

# How Online Content Creators Use, Engage In, and Perceive Social Media

**The 2011 Cision-Newhouse School  
Digital Influencers Survey**

**The Objective**

In mid-2011, Cision, the leading provider of PR software, services and tools for the marketing and public relations industry, and faculty members of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University surveyed over 1,000 North American digital influencers – including journalists, writers, bloggers, editors, marketing, PR and other communicators – who create social media content. The objective was to gain insights into:

- How social media has changed the way they work
- Their opinion of the credibility of social media, and the strengths, weaknesses and characteristics of social media and social content contributors
- The best ways for PR and marketing professionals to reach digital influencers using social media and other methods

The research team developed a questionnaire that consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions. Participants were randomly selected from the Cision influencer database. Here is a summary of the major findings of the survey.

**The Respondents: Both Journalists and “Other Content Creators”**

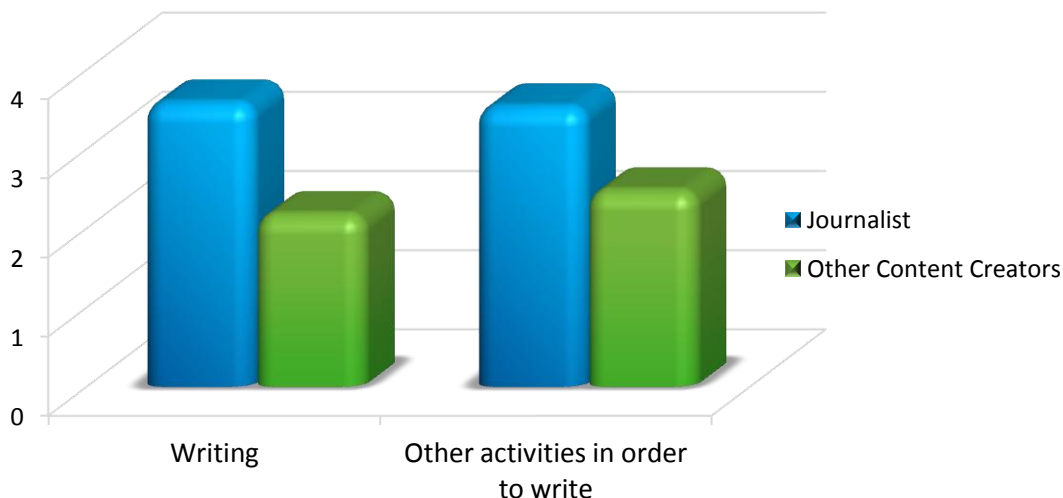
Every digital influencer who was surveyed reported that they contribute to “social media, a blog, or the online versions of traditional media sites.” The survey then allowed respondents to select whether or not they considered themselves journalists.

Just over two-thirds of respondents called themselves journalists. However, 32% declined to identify themselves as such. This segment – grouped here as other content creators (or “others”) – preferred terms such as writer (4%); blogger (3%); editor, educator-student, marketing-branding-advertising, PR-communications, and consultant (all 2%). Five percent did not categorize themselves.

The journalists surveyed claimed significantly more experience in contributing to media: almost half (46%) said they have been doing so for over ten years, compared to 15% for other content creators. Journalists also reported contributing more frequently to social media and spending more time per day writing and performing other work-related activities (7.1 hours vs. 4.6 hours – see Figure 1), and having more editorial oversight (51% to 31%), than the “other” segment.

Demographically, 50% of journalists and 54% of other content creators surveyed identified themselves as male. However, the respondents who reported the least amount of experience as social media contributors – three years or less – were significantly more often female (63%).

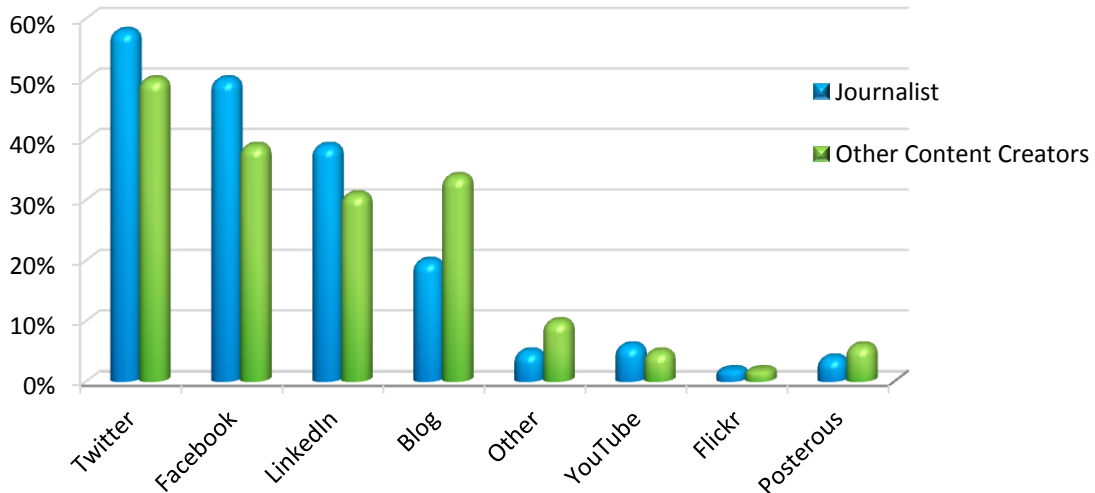
Figure 1: About how many hours do you spend daily (a) writing for; and (b) doing activities apart from writing in order to contribute to, a blog, online news site, or other social media?



