources and commitment devoted to a range of topics. At the top of that list, nearly two thirds of papers surveyed have cut back on foreign news, over half have trimmed national news and more than a third have reduced business coverage. In effect, America’s newspapers are narrowing their reach and their ambitions and becoming niche reads” (The Changing Newsroom, 2008).

The face of news in the newspaper industry is changing every day, and that change is obvious. There are several reasons for the change including workforce cuts, less space, and a new generation of reporters. Although the industry is changing before their eyes, news editors agree that their product is getting better. “Editors still sense that their product is improving, not worsening. Fully 56% think their news product is better than it was three

years earlier” (The Changing Newsroom, 2008). The study performed by the Pew Center is based on interviews at newspapers in 15 different cities from four distinct regions of the country and a survey of senior news executives from 259 newspapers.

Another theory not as widely associated with the subject of UGC that is nonetheless relevant is Media Dependency Theory. Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur (1976) theorize that the more dependent an individual is on the media for having his or her needs fulfilled, the more important the media will be to that person. Combining the media dependency theory with the U&G theory described earlier it is possible for stations not only to fulfill the needs of their viewers by incorporating UGC, but also to continue to keep the viewers they gain. It is important to remember people use the media for many reasons. Information, entertainment, and parasocial relationships are just a few of them (Littlejohn, 1999). Media Dependency Theory says the more a person becomes dependent on the media to fulfill these needs, the more important the media will become to the individual. The media will also have much more influence and power over that individual. Considering Media Dependency Theory, stations should strongly consider using UGC not only to fulfill the uses and gratifications of their viewers but also to hold onto those new viewers once they start watching.

The future of UGC relies on people to create content because without content there would be no UGC, and the phenomenon could be interpreted as just a fad. To ensure that the current study is worthwhile, it must be argued that the public will continue to produce its own content. A 2006 Pew study shows, “Forty-eight million American adults have contributed some form of user-generated content on the Internet. That's 35 percent of Internet

users” (Burns, 2006). Possibly more important than the 35 percent of internet users who have participated in UGC is, “fifty-one percent of respondents under the age of 30 have posted some sort of content on the Web” (Burns, 2006). The people who participate in the creation and submission of UGC are those who will continue to participate in years to come. As people continue to produce content, websites and news organizations will continue to find new ways to incorporate their work.

The Society of Professional Journalists, which was founded in 1909, “is the nation’s most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to encouraging the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior” (About the Society). The SPJ is even recognizing the change that the journalism industry is undergoing. “They’re gaining momentum in the media community and changing the way news is reported and delivered, as well as how community members view the world around them” (About the Society). The Society of Professional Journalists looks at the citizen journalism phenomenon as positive because there is more information coming to light. The rising number of citizen journalists is forcing organizations such as the SPJ to offer new services that are not only for the professional but also for the citizen journalists of the world.

“Through its Citizen Journalism Academy, SPJ seeks to help everyone wanting to practice journalism to do so accurately, ethically and fairly. The Society aims to help participants understand how responsible practices could increase their reach and help them have strong journalistic reputations within their communities and around the world” (Citizen Journalism Academy).

With professional news resources recognizing the growing number of citizen journalists in the world it confirms the news industry is forever changed. The citizen journalist is alive and well. News agencies are continuing to change the way they receive and incorporate citizen journalists into their content, and as user generated content continues to gain support and recognition news agencies will continue looking at options to use the content in different ways.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### HISTORY

Citizen Journalism refers to the once consumers of news media turned provider of news content. The information that a citizen journalist creates is not yet considered news, but instead fits into a category commonly referred to as user generated content (UGC). UGC, also broadly known as participatory journalism, user created content, or as consumer generated content, has been working its way into the mainstream media for years. Although this new genre of content is considered by most to be a new trend, it has been around as long as journalism itself in America. The history of Citizen Journalism is explored by Dan Gillmore in his book, We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People. Gillmore says, “Personal journalism is also not a new invention. People have been stirring the pot since before the nation’s founding...” (Gillmore, 2004, p.1). The book also points to the work of Thomas Paine, the author of Common Sense, and others early writers as some of the first Citizen Journalists giving their work to a newspaper in order to spread their message.

The use of UGC by newspapers never stopped, and, in fact, continues today. Letters to the editor have served an important role in almost all major and community newspapers have invited guest editorials. The letters to the editor section of newspapers serves as a sounding board allowing for any member of society to write a letter to the newspaper in hopes that their point of view will be shared with all readers. A letter to the editor is just one of many forms of UGC which has continued to flourish, not only because people want their opinions expressed, but also because technology is making the process easier both for the newspapers and for the producers of UGC.

Although the idea of Citizen Journalism has been around since the creation of the

United States its recent boom is being credited to technology. Michael Rosenblum was a producer for CBS “Sunday Morning,” but today he helps train citizen journalists.

Rosenblum contends that the technology available to citizens today lends itself to their content being incorporated into the mainstream media. “Today a small, hand-held, high-definition video camera, one that is unquestionable broadcast quality, costs less than \$1,000” (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 75). As a former employee of the industry, Rosenblum thinks technology is empowering millions of journalists (and others) to be part of a global dialogue that he calls television and video news. The scenario that is incorporated in Rosenblum’s article titled, “Video News: The Video Journalist comes of Age,” uses J.K. Rowling, author of the seven-book series Harry Potter, as an example. “What Rowling did with a pencil and paper (or cocktail napkins at the start) [by being a laywoman who created a fictional sensation] anyone can now do with a camcorder and a laptop; they can make their vision.”

Guosong Shao, assistant professor of communication at Pittsburg State University, believes users create content to fulfill two aspects of their lives--self-expression and self-actualization. By creating content, users are able to express their thoughts and opinions to the masses; people who produce content do so to inform and entertain others, or to trigger responses (Bowman, & Willis, 2003). Shao looks at the user generated content through the lens of the uses and gratifications theory (U&G). Blumler and Katz presume audiences consciously choose the medium that can fulfill their needs and that they are able to recognize their reasons for making media choices (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Citizen journalists who create content are, therefore, fulfilling their needs and gratifications, though this approach appears to be self-fulfilling.

Although the use of the term participatory or citizen journalism is relatively new the incorporation of it in news content has been increasing over time. Domingo examined the use of participatory journalism in his article ‘Interactivity in the daily routines of online newsrooms: Dealing with an uncomfortable myth.’

The buzzword in the 1990s was interactivity. Now it is participatory journalism. But the bottom line is the same: many professional and scholarly discourses tend to reproduce ideal models of what online journalism could be, taking them for granted as the path that news production on the Internet must walk (Domingo, 2008, p. 680). Domingo found that the weblog phenomenon strongly reactivated the usage of participatory journalism. There is a lot of discussion around weblogs, as to whether they serve as a form of extremely easy personal publishing or if it is simply not journalism. Domingo’s study also found that the “prevalence of traditional journalism culture and the representation of the users as passive consumers or active producers had a strong influence in shaping the strategies of the different online newsrooms” (Domingo, 2008, p. 698).

## **WEB BOOM**

The American people have become empowered by technology; the creation of smaller more cost efficient cameras allows people who were once only consumers of the media to create content for everyone to see. However, the content still would be nothing if there was no outlet for it to be used. The Internet provides a wealth of opportunity to the creators of UGC. While online content is not the focus of this study, the web phenomenon of UGC is where the boom begins—therefore, it is important to begin there. Five of the top ten fastest growing web sites from July 2005 to July 2006 were user generated sites, according to Nielsen/NetRatings (Bausch & Han, 2006). The power of UGC online is obvious—everyday

users upload more than 65,000 new videos to YouTube and more than 6 million photos to Facebook. The importance of these sites also continues to grow, and one reason is because of the information that is available, “virtually all of the US 2008 presidential candidates have advocated their candidacy through YouTube and MySpace” (Guosong, 2009).

As the Internet and the access to the Internet continue to improve there is a direct correlation to the increased access and amount of user generated content produced and posted to online UGC Web sites. A Pew study found “as home broadband adoption grew, posting and creating content for the internet became more widespread” (Horrigan, 2007). The Pew Internet Project reported in a 2006 survey that 44% of home broadband users participated in a direct form of participatory action online. Although UGC is dominated by young people, 31% of those over age 50 with a broadband connection at home had engaged in some activities (Horrigan, 2007).

It is not just user generated Web sites that are making large jumps but also news Web sites that are beginning to impact traditional forms of media. One example of this form of online user generated news site is OhmyNews.com, which is a South Korean online only newspaper. The majority of the content on the site is produced by a large staff of citizen reporters. The online newspaper is called the “crown jewel” of participatory journalism,

“The online news organization, which boasts more than 700,000 daily readers, has 54 staff reporters and editors, but at least 70 percent of its content comes from 39,000 citizen reporters. Its new international edition has 300 citizen reporters, according to Jean Min, director of *OhMyNews’ International*” (Marshall, 2005, p. 14).

It is the success of sites like these that has strongly influenced United States media companies to launch Web sites that host and use participatory journalism.

