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Citation: Domingo, D., Quandt, T., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J. & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory Journalism Practices in the Media and Beyond: An International Comparative Study of Initiatives in Online Newspaper. Journalism Practice, 2(3), pp. 326-342. doi: 10.1080/17512780802281065

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Abstract available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17512780802281065#.U_tm2bSvvVo
DOI: 10.1080/17512780802281065

Please cite as:
Domingo, D., Quandt, T. Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J. B., and Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory Journalism Practices in the Media and Beyond: An international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers. *Journalism Practice* 2 (3), 326-342.

Participatory journalism practices in the media and beyond: an international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This article is a contribution to the debate on audience participation in online media with a twofold aim: a) making conceptual sense of the phenomenon of participatory journalism in the framework of journalism research, and b) determining the forms that it is taking in eight European countries and the USA. First, participatory journalism is considered in the context of the historical evolution of public communication. A methodological strategy for systematically analysing citizen participation opportunities in the media is then proposed and applied. A sample of 16 online newspapers offers preliminary data that suggest news organisations are interpreting online user participation mainly as an opportunity for their readers to debate current events, while other stages of the news production process are closed to citizen involvement or controlled by professional journalists when participation is allowed. However, different strategies exist among the studied sample, and contextual factors should be considered in further research.

1. Introduction

Now that newspapers are exploring newsroom convergence and eroding the boundaries between print, broadcast and online media, participatory journalism seems to add another dimension that questions previous boundaries—and definitions—of professional journalism. The borderline that separates professional journalists and their audience seems to be blurring (Bruns 2005; Jenkins 2006).

Until recently, the working routines and values of journalistic culture had remained highly stable for almost a century (Tuchman 2002; Schudson 2005), even after being declared in crisis (Dahlgren 1996; Blumler and Gurevitch 1996). Traditionally, journalism has been attached to the institution of the media, based on the production of news by dedicated paid labour, the journalists. The term 'gatekeeper', used to describe a main task of journalists, indicates their claim to be the ones who decide what the public needs to know, as well as when and how such information should be provided. The gatekeeper role is maintained and enforced by professional routines and conventions that are said to guarantee the quality and neutrality of institutional journalism (Shoemaker 1991; Reese and Ballinger 2001).

But contemporary critics have proposed alternative models such as public journalism (Rosen 1999; Massey and Haas 2002) that asked for a more reciprocal relationship between reporters and their audience, suggesting news should be a conversation rather than a lecture (Kunelius 2001; Gillmor 2004). In the past decade, new communication technologies, particularly network communication, have made it possible for others also to publish content for a potentially global audience. Of course, the arenas of public communication and especially news production still are dominated by the media, but in certain spheres, alternative agenda-setting actors do exist, and they are producing news themselves. Thus, institutional journalism has encountered—for the first time—a serious challenge to its social function, an activity parallel to its own.

A new and relevant object of study is how journalists in the established, institutionalised media react in this situation (Lowrey 2006; Chung 2007; Hermida and Thurman 2007). This article is an initial effort to explore the extent to which the current development of audience participation opportunities in online newspapers is redefining journalistic culture, values and practices. We want to examine online media to see when and how institutional journalism accommodates the public's capacity to participate in news communication as more than mere receivers. This is not a normative statement implying that media institutions and journalists in fact should abandon traditional core tasks in favour of participatory journalism, but scholarly curiosity about whether institutional journalism empowers and engages citizens in public communication with newly available means.

We have two main objectives in contributing to this inquiry: a) making conceptual sense of the phenomenon of participatory journalism in the framework of journalism research, and b) determining the forms that it is taking in different European countries and the USA. In the following pages, we develop a theoretical and methodological model to analyse audience participation opportunities in journalism. The model is tested with a preliminary overview of participatory options in 16 leading online newspapers from eight European countries (Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, Slovenia, United Kingdom) and the USA. The international sample enables a comparative perspective that aims to overcome the deterministic idea that participatory journalism is a must for professional media and to start a more fruitful and contextualised discussion on the benefits, risks and possibilities of this trend (Paulussen *et al.*, 2007).