**Social Web Popular for Interaction ... Yet Email is Preferred News Release Channel**

Almost three-fourths (73%) of the journalists who responded now interact with public relations professionals through popular social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn; 69% percent of other content creators reported engaging with PR professionals via those sites, although they also rely significantly on blogs and other social media platforms.

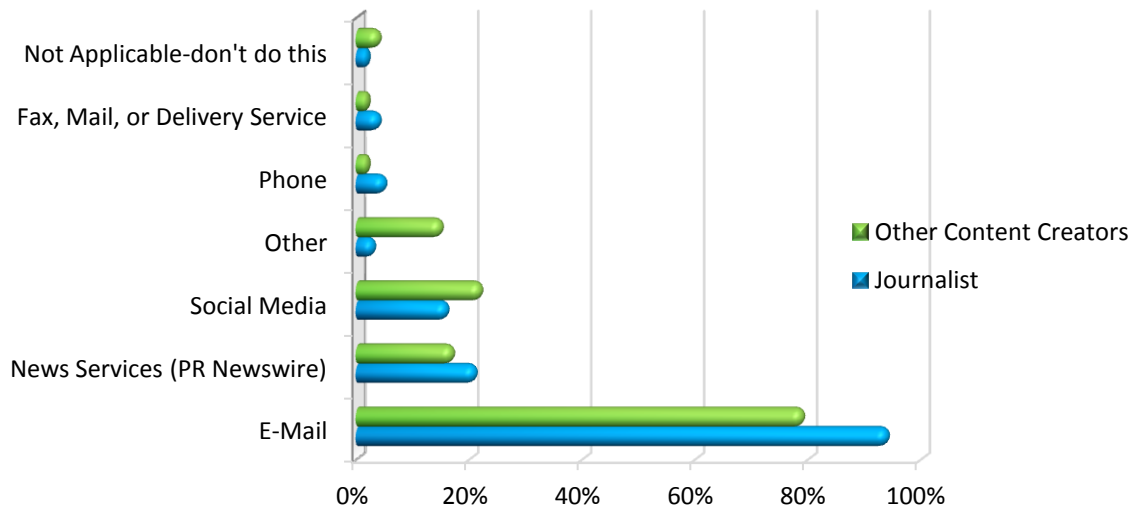
Figure 2: Which social media sites do you use to interact with PR professionals?



The survey also found that email remains the top choice by far for journalists fielding press releases from PR professionals, with 94 percent of journalists and 79 percent of other content creators reporting a preference for receiving news from marketers via email.

While news services held second place among journalists, social media was runner-up to email among the other content creator segment. In addition, 63% of journalists and 61% of “others” said they welcomed story proposals and pitches that are sent them via social channels. Fewer than five percent of respondents reported a preference for telephone or fax contact.

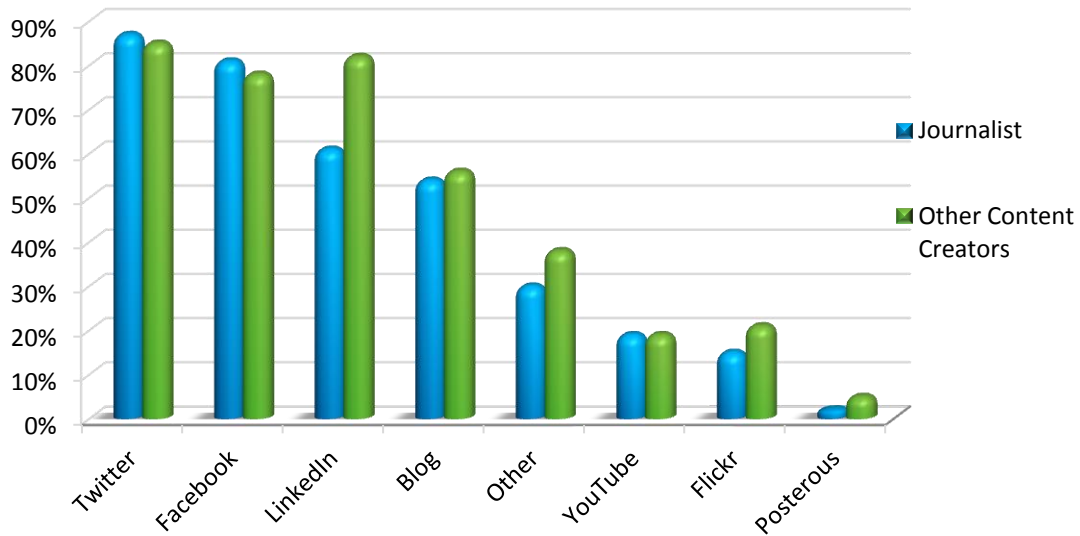
Figure 3: How do you prefer to field press releases?