This should come as no surprise according to Jon Marshall who argues that, “The digital generation that grew up using the Web and playing video games expects its media to be interactive and is turning away from traditional ways of getting news” (Marshall, 2005, p. 15). The emerging digital generation is causing a reinvention of journalism, according to Amy Gahrn, a coeditor of Ireporter.org. Although there is a continued push toward more participation in the mainstream media some argue that it will never be the same as a professional report. Steve Outing, a senior editor at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies says, “It doesn’t replace professional reporting, and I wouldn’t want it to do so, but photos and accounts that citizens are able to give us, I think, contributed to better overall coverage” (Marshall, 2005, p. 14).

The digital generation that Marshall discusses is representative of future media consumers who are fueling changes in mass media. A Pew research study on teenagers as content creators found that, “Fully half of all teens and 57% of teens who use the internet could be considered Content Creators. They have created a blog or webpage, posted original artwork, photography, stories or videos online or remixed online content into their own new creations” (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). As technology continues to improve and, as shown by the Pew study, the younger generations continue to take an active role in the media process, UGC is proving to be more than just a trend.

The popularity of user generated Web sites continues to grow, and while empowering the people it would be unfair to say it has not sustained criticism, “sites like YouTube and Wikipedia collect the creations of unpaid amateurs while kicking pros to the curb—or at least deflating their stature to that of the ordinary Netizen” (Dokoupil, 2008). This common problem, a lack of trust, has plagued not only the internet form of user generated content

sites but may also account for its slow transition into the mainstream media. "The more trusted an environment, the more you can charge for it," says Mahalo founder Jason Calacanis, a former AOL executive who was previously involved with several Web start-ups (Dokoupil, 2008).

## **TRANSITION INTO NEWSPAPERS**

The transition of UGC from the web to what is considered more traditional media such as newspapers or broadcast television has been slow, according to most researchers. The reasons for the slow integration have been questioned by researchers across the globe, but the question remains unanswered. Newspapers allow several different types of participatory journalism into their craft. These range from allowing readers to comment on stories to others that contain nothing but reports from people who are not trained professional journalists (Marshall, 2005). In their paper *User Generated Content in the Newsroom: Professional and Organizational Constraints on Participatory Journalism*, Pieter Ugille and Steve Paulussen suggest that the slow integration can be explained in part because "...it can be expected that professional journalists will make rather limited use of user generated content, because they somewhat routinely and passively rely on a number of official suppliers of information" (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p.34).

Paulussen and Ugille conducted a qualitative study in four newsrooms of the Belgian newspaper company Concentra Media. The two researchers conducted twenty in-depth interviews and observations at the three newsrooms in hopes of examining the extent to which professional newsrooms are prepared to exploit the editorial possibilities of user generated content in the news making process. Through their research the two suggest the "sluggish" move is not because of a professional unwillingness, but more because of the

heavy workload and the time that is required to continually uphold the standards that the news organizations stand upon. Although journalists are concerned about their standards, they are able to see the potential of UGC and professional content in the news making process. Paulussen and Ugille found that some news organizations are actually hiring more staff to accommodate the large amount of feedback and comments that is pouring in. The problem is, although users continue to comment and provide feedback, users are not just restricted to those actions; in fact, “readers are encouraged to submit pictures and personal stories destined for special human interest sections...” Journalists also use UGC in their favor. Although not trusted as a story on its own, journalists have begun turning to UGC as a secondary news source much like the Internet. “...User generated content is considered a secondary source of information, most of the interviewees were convinced that handling user generated content and interacting with users are becoming more important journalistic tasks” (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p. 35).

Another study done on European newspapers found much the same. Henrik Ornebring (2008) researched two leading newspapers, *The Sun* in the United Kingdom and *Aftonbladet* in Sweden. Ornebring observed the dedicated UGC/reader’s material sections of both newspapers and their websites looking for UGC outside the dedicated UGC sections over a 6 week time span. Ornebring observed the papers weekly and found that traditional news organizations are unwilling to add features that give users more control and influence over the content. The policies behind the UGC provisions in *Aftonbladet.se* and *The Sun Online* fit with Singer’s, “finding that while journalists may be willing to let audiences respond to and interact with already-produced material, they are less willing to give audiences any real influence over the news process” (Singer, 2006). The study also found

that while the two papers are different in what type of news they present in their paper they are not very different in how they present UGC. The study suggests that papers are working to make it appear as if they are willing to incorporate their readers' content into their paper and Web site while in actuality there is not much content in the news that is user generated.

### **TRANSITION INTO BROADCAST AND CABLE NEWS**

The incorporation of UGC into the broadcast and cable media landscape can be linked to decreased ratings that many news organizations are now forced to overcome. Between 1997 and 2003 the early evening news, which traditionally has been the newscast of record, has seen a drop in viewership on an average of 3% of share a year (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006). The ratings decline is an issue not only facing the early evening news but also local news as viewers continue to turn to other sources for their information, including the Internet. In the past, local news served as one of the few options available to viewers to receive the information they desired; however, today there are several options. News is all around--on the radio, on television, and just a click away anytime the desire arises – meaning, the idea of a fixed nightly newscast may be outdated. Television stations are battling back though, experimenting with new strategies and new techniques that will not only draw the interest of viewers but also fulfill the viewers' needs in order to keep their audiences.

Being in the right place at the right time and sharing a story is one form of UGC that has existed and been used for decades. As a result, it is widely acknowledged that this form of UGC is nothing new; however, it is no longer just the stories that are making it onto the airwaves and television screens. On August 2, 2006, CNN.com launched its iReport Web page in an effort to involve citizens in the newsgathering process, saying,

“With this site, we want to share our passion about the news in a way that invites you –and everyone else –to share your passion about the news. At CNN, we live for news. We love talking about it. And we know that there's a whole lot more to it than what you see on TV or read on your favorite Web site. So we've launched an independent world where you, the iReport.com community, tell the stories we're not used to seeing”

The program was hugely successful, and within the first year of iReport’s launch, the power and success of the new program was showcased. On the eve of its anniversary, iReporters responded to yet another major news event: the deadly collapse of a bridge over the Mississippi river in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One iReporter, Mark Lacroix, sent photos of the scene immediately after the disaster, and as the story developed, gave information about the situation to viewers live on television. Lacroix's photographs were among the more than 450 iReport submissions sent to CNN within the first 24 hours of the bridge's collapse –the biggest response in one day to a single news event in iReport history (CNN, 2007).

Tom Brew, deputy editor of MSNBC.com, told Deborah Potter in an interview, “Our goal in exploring citizen journalism is not to create a new revenue model or to start paying a new army of freelancers out there ... our goal is to help round out the journalism on our site” (Potter, 2007, p. 66). The station also has to do little work with the UGC. For example the iReporter service offered by CNN has a disclaimer,

“Welcome to iReport, where people take part in the news with CNN. Your voice, together with other iReporters, helps shape how and what CNN covers every day. iReport is the way people like you report the news. The stories in this section are not

edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. Only ones marked 'CNN iReport' have been vetted by CNN" (iReport, 2009).

The disclaimer gives CNN the ability to take information from viewers and add it to their Web site with little or no contact with the work other than posting it to the Web site. CNN, with the help of iReport, receives hundreds of new stories every day. For example on one Saturday in November, the iReport section of CNN received 34 viewer submitted news stories in the span of just one hour. The ability to constantly have fresh, never before seen content at the news agencies' fingertips makes it a new and exciting time for media outlets.

CNN has been on the front lines of experimenting with user generated content, and that experimentation is continuing. In 2007, CNN created a "news-gathering outpost" in the virtual world of Second Life. CNN uses the network to create its variation of iReport. It is CNN's hope that the network can serve as a journalism school that can offer guidance to its users. The move of CNN into Second Life was documented in MediaWeek. "Given that Second Life users tend to be highly passionate about the virtual space, CNN execs believe the community will embrace user-generated journalism – more than they would simply embrace simply repurposed content" (Shields, 2007, p. 6). CNN is using the virtual world for more than just UGC, they are also marketing their product by allowing visitors to Second Life to get the latest news by visiting kiosks scattered through the virtual community.

User generated content serves both ends of the journalism spectrum; the use of UGC gives the viewers the gratification they wanted, but it also satisfies the needs of the station. With UGC, the station gains extra, unexpected content, and it fulfills the needs of many who may have been otherwise neglected because of distance or lack of resources. Several news

organizations have started viewer generated content sites as a supplement to the news they already produce. Unfortunately, for journalists, not all television stations are planning on using UGC as supplemental material. In 2007, KFTV in Santa Rosa, California laid off “most of its news staff...now it’s asking the community to help provide local coverage” (Potter, 2007, p.66). KFTV’s general manager John Burgess told the local newspaper that, “Frankly, I think we’re going to do a much better job of covering local issues than we are doing right now” (Potter, 2007, p. 66).

Although not all citizen journalists are replacing professionals the concept remains that given the appropriate equipment and oversight it is possible for anyone to tell a story. That is the hope of Hearst-Argyle. The company launched its user generated content program in 2009, inviting users to take part in news gathering by uploading footage to the station site. The hope is that it will serve as an effective way to not only give a peek into the station, but give users a voice in the proceedings, as well. “It’s an easy, extended way for us to make contact with viewers and encourage the interactivity that everyone wants,” WCVB Boston President/General Manager, Bill Fine says. “It’s more than them just sending an email to the station” (Malone, 2009).

