

Citizen journalism: how democratic is it?

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As I flew over the Canadian ice-pack on my way to a new media [conference](#) (oops, a bit less ice now thanks to long-haul travel...) I finally get the chance to catch up on some reading. So I delve in to the further reaches of the [Pew Report](#) on American Media. It is a massive annual survey of all aspects of US media. When you turn to the bit on citizen journalism it has some interesting thoughts based upon a research survey of 25 news sites and 39 blogs.

Now the traditional definition of Citizen Journalism is that it should be 'amateur' and , well, that's about it really. The rest is up to you. The [survey](#) found incredible diversity but it also found that Citizen Journalism can be even less accessible to the public than mainstream media. Now Citizen Journalism tends to see itself as a force for democracy, which I think it is. But it is not a particularly interactive form. It is very hard to post material on most of these sites. Few of them allow email contact or even comments. And very few have any way of contacting the producers. This is what the [Pew](#) researchers conclude:

"A persistent criticism of traditional news media is that they tend to involve very strong gatekeepers and allow non-staffers to publish only the occasional letter to the editor. Indeed, one idealized element of citizen journalism is the idea of allowing individuals to publish whatever they want. The strong gatekeeper approach among traditional media has also been identified as a justification for the development of blogs, primarily because with blogs a traditional news organization-type gatekeeper would no longer control the stream of information and opinions. Blogging allows citizens to open up the marketplace of ideas and contribute their opinions and ideas. Other than allowing visitor comments about posted material, however, the majority of people running the sites analyzed here tended to be strong gatekeepers."

With mainstream media becoming ever more interactive it is clear that the Citizen Journalists need to look to their democratic laurels and start embracing ideas about accountability, transparency and accessibility themselves. Much more on this kind of subject from Los Angeles and [Media Re:Publica](#) conference after I have touched down. (I will plant a tree, honest).

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