The groundwork provided by this article places participatory journalism in the historical context of the evolution of journalism and public communication. We propose operational concepts for a systematic analysis of user participation in news websites, understanding it as a very flexible process defined by different roles of content contributors and managers in different stages of the news production process. We end by suggesting further research that could be developed with the analytical model presented here.

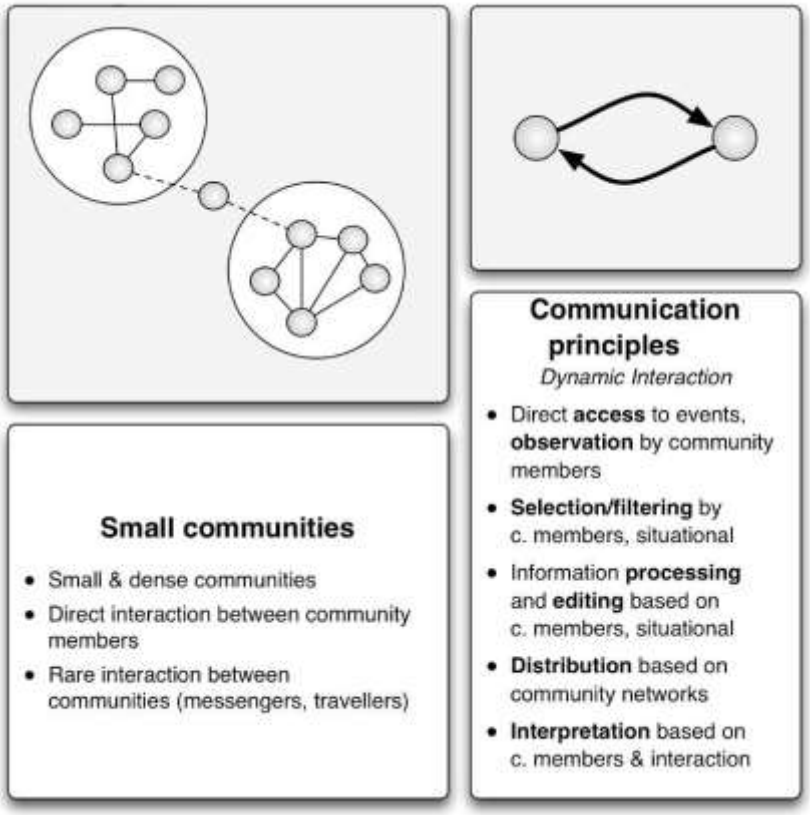
2. Participatory journalism: a theoretical model and analytical proposal

In early societies, with small and densely knit social networks, communication on matters of public interest took place through direct interaction among community members. Events that mattered could be communicated by word of mouth, without the necessity of media to transport or convey ideas. Some member of the community would observe an event and tell others, who might then pass the information on. Access to and observation of events, as well as the filtering of relevant information, were contingent on individual and situational factors. The same was true for the processing and editing of information; some community members might be excluded from news or get an altered version of the story.

Both distribution and interpretation of news stories in personal networks were thus highly dynamic and dependent on individuals, personal relationships and various external factors. Only rarely did members of different social networks engage in informational interaction, typically through some connecting node such as a messenger or a traveller who spread the news from one village to the other. However, most of the necessary information for the functioning and survival of each social network was contained in the network itself. These same communication principles of 'unmediated' public communication are with us today, not only within small communities but also in many everyday contexts that do not primarily rely on mass media as a means of transporting information.

Why is this relevant for the study of journalism? While this ideal model of unmediated public communication (see Fig. 1) oversimplifies the community structures at play here, it helps us identify the basic communication principles that constitute *all* types of public communication. Common components of communication processes include access to and observation of something that can be communicated; selection and filtering of information; processing and editing that information; distribution; and interpretation.