## **RELATION TO THIS STUDY**

It has been shown that modern consumers are no longer satisfied with the gatekeeper model that has dominated the industry for so long (Flew, 2004); however, it is the gatekeeping theory that is being blamed for UGC’s lethargic move into the mainstream media. Journalists see their gatekeeping role as one of the most important jobs they possess (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). The questionable traits that UGC commonly holds may help to

keep it out of the mainstream media. “Concerns are raised about the low newsworthiness, the personal tone and the subjective bias of user contributions. All journalists say that moderating user generated content and retaining control over the news selection are essential to keep the standards high” (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p. 38).

The extent to which news agencies are willing to use viewer submitted news or citizen journalism continues to change. What started out as a comments section for a particular story for some stations has now evolved into an entire story for others—with essentially all of the work already done for the station by the viewer. Newscasts frequently include tips, video, or photos supplied by viewers and can rely heavily on the community for follow-up stories (Deuze, 2006).

This new generation of content has never been seen before, and what it stands for and what the future holds remains unclear. What is understood is that the impact UGC has had on the online structure has forever changed the web as researchers now know it. The current study will look at a format that is still being altered. Since the concept of UGC is still relatively new to the broadcast journalism industry, there has been little research done on the topic. The current study is designed to start the discourse on a moving target and will take a look at the use of Viewer Generated Content (VGC) in today’s broadcast news organizations. To paraphrase the three research questions offered at the end of this chapter: “Is VGC being used and does the difference in market size make a difference in that use? Why are outlets using VGC and does the difference in market size make a difference in those reasons? And finally, what impact might VGC have on the mainstream industry and does market size make a difference in that outlook?”

Is it perceived as an opportunity for free fresh content that can immediately work its way into the broadcast like KFTV in Santa Rosa? Or is it seen as Pieter Ugille and Steve Paulussen suggest as a secondary source with the possibility of growing into another story. Michael Rosenblum, a former CBS producer, argues that anyone can produce broadcast quality work with a camera that costs less than \$1,000, but do broadcast news organizations agree?

RQ-1: Is viewer generated content being used, and does Designated Market Area make a difference in the use of viewer generated content?

RQ-2: Why are broadcast news organizations incorporating viewer generated content and does the reasoning vary depending on Designated Market Area?

RQ-3: What do news organizations believe the use of viewer generated content means to the overall journalism industry, and does DMA make a difference in that outlook?

## METHODS

The research in the literature review demonstrates there is no lack of user generated content being created or used throughout the cable news media. The current study is designed to survey broadcast news organizations' perceptions of viewer generated content, meaning specifically, Is viewer generated content being used, and does Designated Market Area make a difference in the use of viewer generated content? Why are broadcast news organizations incorporating viewer generated content and does the reasoning vary depending on Designated Market Area? and what do news organizations believe the use of viewer generated content means to the overall journalism industry, and does DMA make a difference in that outlook? While the current study addresses three major ideas, it also addresses the posited research questions and provides heuristic results that will aid in determining the current thoughts and opinions of news managers from across the United States.

The questionnaire was designed and executed through [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com). [Surveymonkey.com](http://Surveymonkey.com) is an online survey Web site that allows researchers to create and carry out a survey/questionnaire and store important data within the site but off site from the researcher's server. The site and questionnaire were created in April, 2010.

Prospective participants were managers in the news department of U.S. television stations in the 210 Neilson DMA assigned markets across the country. News managers are decisions makers who do not report news but who shape the focus of local news content. Newsroom managers include, but are not limited to, news directors, assistant news directors, executive producers, and new media managers. These potential survey respondents were located with the help of an updated news director database stored on the Web site [newsblues.com](http://newsblues.com). In addition to the news director database, the broadcast news station's Web

sites were also searched looking for other managers and their contact information. Once all contact information was compiled, perspective participants were contacted through work email addresses, first informing them of the purpose of the study and asking for their participation. The email also contained a direct link to the questionnaire. A total of 614 emails were sent to news managers requesting they visit the survey monkey Web site. Two weeks after the initial email was sent, a follow up email was sent asking participants to take part in the questionnaire if they had not previously done so. A third and final email reminder was sent one week prior to the survey being taken down to calculate results asking them to participate one final time.

As questionnaire participants entered the survey monkey Web site they were greeted with an informed consent form approved by Institutional Review Board that stated no identifying information would be collected and that the participant could opt out of the questionnaire at any time without penalty or loss. Once the participants agreed to the informed consent, the questionnaire appeared. There was a brief introduction which reiterated what the instrument was designed to discover. It asked for the honest opinions of the TV news decision makers. For example, “To be clear, I’m looking for your honest opinion. No one will ever be able to trace your answers back to you.” Such statements are included to help assure anonymity and combat survey reporting errors. It was critical to the endeavor because of the perception that the use of VCG in some newsroom is considered unprofessional.

The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions designed to answer the three research questions posed. The first ten questions were demographic and also gauged how often VGC was incorporated in the participant’s station during a newscast. For example participants

were asked, “How often does your station use viewer generated content during a news broadcast?” and, “Does your news organization use viewer generated content in other media produced by your organization?” The remaining 30 questions broke out into two parts--first, news organizations’ perceptions of viewer generated content, and second, the impact of VGC on the industry. The instrument was based on a five-point Likert Scale where 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= somewhat agree, 4= disagree, and 5= strongly disagree. The questions included, “Your news organization will continue to use viewer generated content. Your news organization will do more in the future to solicit viewer generated content? and, Viewer generated content will continue to hold an important place in your news organizations’ product?” The unit of analysis was the individual news manager’s beliefs, attitudes and intentions regarding viewer generated content.

The questionnaire was pre-tested by members of the WSAZ broadcast news station in Huntington, West Virginia. A paper version of the online questionnaire was distributed to employees, but not to managers to make sure the managers at the operation did not get a preview of the instrument. The pre-test instructions were not only to complete the questionnaire but also to mark or change any questions the participant found unclear or difficult to answer. A total of 17 questionnaires were returned to the researcher who then took the comments into consideration before distributing the revised document to the prospective sample.

While the sample was not random but purposive, the participants were selected because they are the most likely to handle VGC and consider its effects. Reporters and line producers did not receive the invitation to respond. Limiting the questionnaire to news directors, assistant news directors, executive producers and only other newsroom managers

ensured the results portrayed only the thoughts and opinions of those who make viewer generated content (VGC) decisions. Although most journalists have an opinion on the VGC phenomenon many of those thoughts, as shown by previous research, are tainted by the fact that some journalists believe that their jobs might be at risk depending on the incorporation of VGC. It was because of those thoughts the sample was narrowed to just the managers in the news department and not just anyone willing to take part in the research. The sample also stratified itself very closely to the market designations of Neilson, which assured that certain sized areas were not overly or under represented.

News organization managers were contacted immediately following the February Nielsen rating book in the winter of 2010. Such a time frame is not coincidental; by timing the questionnaire immediately following a ratings period, it was thought that stations may be more attuned to the needs of their viewers and may be more willing to experiment with VGC. The ratings period is often when stations are more willing to experiment and remain focused on the overall product that their station creates. It is the premise of the current study that if VGC were used at all, it would be best to evaluate that use after what are called sweeps periods but *before* news managers had time to formulate opinions on VGC based on their access to the ratings book that comes out a few weeks later. Due to the strict time frame --in between ratings periods-- the questionnaire was only available for a two- month period beginning March 4 and ending May 4.

Once the questionnaire was completed the findings were analyzed first using a non-statistical simple percentage calculation. The use of a five point Likert scale allowed the respondents to share their agreement or disagreement with the questions posed and gauged how strongly they felt about the message statements. The analysis of the results began by

coding each position in one questionnaire question and the scale using the following responses strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Using the Likert scale provided the researcher with ordinal data, which means one score is higher than another; however, use of the Likert also means it is impossible to gauge a scale for the differences as one could with interval data.

Once coded, the responses were grouped together to ensure the results of each research question were based on more than a single answer. For example to answer RQ1: Is viewer generated content being used, and does Designated Market Area make a difference in the use of viewer generated content? 11 questions were grouped together to gauge the amount of VGC involvement at the participant's news organization. Questions grouped to answer research question one included "Does your news organization use viewer generated content?" "How often does your station use viewer generated content during a news broadcast?" and "Does your news organization use viewer generated content in other media produced by your organization?" By incorporating the answers from several questionnaire questions the researcher had data that could be used for an analysis of variance. All three research questions had collections of similar responses behind them.

The answer to research question two was answered by grouping a total of seven questionnaire questions together to ascertain why broadcast news organizations incorporate viewer generated content and if the reasoning varies depending on Designated Market Area? The questions included "What do you believe is the main reason news organizations use viewer generated content?" "The main reason news organization use viewer generated content is to save money?" and "Your news organization's ratings are helped by using viewer

generated content?” A t-test was also performed to assess possible differences between viewer involvement and cost to increasing viewership.

The third research question was answered by grouping eight questions together – then further breaking the eight questions down into two groups in order to discover if VGC will remain in the content created by broadcast news organizations and if viewer generated content is good for the broadcast news industry. To answer the question whether VGC will remain in the content created by broadcast news organizations there were four questions grouped together including “Viewer generated content is the future of broadcast news?” “Viewer generated content is just a fad and will pass?” “You would suggest that struggling news organizations’ incorporate viewer generated content into their product?” and “Viewer generated content will continue to hold an important part in your news organizations product?”