**Story-Telling and -Sharing is #1 Use; Many Influencers Use Social Web to Build Personal Brands**

Those surveyed listed Twitter and Facebook as the preferred location for their social media profiles and social web presence. Yet significantly more other content creators also listed maintaining a blog, YouTube, Flickr or Posterous presence than did the journalists surveyed. (See Figure 4.)

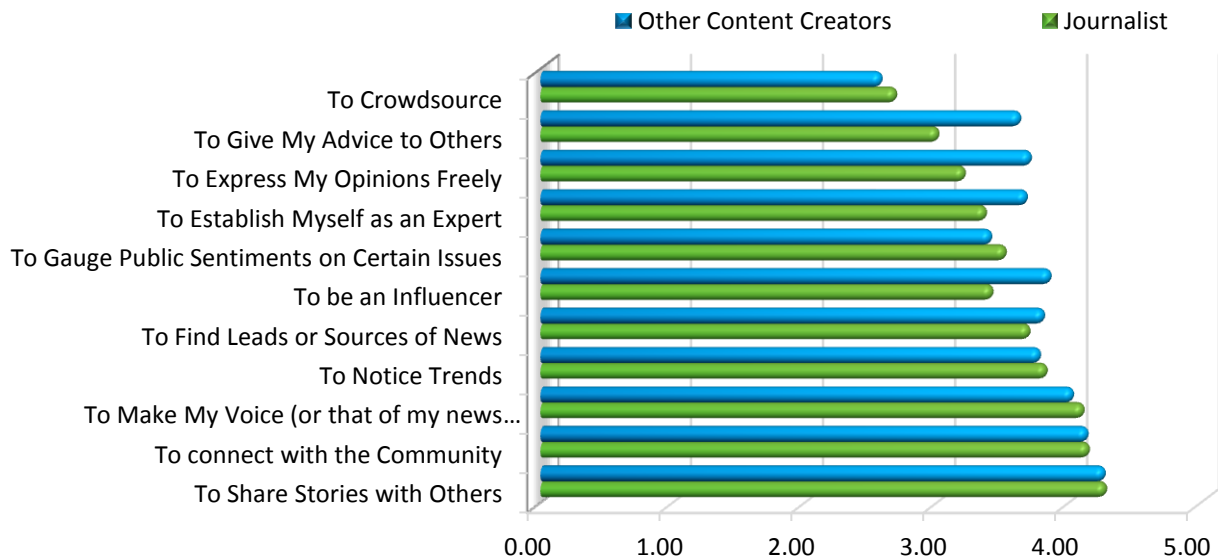
Figure 4: Which social media profiles do you maintain for blogging or journalistic use?



All respondents said they use social media most often to share stories with other people, “connect with the community,” and make their voices heard. Many use it to identify trends, story leads and information sources. At the other end of the spectrum, they rarely use the social web to crowd source.

People within the other content creator segment – who may not have an established news organization’s brand to support them – also use social media to increase their online importance as experts, influencers, thought or opinion leaders, and dispensers of advice.

Figure 5: How often do you use social media for these purposes?



**Gaps in Credibility, Gaps in Perception**

The survey contained a dozen descriptive statements that addressed the quality of social media compared to traditional media. Journalists and other content creators could agree only on one thing: that social media content is timelier than traditional media content.