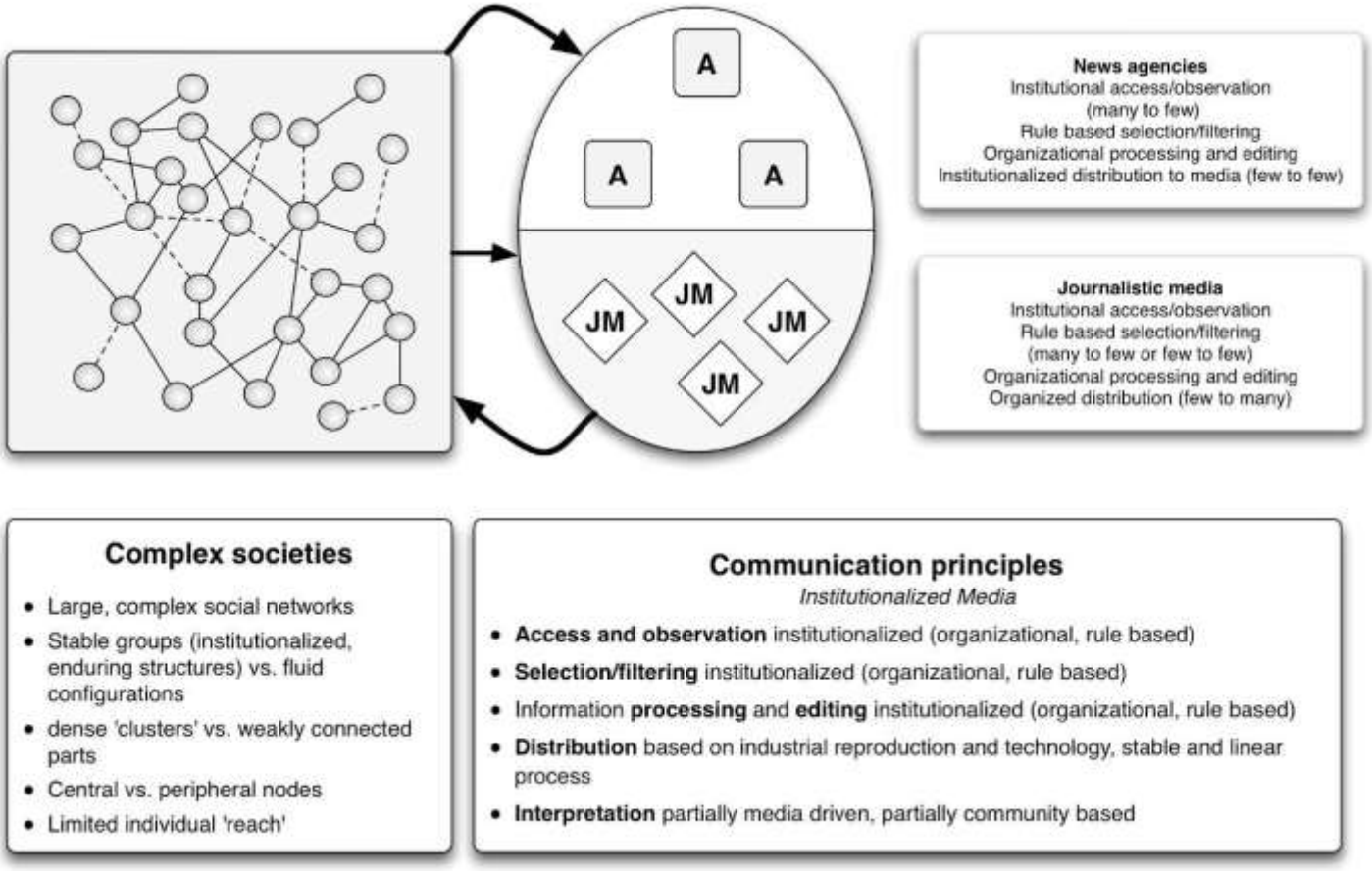
Figure 1. Public communication principles in small communities



This process is certainly more complicated than just 'transporting' information from point A to point B, as is sometimes still implicitly assumed in communication models and public discussion alike, and it depends on mutually accepted rules and roles for all the individuals involved in the process. Furthermore, such processes do not necessarily or directly lead to a final element of the chain in each case. Communication processes can stop, for example, if the selection does not lead to a positive result. There are 'loop points', where the process might go into a repetition circle; for example, edited information can be further selected and filtered by individuals. And each chain might lead into another chain; for instance, the last

steps of the original observation chain could be the first steps of a second-order chain that relies on already-communicated information.