Answering the second part, “Viewer generated content has no place being used in a news broadcast?” “Viewer generated content has no place in the news industry?” “Viewer generate content is transforming the news industry for the better?” and “Viewer generated content is demeaning the journalism industry as a whole?”

The current study also appropriately reported descriptive statistics, especially mode, or the most frequent response. This made the questionnaire results much easier to interpret. The results were also displayed in a frequency table showing the distribution of responses, including the percentages that agree and disagree with the given statements in a graphic.

## MANIPULATION

The current study incorporated analysis of variance to assess mean differences among five groups of DMAs—Markets 1-25 were group 1, Markets 26-50 were 2, 51-100 group 3, 100-150 were in group 4, and 151-210 were in group 5. An F-test was appropriate because the research questions asked whether differences among market designations existed. The parameters were set with  $p < .05$  and a 95% confidence interval to assure that any differences did not come about by chance. It is widely perceived among journalists that numerical market differences actually translate into radical differences in policies, resources, even news outlook. Given that perception, it was decided the search for actual differences would establish a baseline for further qualitative study—no matter the results. If differences were detected, the researcher would use two post-hoc tests, *t* and *Bonferroni* to evaluate the size and strength of the effects.

Answering questions about how news organizations perceive VGC allows the creators of the content to know whether it is being used and how news organizations perceive its effectiveness, once the results get back into their hands.

## RESULTS

The survey response rate was 12.86 percent, with 79 responses from the 614 emailed requests. The majority of the responses were from the leaders of the newsrooms; 75.9 percent of the completed surveys were answered by the news directors of broadcast news stations. The remaining response percentages were as follows: 7.6 percent executive producer, 7.6 percent managing editor, 3.8 percent assistant news director, 2.5 percent new media manager, 1.3 percent content brand manager, and 1.3 percent operations manager. The sample collected is also representative of all market sizes. The respondents were asked to report their Nielson DMA rank and of those who responded, the largest were those stations from 50 through 100 which accounted for more than 35 percent of the sample; however, each of the DMA rank categories, (210-150, 150-100, 100-50, 50-25, and 25-1), accounted for at least 10 percent of responses, meaning a relatively equal distribution was collected.

The first part of research question one about whether broadcast outlets did or did not use VGC was answered by simply asking survey participants, “Does your station use viewer generated content?” The answer was a resounding yes. Nearly 99 percent of respondents answered that their station uses viewer generated content, and all but one of the 79 surveys returned made the same claim. Broadcast news organizations are also incorporating VGC into their product in more ways than ever; of the 76 respondents that answered the question, “Does your news organization use viewer generated content in other media produced by your news organization?” only four respondents replied that their organization did not use viewer generated content in any form other than their news broadcasts.

Further examination of the research was conducted by examining the responses of the 11 questions. RQ 1 showed no statistically significant difference related to DMA [ $F(4,67) = .262, p > .05$ ]. To reiterate, 11 research questions including “Does your news organization use viewer generated content?” “How often does your station use viewer generated content during a news broadcast?” “Does your news organization use viewer generated content in other media produced by your organization?” were distilled to categories related to each research question posited.

The results were coded with the lowest possible rate of 9 and the highest possible rate of 48; the lower the rate the stronger the agreement to VGC being used by broadcast news organizations. (The numbers were arrived at by assessing the lowest self-report based on eight questions and the highest self report. No respondent actually scored at the highest or lowest level). The descriptive statistics show a mean of 20.46, a median of 20.00, and a mode of 20.00 indicating a relatively normal distribution. The standard deviation for the coded responses was 4. The variance was 15.96 with a range of 16.00.

As stated, the results were further examined by using an analysis of variance breaking down the statistics based on the Neilson DMA market rank reported by the news managers. The breakdown can be seen in Figure 1.0. The lowest standard deviation of 1.87 is in market rank 26-50. An ANOVA was used to ascertain any differences among the different markets. No statistically significant difference was found  $F(4,67) = .262, p > .05$ .

Figure 1.0

### Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: News organization of  
User Generated Content by market size

Market	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1-25	21.6250	3.37797	8
26-50	20.4444	1.87824	9
51-100	20.5000	4.38376	24
101-150	20.4375	4.78496	16
151-210	19.8000	3.98569	15
Total	20.4583	3.99538	72

Broadcast news stations are doing more than just using VGC—the majority of respondents said that they use it regularly, with 49 of the respondents saying that they use VGC in every news broadcast, or whenever it is available and appropriate. Broadcast news organizations are also willing to solicit VGC. The majority of respondents said their stations actively request that their viewers submit content for use. Of the 76 respondents who answered the question “Does your station request viewers send in content?” 71 respondents, or 93.4 percent, said they did so.

There were several questions designed to answer the second research question posed, “Why are broadcast news organizations incorporating viewer generated content, and does market size make a difference in those reasons?” Participants were asked, “What do you believe is the main reason the main reason news organizations use viewer generated content?” The questionnaire offered participants three choices: “it gets the viewer involved,” “lack of resources,” “cost,” or the ability to include their own option. Respondents answered in the majority that involvement was the key factor. Of the 66 respondents who responded to the question in the manner requested, 51 participants, or 77.3 percent said that involvement

was the main reason, for 12 respondents or 18.2 percent, lack of resources was the main reason, and cost was chosen as the main reason for using VGC by only three respondents, or 4.5 percent.

Another factor that could influence why broadcast organizations incorporate VGC into their product is an assumed increase in ratings, viewership, or both. Participants were asked, “You have seen an increase in viewership since your organization began using viewer generated content” Of the 71 participants who answered the five point Likert scale question, (1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree), 17 respondents or 23.9 percent agreed with the statement. The majority, 23 respondents or 33.4 percent, said that they somewhat agreed with the statement posed, while 21 responses or 29.6 percent participants disagreed with the statement. Six respondents or 8.5 percent strongly agreed with the statement posed, suggesting that they had seen an increase in viewership since their organization began incorporating VGC. However, four respondents or 5.6 percent indicated that they strongly disagreed with the statement. The average response was a 3.0, showing participants somewhat agree with the statement, “You have seen an increase in viewership since your organization began using viewer generated content.” The overall agreement was 59%.

“Your news organization’s ratings are helped by using viewer generated content,” was another statement posed. Seventy-three participants answered this Likert scale question. Only 4 respondents or 5.5 percent said that they strongly agreed that their ratings are helped by using VGC, 24 respondents or 32.9 percent said they agreed with the statement, 28 respondents or 38.4 percent said that they somewhat agreed with the given statement. Sixteen respondents or 21.9 percent said they disagreed with the statements, and only one

person or 1.4 percent said that they strongly disagreed with the given statement. Overall agreement was 77%.

There was a finding of no difference for RQ 2.  $F(4,67)=.567, p>.05$  – cost issues;  $F(4,67)=.839, p>.05$  – viewer involvement; and  $F(4,67)=1.682, p>.05$  – increasing/maintaining viewers. The responses to 11 questionnaire questions were coded into three separate categories, viewer involvement, cost issues, and increase/maintain viewers. Coding the responses into these three categories allowed for more specific statistical evidence supporting or detracting from the categories. There were 72 completed questionnaires with nine not completed. Viewer involvement was the most important reason given for using VGC with a mean of 7.96, a median of 8.00, and a mode of 9.00. The standard deviation was 1.81 and the variance was 3.28 with a range of 9.00. The second most important reason given by news managers for incorporating VGC into their product was to increase/maintain viewers. The mean for increasing/maintaining viewership was a 10.83, the median was 10.50 and the mode was 10.00. The standard deviation for viewership was a 2.95 with a variance of 8.70 and a range of 14.00. The last reason given for incorporating VGC into broadcast news was cost. The Mean for cost was an 11.36 with a median of 11.00 and a mode of 11.00. The standard deviation was 2.07 the variance was 4.29 and the range was 9.00. It is important to note that there was normal variance when analyzing both viewer involvement and cost issues but above average variance with increase/maintain viewers. The data is also normally distributed.

When the descriptive statistics are further broken down according to both categories for incorporating content and DMA rank there is little difference shown. The standard deviation in the category of cost issues in market 26-50 is only .97. An ANOVA confirmed

there was no statistically significant difference among markets for any of the three factors,  $F(4,67)=.567, p>.05$  – cost issues;  $F(4,67)=.839, p>.05$  – viewer involvement; and  $F(4,67)=1.682, p>.05$  – increasing/maintaining viewers. T-tests were also conducted in order to compare cost to viewer involvement and cost to increasing viewers. Both cost issues and increasing/maintaining viewers were significantly different from getting viewers involved as  $T(71)=13.94, p<.05$  and  $T(71)=8.27, p<.05$ , respectively. The descriptive statistics for both DMA and the three categories are offered in figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Market	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Cost Issues	1-25	11.8750	3.22656	8
	26-50	11.2222	.97183	9
	51-100	11.4167	1.74248	24
	101-150	11.6875	2.24258	16
	151-210	10.7333	2.21897	15
	Total	11.3611	2.07130	72
Viewer Involvement	1-25	8.2500	1.75255	8
	26-50	7.7778	1.48137	9
	51-100	8.3750	1.92946	24
	101-150	7.8750	1.50000	16
	151-210	7.3333	2.12692	15
	Total	7.9583	1.81106	72
Increase/Maintain Viewers	1-25	12.6250	3.66206	8
	26-50	11.1111	1.36423	9
	51-100	11.2500	2.86280	24
	101-150	10.2500	2.95522	16
	151-210	9.6667	3.08607	15
	Total	10.8333	2.95029	72

To answer research question three, “What do news organizations believe the use of viewer generated content means to the overall journalism industry and does market size make a difference in that outlook?” respondents were asked their thoughts on the future uses of VGC in broadcast news, along with their willingness to suggest its use to other stations. A statement posed in a five point Likert scale question asked respondents if, “Viewer generated content will continue to play an important part in your news organizations’ product?” Of the 72 respondents who answered, 19, or 26.4 percent, said they strongly agreed with the statement. More than 51 percent, or 37 people, said they agreed with the statement. Only two respondents disagreed, 2.8 percent, and no one strongly disagreed. Overall agreement was 77%.