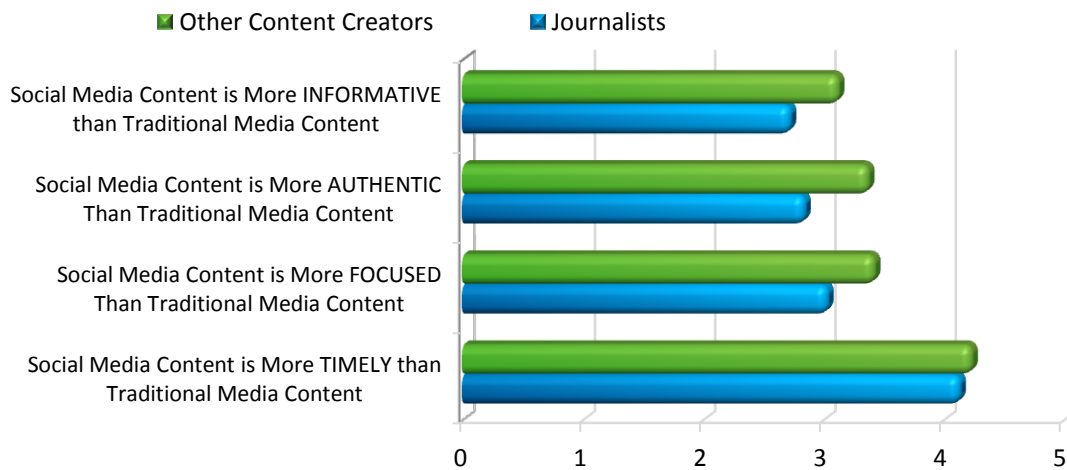
Three scale-based questions asked how positively journalist and other content creator respondents viewed social media as a medium, the writers for social media, and social media content. On the whole, other content creators agreed more strongly than journalists with all positive statements, but the agreement levels, on average, were low. The results:

Neither segment agreed that social media as a medium is more “complete,” “fair,” “believable” or “accurate” than traditional media; however, other content creators registered significantly higher agreement levels than did journalists.

Neither agreed that social media writers are more “influential,” “transparent” or “insightful” than traditional media. “Others” agreed slightly that social media contributors are more “passionate,” while the journalist segment was more neutral in its assessment.

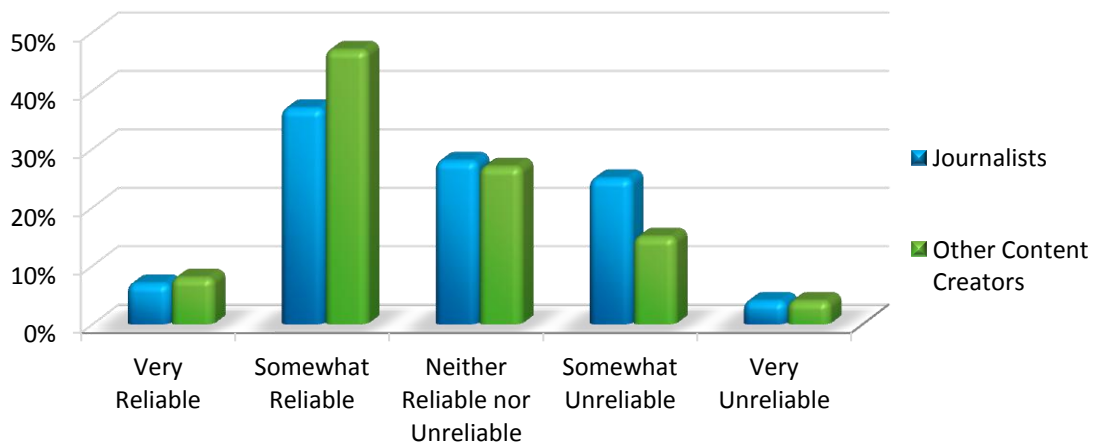
Journalists disagree that social media content is more “focused,” “authentic” or “informative” than traditional media, while the other content creators surveyed were more neutral in their judgment – with the latter segment again reporting significantly higher agreement levels than the journalist segment.

Figure 6: How much do you agree with these statements about social media content?



Both groups were neutral in their assessment of the credibility of news and information sourced from social media.

Figure 7: My overall opinion of the credibility of social media in gathering news and information is:



However, significantly more other content creators (55%) than journalists (44%) said the credibility of social media in gathering news and information that they would use in their writing was “reliable,” while significantly more journalists (29%) than “others” (18%) said it was “unreliable.” Those who write for social media the most often (several times a day) significantly more often found it slightly more credible than those who wrote the least often.

### **Conclusion**

The 2011 digital influencer survey shows that social platforms like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn (with the impact of Google+ soon to be felt) continue to revolutionize how those who create digital content do their jobs: how often they post content (“file stories”) and how they identify stories and trends, cultivate and qualify sources, and share information.

But – perhaps even more importantly – it is apparent that social media has empowered anyone with a voice that resonates with a community to build influence and vie for the same attention and audience as traditional media.

These “other content creators” may not be connected to an established news organization or blog, but their “social capital” is so significant that they have a direct impact on consumers and other influencers.

Those who define themselves as journalists tend to have very different (and less positive) perceptions about the usefulness and accuracy of social media.

Yet all respondents agree that social media is a superior way to share stories, connect with communities, and make their voices heard.