Figure 2. Institutionalisation of public communication



In complex societies, we find the same communication principles (see Fig. 2). However, as the size and level of complexity in societies rises, it becomes more and more difficult for individual community members to perform the necessary functions in the process. The social networks in complex societies contain both stable groups and quickly changing ones. There are dense, clustered networks structures and loosely knit ones, as well as central and peripheral nodes. Depending on where something happens or is observed in the network, and where the relevant interest groups for news are, the information still might reach its goal by direct interaction. But the farther the source is away from the 'goal' person, the more likely it will get lost somewhere in the structure of the networks.

Therefore, institutions developed in order to solve the problem of limited individual reach and communication processing capability; some sociologists see this institutionalisation of communication as a process of societal evolution (for example, Luhmann 1975; Parsons 1964; compare also Görke and Scholl

2006). Institutionalised communication, supported and enabled by media that help bridge space and time differences between members of large and complex communities (Carey 1998), can be seen as a part of a more general social development toward 'modernity' (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992), with new divisions of labour, the birth of modern social institutions, and so on.

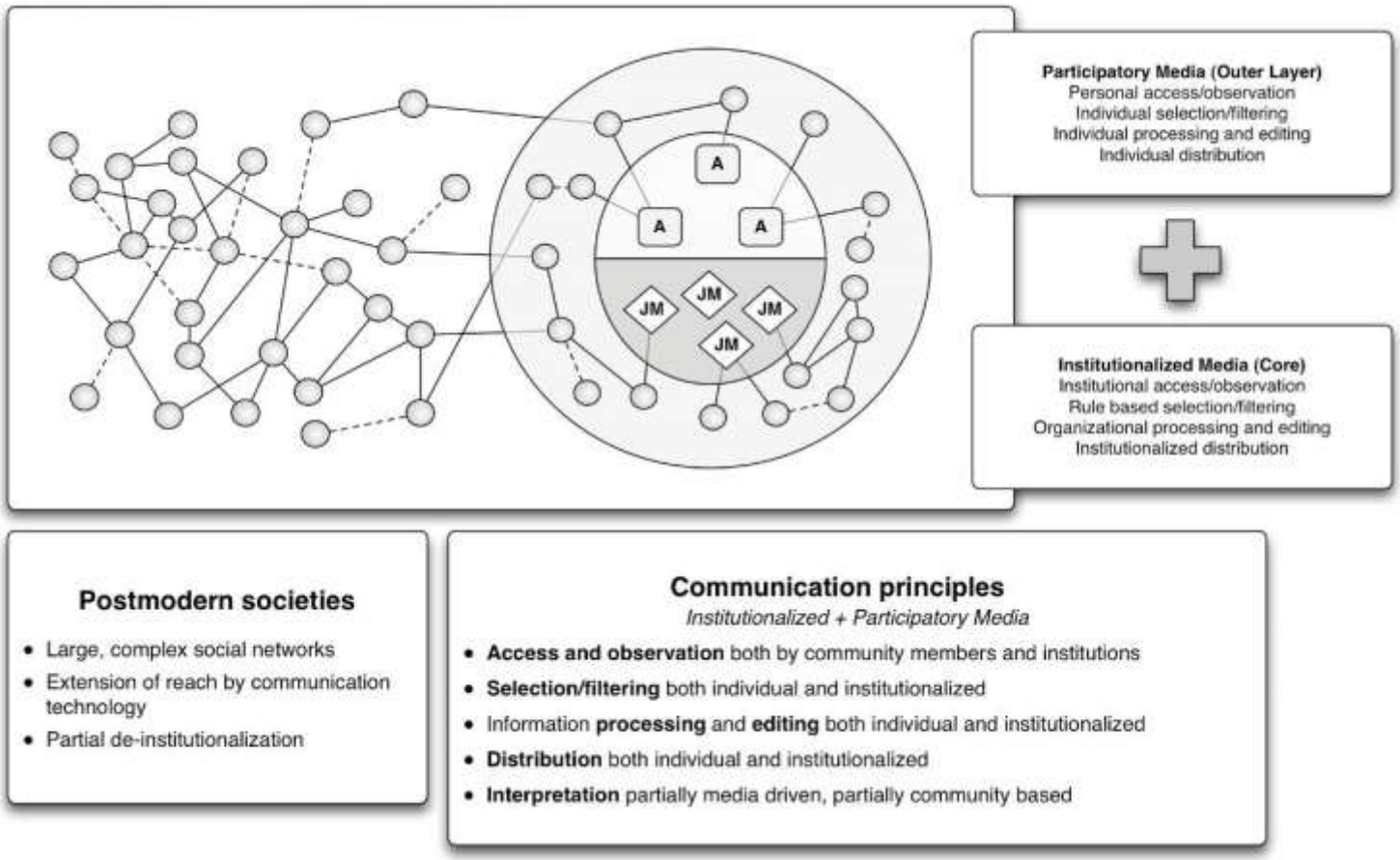
As a result of this socio-historical development, professional observers and communicators (agencies and journalistic media) work full-time to access, select and filter, produce and edit news, which is then distributed via the media to network members. The interpretation of information is also partially journalism driven, as the media imply interpretation patterns by providing comments and opinions. The institutionalisation process is connected to technological advances and to the development of working rules, professional roles and organisational structures. As a result, discussions of journalism today incorporate consideration of distribution technologies; the industrial formations organising the production processes; a complex system of social rules and roles connected with production, distribution and reception processes; and a large number of cultural myths connected with all these aspects. However, the processes described above are by no means linear, and institutionalised media did not replace the 'earlier' type of communication. From early two- and multi-step flow approaches up to recent network-based analyses, communication research has shown that mediated and interpersonal communication work together to disseminate news in a society.