To gauge how seriously news organizations were willing to invest time and money into the use of VGC, the questionnaire posed the statement, “Viewer generated content is just a fad and will pass. The responses were overwhelmingly supportive of VGC with only one respondent who agreed with the above statement, only 1.4 percent of the 74 respondents; there were no respondents who strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. Nearly 60 percent, or 44 respondents, said they strongly disagreed with the assertion that VGC is only a fad and will pass, while the remaining 29 respondents, or 39.2 percent, said they disagreed. The average response was a 4.57 on the one to five Likert scale representing the respondents, as a whole, disagree with the statement.

A third question was posed to learn what the managers in a news organization believed the use of viewer generated content means to the journalism industry. “Viewer generated content is transforming the news industry for the better.” Seventy-four respondents answered this question, with only 2 people or 2.7 percent saying they strongly agreed. The

majority of respondents—31, or 41.9 percent—said that they agreed with the statement and that the use of VGC is a positive move for the broadcast news industry. 25 respondents, or 33.8 percent, said that they somewhat agreed with the statement, 15 respondents or 20.3 percent said they disagreed with the statement, and only one person, a minute 1.4 percent, strongly disagreed with the statement. Overall agreement was 79%. The questions, when combined, show that news organizations believe VGC is not a fad and will continue to hold an important role in the broadcast news industry. It is also important to add news organizations do not feel that using VGC is in any way harming the news industry, in fact, news managers suggest the opposite suggesting VGC is transforming the news industry for the better.

Finally, RQ 3 was answered with a finding of no difference  $F(4,67)=1.30, p>.05$  . For VGC being good for the industry, the results were also not statistically significant  $F(4,67)=.180, p>.05$ . The findings were discovered through the grouping of eight research questions based on the 1 to 5 Likert scale answers for each question divided into two categories; VGC will stay, and VGC is good for the news industry. The lowest possible answer was an eight with the highest answer a 40. The midpoint for the data set was 24. There were 72 completed surveys and 7 incomplete. For the category of VGC staying, the mean was 11.73 with a median of 12 and a mode of 12. The standard deviation for this category was a 2.36 with a variance of 5.61 and a range of 11. The data set assessing whether VGC is good for the news industry had a mean of 16.82 a median of 17 and a mode of 17. The standard deviation was 1.34 with a variance of 1.79 and a range of 6. The data sets both showed normalcy. The descriptive statistics for both DMA and the two categories are offered in figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Market	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
VGC Stays	1-25	13.1250	1.72689	8
	26-50	11.6667	1.50000	9
	51-100	11.6400	2.23383	25
	101-150	12.0667	2.65832	15
	151-210	10.8667	2.82506	15
	Total	11.7361	2.36758	72
VGC is good for the industry	1-25	17.0000	1.30931	8
	26-50	17.0000	1.22474	9
	51-100	16.7600	1.09087	25
	101-150	16.8000	1.52128	15
	151-210	16.6000	1.63881	15
	Total	16.7917	1.32088	72

Again, an ANOVA was used to determine differences among market levels, and as with the two previous research questions, the results were not statistically significant  $F(4,67)=1.30, p>.05$ . For VGC being good for the industry, the results were also not statistically significant  $F(4,67)=.180, p>.05$ .

## DISCUSSION

In what would clearly be news to the news industry, television markets may not be much different after all, at least in the area of viewer generated content. Regarding VGC, Hazard, Kentucky and Los Angeles are apparently very much alike, in that the people in charge seem to be straining for a way to pull viewers along for the news ride. And they are using the same tools—the material viewers send in—to do it. The unspoken driving force in all this is that it works, though there is very little data to support the claim. The lead and second researcher are veterans of the television business, and both found the lack of differences astonishing. After all, Designated Market Area is the success ladder all journalists climb and they are schooled in the differences early in their careers. But, the data from the current study suggest a not so unexpected commonality among the 210 television markets in the U.S.—viewers matter, whether they are in Miami or Duluth. It appears television outlets believe material sent in by viewers is a cost-effective yet “touchy-feely” way of accomplishing that.

Consider the results of the first research question regarding differences in DMA and use. There is no difference. That means the largest and smallest television stations with the largest and smallest staffs are making editorial and content decisions based on what they think viewers want. Giving viewers what they want may make economic sense but one would think the practice would be concentrated in a particular market break out or operation. The ANOVA results, however, showed no movement anywhere across a fairly representative sample of this country’s TV outlets. Such a statement carries even more weight because it comes from those who alone have the power to open or close the floodgates on the “me

journalism” rage. In retrospect, the finding of no difference may not be surprising given the ubiquitous nature of quality inexpensive video cameras. But, that news directors of all stripes and pay grades treat the phenomenon mostly the same gives one pause.

The Republic was founded on notions of an informed electorate. Since the maturation of the Fourth Estate—the Press—Americans have come to rely on the news media for decision making information in a complex democracy. It is usually thought that news has a sacred trust to give viewers what they need to make good decisions. Need and want are sometimes very different things. In the pursuit of ratings, which is an additional finding of the current study, news directors will replace what their training tells them viewers need with pictures of grandmother’s birthday or other such non-news. True, some VGC is news video that journalists simply cannot reach in time or across distances they cannot span, but the phenomenon is much more far-reaching than that. And nobody is asking the question “Is what we want also good for us?” Certainly, no one can blame the news directors for either answering the question the way they think they should or justifying their practices. Faced with tight budgets and falling viewership, they probably perceive their role as pragmatic leaders who use VGC for what it can deliver. The researchers would likely do the same.

Organizations like SPJ and Poynter have nobly stepped up to the plate to train this group of wanna be’s. The old adage, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” seems to apply here. But, training a trickle to behave in a torrent may not serve much purpose. Somehow, someday the people with cameras have begun to equate themselves with journalists, and with the aiding and abetting of CNN and the respondents in the current study, their thinking has a payoff. Some would argue the phenomenon observed in the current study is the equivalent of the inmates running the asylum. If perception is reality, then it may be true that people who

have been trained in other things are as well qualified to cover news as those who trained in journalism schools. In the end, the current study is noteworthy for what it did not find rather than what it did. And that is this—perhaps, news managers view all content as mostly the same. It is not that they have given up the careful pursuit of news. Witnessing the wall to wall coverage of the Gulf oil spill evidences that. It is just that they are enlisting the news consumers to generate more and more of the material.

The results also show that getting viewers involved seems to be the main reason for incorporating VGC into broadcast news production. Moreover, the results suggest lack of resources and lower cost are *not* determining variables in the equation. Finally, the current study demonstrates, according to broadcast television newsroom managers, VGC will continue to play an important role in the news product created. Although the answers themselves are relatively straightforward, they have, in turn, generated more questions about VGC, its use (or lack thereof), and its future. To the issue of DMA a second time, the offerings for why VGC was incorporated did not differ appreciably from the biggest TV newsroom to the smallest.

One unanswered question the researchers could not have anticipated was the location of the one station that answered it does not use VGC at the news organization. Because the questionnaire was anonymous, there is nothing that can be traced back to one respondent—unfortunate given the surprise find. The questionnaire shows the respondent who said her station does not use VGS is a news director who works in a station with a Neilson DMA rank of 50 to 100. Unfortunately, the respondent chose not to answer any other questions on the questionnaire; therefore, it is not possible to gauge their personal thoughts or beliefs

surrounding VGC, or why their station has chosen not to incorporate it into their product. The current study may suffer from a self selection bias as a result.

Aside from the one news director whose organization chooses not to incorporate viewer generated content, the use of VGC not only appears to be widespread but frequent. News organization managers responded saying “VGC is incorporated in their news content on a regular basis with some in every news broadcast.” This statement by broadcast news managers suggests there is no shortage of VGC being created and submitted to broadcast news organizations, and broadcast news organizations are willing and able to incorporate the work of viewers into their content. The fact that news organizations are provided the content to incorporate into their daily news broadcasts is important to note. In short, viewers appear to be willing participants, perhaps, seduced by the notion that they, too, could “be on TV.” However, the pathology of collective narcissism is not the purview of the current study.

The main reason news organizations are incorporating user generated content, according to the results of the current study, is the desire to get the viewers involved in the news process. The majority of respondents, or 77.3 percent, said that involvement was the main reason for incorporating VGC into their news product, more important than added resources or cost. The results of the first research question could mean news managers agree that with the findings of Terry Flew in his article “Creativity, Cultural Studies, and Services Industries.” Flew found that consumers, “are no longer satisfied with the gatekeeper model that has structured the industry for so long” (Flew, 2004, p. 182). The results of the questionnaire could suggest that news directors are aware of the changing dynamic of their viewers.

Viewer generated content is nothing new; however, the recent push of terminology could lead some to believe that the current usage of VGC is only a fad and will not continue; however, that is simply not the case – according to the results of the current study. More than three quarters of the respondents, when asked if “Viewer generated content will continue to hold an important part in you news organizations’ product,” said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The answer to this question alone represents strong feelings from the news organizations’ managers toward VGC, suggesting continued usage will occur.

The use of VGC by broadcast news organizations is not limited to news broadcasts; instead, it is being incorporated through several other media produced by the news organization including Web sites, blogs, web-only newscasts, and email alerts. Only four of 76 respondents who answered the question choose not to use VGC outside of the news broadcast. This would suggest that broadcast news organizations are treating VGC the same as content produced by their station and are not using this content in only one part of their broadcast or Web site. This could also be adding to the amount of content that news organizations receive; as long as the viewers who submit content are able to see their content being used, they may be more willing to collect and submit more content to the organization.

Based on the data, there is little doubt that VGC is being used and incorporated in broadcast newsrooms, but why? To understand why, the current study asked news managers if they have seen either an increase in ratings or an increase in viewership as a result of VGC usage. The response from news managers was not only clear, but was a bit of a surprise. While the average response from news managers showed that they somewhat agreed with the given statements the responses were not nearly as positive as expected.

Another interesting observation was even though news organizations are incorporating VGC into their product and are continuing to look for more ways to do so, news managers do not feel as if it is enough. The questionnaire asked respondents if they believed news organizations overuse viewer generated content; only 14 of the 74 respondents said that they agreed that VGC is being overused. This would suggest that news managers will continue to look for more ways to incorporate it and continue to request more content to be sent to their news organization. As long as news managers believe more content could be used, there is a good chance that there will be new opportunities created to incorporate content that has been created by news viewers.

Although the answers to the research questions are clear, there are some questions that remain; for example, why are news organizations utilizing viewer generated content when there is no obvious good (increased ratings, or viewership) resulting from the decision? News managers must see some good coming from VGC as nearly 90 percent of respondents said they would suggest the use of VGC to a struggling news organization. So what do these managers see as the benefits of using VGC? If it does not rest in ratings, viewership, or even loyalty what do they see as the benefits?

A qualitative study of user generated content UGC (which is essentially the same as viewer generated content) of newspapers conducted by Pieter Ugille and Steve Paulussen (2008) found a “sluggish” move incorporating user generated content into the newsrooms of Belgian newspaper company Concentra Media. The current study shows there is no longer, if there ever was, a “sluggish” move to incorporate user generated content into broadcast news organizations in the United States. Judging from the questionnaire responses received,

instead of a “sluggish” move as suggested by Ugille and Paulussen, there appears to be a push to find new and better ways to include the content and receive more of it.

Broadcast news organizations are not attempting to hide the fact that they are using VGC, either; in fact, they are actively pursuing more content for use in their product. A large percentage, 93.4, of respondents say that their news organization actively requests viewers send in content to be used in their broadcasts. News managers’ responses show that these requests for content come in many forms. The majority of the requests for content come during a news broadcast and online; however, some news organizations employ other sources including, but not limited to promos, pictures, web only broadcasts, email and text messaging, and social networking. The willingness of broadcast news organizations not only to include VGC but also to actively pursue this information suggests there is no “sluggish” move to incorporate the content.

Since broadcast news organizations are not afraid to admit they are using VGC on a regular basis, why are they incorporating this type of content into their product and what are they gaining from using it? To discuss the second research question, it is important to understand what drives news organizations. As with any business model, money fuels the action in the newsroom. Revenue in broadcast news organizations is based primarily on advertising, which is determined mainly by ratings. Another reason that broadcast news organizations could be willing to incorporate VGC into their product is a scary realization for journalists discovered by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. In an article discussing the future of journalism,

“The leaders of America’s newsrooms are nonetheless worried about the future.

Fewer than half of all those surveyed are confident their operations will survive

another 10 years—not without significant new sources of revenue. Nearly a third believe their operations are at risk in just five years or less. And many blame the problems not on the inevitable effect of technology but on their industry’s missed opportunities” (Pew Research Centers, 2010).

As long as news executives and managers are unsure about the future and concerned about their survival, they may be more willing to incorporate new content that could help their organization hold on longer. The problem that arises, according to news managers, is that the use of VGC is in no way helping to keep the station running and making more money.

Another issue Pieter Ugille and Steve Paulussen found when researching user generated content in Belgian newspapers was “Concerns are raised about the low newsworthiness, the personal tone and the subjective bias of user contributions. All journalists say that moderating user generated content and retaining control over the news selection are essential to keep the standards high” (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p.38). To determine if this feeling is held by broadcast news organizations in the U.S. the current study asked if “Viewer generated content has no place in the news industry.” Of those who responded 83.8 percent strongly disagreed and the remaining 16.2 percent disagreed. That apparently means that of the 74 respondents who answered the question, all believed, at least to some extent, that VGC belongs in the news industry and should play a part in the final product provided to their viewers. Narrowing the question down to their most important money maker, the current study asked whether, “Viewer generated content has no place being used during a news broadcast,” and the results were much the same. The overwhelming majority of respondents -- 78.4 percent -- said they strongly disagreed with the

statement and another 20.3 percent said they disagreed. Only one news manager agreed with the statement saying they somewhat agreed.

The final statement posed to news managers was “Viewer generated content is transforming the news industry for the better.” Only 16 of the 74 respondents disagreed with the statement, with the majority of news managers -- 41.9 percent – agreeing, instead. The average Likert response was a 2.76, meaning the average respondent agreed (2) or somewhat agreed (3).

The data suggest news managers have a positive outlook on VGC and are willing to incorporate it into their product. Many think that by incorporating VGC, they are actually having a positive influence on the news industry and they are in no way harming it. To ensure that the question about transforming the news industry for the better was, in fact, the way news managers actually felt, the instrument presented a negative, “Viewer generated content is demeaning the journalism industry as a whole.” While respondents held to their positive views, even when confronted with a negative, 3 respondents, or 4.1 percent, did say they agreed with the statement. The majority, 63.3 percent strongly disagreed. On the one to five Likert scale, the average response was 4.45, meaning respondents were strongly opposed. The data also suggest something of a trend in that news managers actually believe VGC is good for the industry, which is contrary to the findings of some other research..

Given that news managers overwhelmingly believe VGC is helping the industry, the question of whether it will continue to be used is already answered. News managers were asked if they see viewer generated content as a fad that will pass and the results were astounding. Only one news manager felt that VGC was a fad, while the other 73 thought VGC was no such thing. In fact, a majority, nearly 60 percent, strongly disagreed with the

statement. The average on the Likert scale was a 4.57, showing a strong tendency to disagree with the statement that “VGC is nothing more than a fad.”

The idea that VGC is not a fad also shows throughout the responses. News managers appear to be taking VGC extremely seriously and, according to the results, will continue to take VGC seriously in the future. Participants were asked if their news organizations will continue to use VGC and respondents said yes in spades. The average response was a 1.59, meaning that the average response was between strongly agree and agree. As long as newsroom managers feel this strongly about VGC, the possibilities for its expanded use are endless. When managers were asked if their news organizations will do more in the future to solicit VGC, the results were the same. Only five managers disagreed with doing more to solicit VGC; the rest agreed that they would more actively solicit product.

The results suggest that broadcast news would, in a sense, eventually become VGC, but that is not a real possibility, according to newsroom managers. Managers were asked to respond to the statement that VGC is the future of broadcast news. And here, they were split in their responses; 24 respondents said they agreed with the statement and VGC was the future, while another 26 disagreed. It is this question that brings the findings of Ugille and Paulussen back into the spotlight. The two European researchers found that newsroom and journalists’ opinions were holding user generated content back. The question in the current study could have had the same effect. If managers were willing to say that VGC was the future, they might worry they were putting their own jobs and livelihoods on the line. There is little doubt that newsrooms and news content are changing. And while viewer generated content is, based on this research, playing an important role in that change, it is unclear if news managers are simply unwilling to admit it right now. That makes the future of VGC a

little less clear. In other words, news managers may begin to share the views of their reporting staffs regarding the quality of the content, and circumstances may change as a result. Given news management's zeal over VGC, however, that seems unlikely right now.

The current study is also telling in that it revealed the incorporation of VGC was not based on any type of solid market research. No focus group made its wishes clear, either.. The average response to the statement about research was 3.25, falling between somewhat agree and disagree. This begs the question why did news directors begin incorporating the content at all? The responses suggest most news organizations just started feeding content to air or rebroadcast without really checking for data to support the move. Given that most advertising campaigns do not even insert certain words into their commercial without first running them by a focus group, this rush to use VGC is something of a conundrum. How can any organization stake its future on an untested premise? At the current rate, the future content of the news could be increasingly up to viewers and how willing they are to send in different types of material. In such a scenario, there would be an eventual change of hands where the power of the newsroom no longer resides with the gatekeepers but with the consumers ... who also provide the content. Such a power shift would allow them to decide what should and should not be added to the finished news broadcast. As stated in the discussion about decision making authority, such a move might not serve the interests of the country.