The fact that journalism has emerged through the historical and social development process roughly sketched above makes some of its constitutive features more obvious: While journalism is a social phenomenon with a high level of internal differentiation, it still follows the basic communicative principles identified for early societies. Furthermore, its development is certainly not 'finished'; as a solution to the challenges of organising communication processes in complex societies, it will be altered and modified, depending on new challenges and options that emerge. Journalism studies scholars currently discuss some of these possible modifications, which are triggered partly by technological advances but also by societal challenges and deficits in the current state of institutionalised journalism. These modifications *might* lead to a new model of journalism, labelled 'participatory journalism' (see Fig. 3).

This model implies that some of the institutionalised communication functions of agencies and journalistic media can be performed by individual society members and organisations, while others still lie in the hands of the communication institutions. The re-inclusion of the social networks and the resulting de-institutionalisation are closely connected to the emergence of new communication technologies, which expand the reach of the individual network nodes again. Computer technology and the Internet allow users, as individuals or pools, to produce and distribute news items on the basis of their observations or

opinions, and computer-based selection and management systems support collective work processes to gather the information bits that are spread across the whole network.

Within some sociologically oriented approaches, this development is seen as a reaction to the growing complexity in society, with solutions developed in response to the challenges of organising public communication in an ever-expanding social network. These scholars see signs of a paradigmatic shift to a



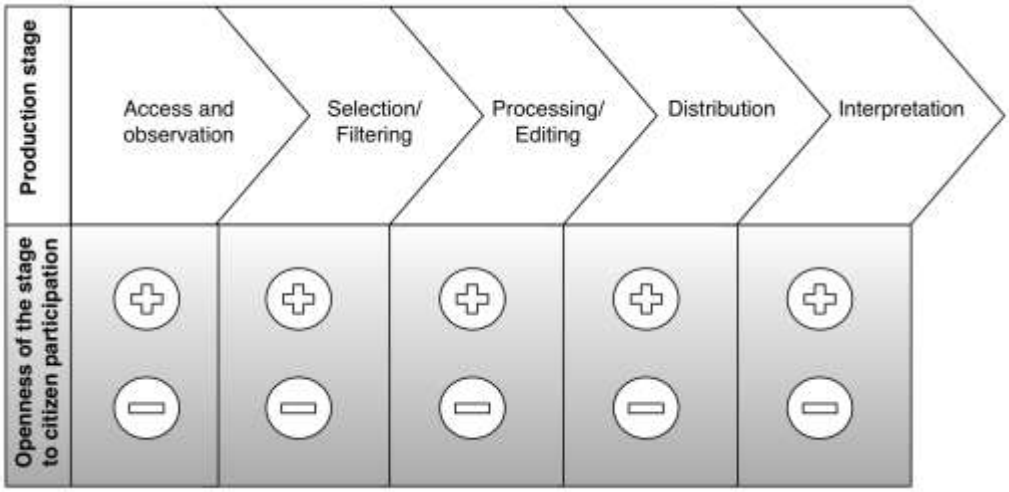
new form of societal order beyond 'modern' institutionalised societies (sometimes called postmodernity, second modernity or liquid modernity, to name but a few; Carey 1998; Deuze 2007; Wimmer and Quandt 2006). Others stress an economic logic behind the developments, seeing user participation as a form of (re)engaging their audiences and cutting costs by 'crowdsourcing' (Howe 2006) tasks that were formerly performed by paid professionals.