To sum up the above paragraphs, 1) there is apparently very little research to support the use of VGC, 2) ratings are not the stated reason among respondents for its use, and 3) increased viewership is not really a concern, either. Simply put, news managers think or perceive that they are getting an edge on their competitors by getting viewers involved and

using what they send in. The question is how is that measured? When asked if news managers felt that using VGC was putting them ahead of their competitors, only 12 of the 73 respondents disagreed with the statement, meaning the majority believe that incorporating content produced by their viewers is making a difference and putting them ahead. This raises the same question as before, how do they know that? The news managers' agreement with the statement could reflect added resources and a quicker response time that comes from viewers who were already on the scene of news rather than sending a crew from the station, or it could reflect the fact that viewers enjoy seeing their content on a news broadcast. Whatever the case, it is difficult to assess.

News managers think that overall, viewers do enjoy seeing content that they produced on television. In fact, only two news managers disagreed with the statement that viewers enjoy seeing their content on television. The view must be shared by the viewers themselves – at least to some extent – otherwise, there would be no such content for news organizations to use. Since this is not the problem, the viewers must get some gratification out of seeing their content on television. As long as news organizations are willing to incorporate VGC and viewers are able to see their work with the work of professionals, there is reason to continue to create the content and submit it to the news organizations for incorporation into their final product.

Another important point is that news managers believe VGC is easily distinguished from the professional content is produced by their news organization. This may be the perception for two reasons. One, the news organization makes it clear to their viewers by informing them what they are seeing is VGC, two the news managers are certain the content that is produced by their organization is superior to the content which is produced by their

viewers. If the latter option is the case and news managers do not believe the content is equal to that produced by the station, are news organizations willing to reduce the quality of their product simply to incorporate content produced by their viewers? Whatever the reason, it remains clear that news organizations are willing to incorporate the external product into their own. While few news organizations are going as far as KFTV in Santa Rosa, which in 2007 laid off most of its news staff and is now asking the community to help provide local coverage, most are asking the community to help cover regular news. It may be that news managers want more content and are willing to look for new ways to incorporate the content into their product. What is not clear is whether they are willing to sacrifice the work of their news organization to fulfill their desire for VGC.

The research portrays VGC as a win-win scenario for both the news organizations and the viewers who submit the content. Broadcast news stations gain additional content that can serve as stand-alone news or simply as a supplement to work already completed by the news organization. At the same time, viewers are given the satisfaction of their content being seen by thousands of people. Viewers who are willing to create content also get the satisfaction of having an impact on the people watching their work, all while getting a glimpse of how the news business works.

To repeat the most unexpected finding, Nielson DMA rank had no measurable effect on the results. Whether the news managers worked in small or large markets, the results did not show much deviation at all. VGC is being used. The process by which it is being used, as well as the reasoning behind its usage do not change based on market size. The results were also clear, no matter the manager -- whether the leader of the newsroom, news director, or an executive producer. All newsroom managers seemed to agree regarding VGC.

Because the DMA ranking of news organizations did not play a role, it becomes apparent that the decision to incorporate VGC is not based on cost or on resources, but, instead, is based on another reason-- simply to get viewers involved.

The current study has provided tentative answers to several questions regarding the current state of VGC in the broadcast news industry. While other questions remain, there is now at least a start to the study of this ever changing form of content. While content created by the users of media is not a new idea, and has been around since the beginning of journalism, it has clearly evolved into a form that allows media users actually to take part in an industry which has an impact on millions of people. Viewer generated content is providing a future of unlimited possibility for both broadcast news organizations and the viewers who are now active participants in the news gathering process.

While the future is always unclear, as long as technology continues to place equipment in the hands of those who were once merely consumers and news organizations are willing to continue the mindset of incorporating content produced by viewers, the future looks bright for VGC. News managers have suggested that not only are they going to continue incorporating VGC, but they are also going to be looking for more and different opportunities to incorporate the content. In addition, by stating news organizations will do more to solicit VGC in the future, news organizations are willing to devote precious time and energy to receive more content, suggesting they are planning on allowing VGC to play an important, perhaps even larger, role in the future of broadcast news. The fact that news organizations are willing to devote their own time and resources to solicit more content shows the commitment of broadcast news organizations to VGC.

## LIMITATIONS

An online questionnaire was used to conduct this research. Although the sample was purposive and designed to examine the views and opinions of the managers in the newsroom, the response rate was not as initially anticipated; expanding the survey would have allowed for more input from journalists working with VGC as opposed to the decision makers. Additionally, since journalists are not as busy as the managers on a day to day basis the response rate probably would have increased. Another limitation was the research tool used. Collecting information via a questionnaire, by definition, comes with limitations. The information serves only as a snapshot, and this topic in particular is changing all the time.

One of the most difficult aspects of this research was finding the contact information, email addresses specifically, for the newsroom managers. The information was not easily found on the news organizations' Web sites. Due to the difficulty in finding the contact information, there were some people who were not asked to participate in the survey. The failure to contact all news managers was in no way intentional; and became an unanticipated and unintended obstacle.

Another limitation could be the very reason for conducting this research. When potential participants received the email asking for their participation it stated, "The research is being conducted by Dr. Christopher Swindell and Chris Atkins of Marshall University as part of a masters' thesis." Disclosing the research as part of a master's student thesis may have, to some, seemed like research that was not as credible as other scholarship and as a result they may have decided not to take part in the questionnaire.

Although the use of VGC in newsrooms is obvious at this point and the concept is nothing new, the future of this content is unclear. While this questionnaire was designed to gauge current usage, it is difficult to infer what the future holds for VGC. The results speak for themselves; yet, with all the technological advances the future is unclear for everyone in a business based on technology. It could work in favor of more VGC or against it.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The current study is designed to serve as a starting point for more scholarly research to be conducted on this developing topic. There are several questions that this research has brought to the forefront. The first topic for further research would be asking news organizations' when they began using VGC and what the reasoning behind incorporating this content was. While some researchers such as Ugille and Paulussen noted a "sluggish" move to incorporate UGC, it does not appear that is the case within broadcast news organizations; however, without asking managers when, why, and how quickly the incorporation occurred, it is impossible to know if the beginnings of VGC incorporation were "sluggish" or not.

Another research question that would be interesting to answer would focus on how much time news organizations are willing to devote to VGC when it comes to an actual news broadcast. It would be easy for news managers to answer that they incorporate the content into every news broadcast, but how much time they actually devote would help researchers understand how seriously news managers are taking this form of content.

The question of how by incorporating VGC news managers have put their product in jeopardy also comes into play. While it might appear that a statement about VGC is not demeaning to the journalism industry, it would be interesting to discover the standards by which broadcast news organization decide when and how to air VGC. Does any submitted

content, whether a picture or video clip, make it on the air or is there some quality standard that must be met before it is able to be broadcast? Answering this question would help future researchers understand the process by which VGC is incorporated and the extent to which news organizations control the flow of information.

The current study also suggests the need for a longitudinal study beginning immediately and continuing for some period of time to track the changes in habits and in patterns. Such a study would serve many purposes including how technology impacts the news organizations and how the use of VGC is changing over time. It could also provide answers to how news organizations respond to pressures from the viewers, if the more content received means more content used and if the usage guidelines change over time.

A content analysis might also be a good option for conducting future research. Focusing on only a few stations or even an entire market would aid researchers in understanding how the content is being incorporated and the decision making process behind that incorporation. Forming a relationship with the stations could allow a clearer picture of the news process and see what the real reasoning behind its incorporation is.

VGC plays a commanding role in the current newsroom—though the degree and scope of that role remains unclear. Whatever the case, the nexus of technology with viewers (who have been conditioned or otherwise believe they deserve to be on TV) and news managers (who feed their predilections) has created a tsunami of content. The real question remains—does using it mean we're servicing the democracy or hurting it, one video image at a time?

## APPENDIX 1

### Your Thoughts about User-Generated Content

---

News outlets everywhere are increasingly turning to video and story content shot, written, or edited by people other than employees. I want to know what your news organization's perceptions of that content are ... and what you think user-generated material means to your product and the journalism craft. To be clear, I'm looking for your honest opinion. No one will ever be able to trace your answers back to you. Many thanks.

#### 1. What is your title?

- News Director
- Assistant News Director
- Executive Producer

Other (please specify)

#### 2. What is the Nielsen DMA rank of your station?

- 1-25
- 25-50
- 50-100
- 100-150
- 150-210

#### 3. Does your station use viewer generated content?

- Yes
- No

#### 4. How often does your station use viewer generated content during a news broadcast?

- Every news broadcast
- Whenever it is available
- A couple times a week
- A couple times a month
- We never use viewer submitted content

#### 5. Does your news organization use viewer generated content in other medium produced by your organization? Check all that apply.

- Web

- Web only newscast
- Blogs
- Email alerts
- We don't use it outside of the newscast

Other (please specify)

**6. Is it your stations policy to disclose viewer submitted news? If so how do you disclose it, check all that apply.**

- We do not disclose that information to our viewers
- Super
- Anchor informs viewer

Other (please specify)

**7. Does your station request viewers send in content?**

- Yes
- No

**8. If you answered yes to the previous question, what medium do you use to request viewer content? Check all that apply.**

- During a news broadcast
- Online
- During a webcast
- Through email or text messaging

Other (please specify)

**9. How do you believe your audience perceives viewer generated content?**

- The same as all other content
- Better because someone like them did it
- Not as good because it is not the work of the news organization

**10. What do you believe is main reason news organizations' reason for using viewer generated content?**

- It gets the viewers involved
- Lack of resources
- Cost

The following 30 questions will be evaluated on a 1 to 5 scale asking the participants if they strongly agree with the question being asked (1) or strongly disagree (5).

**News organizations' perceptions of viewer generated content:**

11. Viewer generated content has no real impact on the news industry right now?
12. Viewer generated content is the future of broadcast news?
13. Your viewers enjoy seeing viewer generated content?
14. Viewer generated content is the same as news produced by your organization?
15. Viewers are able to decipher between viewer submitted content and content produced by your station?
16. News organizations' do a good job of informing their viewers the content is viewer generated?
17. News organizations' over use viewer generated content?
18. News organizations' use viewer generated content because it is cheaper?
19. Viewer generated content has no place being used during a news broadcast?
20. Viewer generated content has no place in the news industry?
21. The main reason news organizations' use viewer generated content is to save money?
22. News organizations' that use viewer generated content are cultivating an active audience?
23. Viewer generated content is just a fad and will pass?
24. Viewer generated content is transforming the news industry for the better?
25. Viewer generated content is demeaning the journalism industry as a whole?

**What does Viewer generated content mean to the industry:**

26. Your news organization's ratings are helped by using viewer generated content?
27. Your news organization will continue to use viewer generated content?
28. Your news organization will look for new ways to incorporate viewer generated content?
29. Using viewer generated content helps your news organization cultivate an active audience?

30. News organizations' that do not incorporate viewer generated content are being left behind?
31. Your news organization will do more in the future to solicit viewer generated content?
32. Your news organization uses proper screening techniques to ensure the information is correct?
33. It is your organizations' policy to confirm viewer generated content with the proper authorities?
34. Viewers that submit content to your news organization are loyal viewers that will not watch competitors in your market?
35. Your organizations' use of viewer generated content is based on previous research?
36. You have seen an increase in viewership since your organization began using viewer generated content?
37. You have received positive feedback since using viewer generated content?
38. You feel that using viewer generated content is putting you station ahead of your competitors?
39. You would suggest that struggling news organizations' incorporate viewer generated content into their product?
40. Viewer generated content will continue to hold an important part in you news organizations' product?

## Bibliography

- Associated Press. (2006, October 10). Google buys YouTube for \$1.65 billion. *MSNBC U.S. Business*, Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15196982/>
- Bausch, S., & Han, L. (2006). User-generated content drives half of U.S. top 10 fastest. *Nielsen//NetRatings*, Retrieved from [http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/PR\\_060810.PDF](http://www.nielsen-online.com/pr/PR_060810.PDF)
- Blumler, J. G., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2003). We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information. *The Media Center*, Retrieved from [http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we\\_media.pdf](http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf)
- Brown, F. (2005). 'Citizen' journalism is not professional journalism. *Quill*, 93(6), 42.
- Burns, E. (2006, May 30). Pew: nearly 50 mm Americans create web content. *ClickZ*, Retrieved from <http://www.clickz.com/3609461>
- Citizen Journalism. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon*. Retrieved February 01, 2010, from Dictionary.com website: [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/citizen\\_journalism](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/citizen_journalism)
- CNN. (2007, August 2). *I-report turns one year old*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/08/01/ireport.first.year/>
- Deuze, M. (2006). Collaboration, participation and the media. *New Media & Society*. pp. 691-698.

- Dokoupil, T. (2008, March 6). Is User-generated content out? *Newsweek*, Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/119091>
- Domingo, D. (2008). 'Interactivity in the daily routines of online newsrooms: Dealing with an uncomfortable myth,' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13: 680-704.
- Effron, M. (2008, July 21). Broadcast Journalism Not Dead, Just Changing. *Television Week*, p. 9.
- Eltringham, M. (2006, April 11). Citizen Journalists Challenge BBC. *BBC NewsWatch*, Retrieved from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid\\_4900000/newsid\\_4900400/4900444.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid_4900000/newsid_4900400/4900444.stm)
- Flew, T. (2004). Creativity, cultural studies, and services industries. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. 1(2), 176-193.
- Gillmore, D. (2004). *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.
- Guosong, S. (2009). Understanding the appeal of user-generated media: A uses and gratification perspective. *Internet Research*, 19(1), 7-25.
- Horrigan, J.B. (2007). Broadband: What's all the fuss about? *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2007/BroadBand%20Fuss.pdf.pdf>
- iReport. (2009). *Hi! you're new here, right?*. Retrieved from <http://www.ireport.com/>

- Lenhart, A., & Madden, L. (2005). Teen content creators and consumers. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, Retrieved from [http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2005/PIP\\_Teens\\_Content\\_Creation.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2005/PIP_Teens_Content_Creation.pdf)
- Littlejohn, S. W. (1999). *Theories of human communication* (6th ed.). Albuquerque, NM: Wadsworth Publishing, 351-354.
- Malone, Michael. (2009, June 8). Hearst-argyle wants 'u' to report. *Broadcasting & Cable*, Retrieved from [http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/278463-Hearst\\_Argyle\\_Wants\\_U\\_to\\_Report.php](http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/278463-Hearst_Argyle_Wants_U_to_Report.php)
- Marshall, J. (2005). Citizen journalism continues to surge. *Quill*, 93(8), 14-16.
- Nielson Reports. (2007, September 6). Obama leads race for web site visitors, Nielsen reports. *Nielson Reports*, Retrieved from [http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/news/news\\_releases/2007/september/Obama\\_Leads\\_Race\\_for\\_Web\\_Site\\_Visitors\\_\\_Nielsen\\_Reports](http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/news/news_releases/2007/september/Obama_Leads_Race_for_Web_Site_Visitors__Nielsen_Reports)
- Nielson Reports. (2009, May 14). YouTube maintains top ranking by total streams and Hulu grows 490 percent year-over-year, according to Nielsen Online. *Nielson Reports*, Retrieved from [http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/news/news\\_releases/2009/may/youtube\\_maintains](http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/news/news_releases/2009/may/youtube_maintains)
- Ornebring, H. (2008). The Consumer as producer—of what? *Journalism Studies*, 9(5), 771-785.
- Paulussen, S., & Ugille, P. (2008). User generated content in the newsroom: Professional and organisational constraints on participatory journalism. *Westminster Papers in Communication & Culture*, 5(2), 24-41.

- Pew research center's Project for excellence in journalism. (2010). *News Executives, Skeptical of Government Subsidies*, Retrieved from [http://www.journalism.org/analysis\\_report/news\\_leaders\\_and\\_future](http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/news_leaders_and_future)
- Potter, D. (2007). You Witness News. *American Journalism Review*, 29(2), 66.
- Powers, W. (2007, August 4). Crowd Control. *National Journal*, 50.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2006). The State of the News Media 2006. *State of the News media*. Retrieved (2009, October 9) from <http://www.stateofthemedias.org/2006/>
- Prosumer. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon*. Retrieved February 16, 2010, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/prosumer>
- Rosenblum, M. (2008, Winter). Video news: The videojournalist comes of age. *Niemann Reports*, 75-77.
- Shields, M. (2007). CNN Goes Virtual. *MediaWeek*, 17(39), 6.
- Singer, J. (2006) Stepping Back from the Gate: Online newspaper editors and the coproduction of content in campaign 2004, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 83(2), 265-280.
- Wales, J., & Weckerle, A. (2009). Most define user-generated content too narrowly. *Advertising Age*, 80(11), 38.
- Whitney, D. (2007). Networks build tech expertise. *Television Week*, 26(12), 12.

## RESUME

520 GREEN ACRES CIRCLE • SPENCER, WV 25276  
 PHONE (304) 939-0623 • E-MAIL ATKINS41@MARSHALL.EDU

## CHRISTOPHER L. ATKINS

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

---

- One year advising experience at Marshall University including knowledge of university policies and current curriculum requirements
- Three years of classroom experience with college students and, one year as an instructor for Strategies for Academic Success Course
- Membership on First Year Experience and Overnight Orientation committees
- Member of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

---

7/2009—Present Marshall University  
*Graduate Assistant: University College*

- Responsible for advising students, teaching university studies course and UNI peer mentoring course; active member on multiple student success and retention committees

8/2008—Present Marshall University  
*Co-teacher: SOJMC*

- Responsible for teaching a television reporting course; executive producer of MU-Report, a student produced newscast.

11/2006—Present WSAZ-TV  
*Photojournalist/Producer*

- Responsible for writing and organizing newscasts; communicating in a clear and concise manner with viewers; shooting news content.

Summer 2005 -2008 City of Spencer  
*Summer Recreational Director*

- Responsible for grant writing, pool finances, lifeguard scheduling, and coordinating and implementing all community summer recreational programs.