Figure 3. Re-inclusion of social networks in public communication

There are no easy answers to the questions of which factor or combination of factors is driving the process, or of whether a new participatory model will succeed. But it is obvious that its development does

not depend solely on an internal differentiation of journalism: the emergence of participatory forms is influenced by various external factors such as technology, economy, and the larger cultural and societal framework. Out of these internal and external factors, various development logics might emerge. In this article, we analyse the status quo among leading news organisations in various Western countries. We do so using an analytical grid (see Fig. 4) that follows the logic of news production stages, as described in the three models above.

Figure 4. Analytical grid derived from the theoretical model



The grid serves as an orientation for our empirical approach to participatory journalism. Looking at each stage of the process, we separately evaluate the current state of development regarding participatory and institutionalised elements in a way that strives to be both systematic and flexible. The analytical grid suggests that audience participation in the media can take many different forms, depending on the openness of each of the news production stages. In which part of the production process audiences can participate, and to what extent, is in fact a decision of institutional media. The work of Bruns (2005) on participatory sites outside the institutional media field, from Indymedia to Slashdot, has inspired our analytical grid, but we felt that his proposal of *input*, *output* and *response* gates was not thorough enough for the analysis of professional news production stages.

In order to operationalise the analysis of the online newspaper websites, we tried to identify in each stage who were the content *contributors* and who were *managers* of the process, the ones with decision-making power. In Bruns' cases, illustrating some of the most open models of participatory journalism, citizens were in charge both of contributions and management. We expected that in institutional media news

sites, journalists would have a significant degree of control in most of the stages. Besides this, we also wanted to identify the explicit *rules* and *incentives* for audience participation and the explicit *criteria* for user-generated content management in each stage. To build the checklist for the qualitative analysis of the websites, we took into account the participatory features detected by other researchers in professional and citizen media (Bruns 2005; Hermida and Thurman 2007; Schaffer 2007).

3. Preliminary study: an international comparative sample

This empirical study seeks to outline the structural characteristics of audience participation in 16 online newspapers. We did not analyse the actual content (news, photos, comments) being produced by citizens, nor we did interview the journalists in charge of participatory spaces to know their rationale when developing these features. The study is a preliminary approach that intends to identify, through qualitative analysis of the websites, the opportunities for audience participation and the explicit rules, criteria and incentives regulating them.

After agreeing on the theoretical and methodological framework and developing the analytical checklist, the team of six researchers selected two leading online newspapers in six EU countries (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Spain, UK) and in the USA (see Fig. 5). One website also was selected in Croatia and one in Slovenia. The countries represent a sample of Western parliamentary democracies, both old and new, and include EU newcomer Slovenia and member-to-be Croatia. Each researcher was responsible for selecting the online newspapers to be analysed in the countries he or she was familiar with. Sensationalist or specialised newspapers were not considered for the sample selection, nor were papers with a free printed version.

Figure 5. Online newspapers included in the study

Country	**Newspaper**	**Online web address**
Belgium	*De Standaard*	standaard.be
	Gazet van Antwerpen	gva.be
Croatia	*Jutarnji List*	jutarnji.hr
Slovenia	*Dnevnik*	dnevnik.si
Finland	*Iltalehti*	iltalehti.fi
	Helsingin Sanomat	Hs.fi
France	*Le Monde*	lemonde.fr
	Le Figaro	lefigaro.fr
Germany	*Spiegel* (weekly in print)	spiegel.de

	Frankfurter Allgemeine	Faz.net
Spain	*El Mundo*	elmundo.es
	El País	elpais.com
UK	*Guardian*	guardian.co.uk
	The Times	timesonline.co.uk
USA	*New York Times*	nytimes.com
	USA Today	usatoday.com

Structural analyses of the websites were initially conducted during June and July 2007 and recoded in December 2007, looking for participatory features in the websites and any explicit definitions or other information offered by the online newspaper, including the FAQ and Help pages. An analytical checklist was used to set a common data gathering procedure and each website was coded by two different members of the research team[1]. Differences were discussed and resolved to ensure interpretative homogeneity. More formal intercoder reliability tests will be performed in a follow-up study that will include a broader sample.

4. Results: professional media exploring participation

A first overview of participatory features in the analysed websites indicates that most of the options explored by citizen media sites have not been widely adopted by the online newspapers studied here (see Fig. 6). The most common features offered by the studied cases enable users to act upon journalistic content, such as by ranking or commenting on it. Features that let citizens produce content themselves are developed in relatively few websites; most popular are invitations to submit audio-visual materials (mainly photos) and story ideas, links to social networking sites and space for citizen blogs. Few online newspapers use tools that are regarded as efficient for community-building, something that citizen media initiatives have found to be a key aspect to engage participants and make them feel responsible for the quality of their contributions (Schaffer, 2007). *USA Today* has explored these options more thoroughly than the other cases in this study, creating user profile pages as well as a system to recommend other users and their contributions and to report abuse. However, this user-centric management of comments is still minimal compared to all the other decision-making processes that remain under the sole authority of journalists.

1 Pauliina Lehtonen was the second coder for the Finnish sample, and Nina Brnic assisted in the second coding of the Slovenian and Croatian news sites.

Figure 6. Participatory features in the analysed online newspapers

	Yes	No	n.a.
News production related spaces			
Invitation to submit photos, video, audio	**10**	6	
Invitation to submit story ideas	6	**10**	
Collective open interviews with newsmakers	3	**13**	
Space to publish citizen blogs	6	**10**	
Space to publish citizen stories	5	**11**	
Audience-driven citizen content selection/hierarchy	1	6	**9**
Audience-driven journalistic content hierarchy	**11**	5	
Commentary and debate spaces			
Comments embedded in journalist stories/blogs	**11**	5	
Comments embedded in citizen stories/blogs	6	1	**9**
Trackback of comments by external weblogs	6	**10**	
Audience-driven forums, open to any topic	5	**11**	
Journalist-driven forums, referred to in stories	**9**	7	
Polls	**13**	3	
Social networking features			
Public user profile page	4	**12**	
Karma system (user points based on activity)	1	**15**	
User tagging of content, serendipity tools	2	**14**	
Links to promote content on social sites	7	**9**	

A closer look, separating the news production process into the five stages previously discussed, confirms that only the interpretation stage is significantly open to some sort of citizen participation for all the newspapers studied (see Fig. 7). The audience does not take part at all in selection and filtering; while there is considerable variation in the other three stages, most of the sampled sites exhibit little openness. This suggests that the institutional media have largely kept the journalistic culture unchanged even when exploring participation opportunities for the audience. The core journalistic role of the 'gatekeeper' who decides what makes news remains the monopoly of professionals even in the online newspapers that have taken openness to other stages beyond interpretation. Furthermore, no single stage in any of the cases allows for complete involvement of the citizens as managers, either on their own or in collaboration with journalists. Professionals reserve the last word in management of each stage of the production process; citizens generally are limited to a role as contributors, if they are given a role at all.

Figure 7. Openness of the news production stages in the analysed online newspapers

		Access/ observation	Selection /filtering	Processing /editing	Distribution	Interpretation
Belgium	standaard.be	Closed	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Slightly open
	gva.be	Slightly open	Closed	Closed	Closed	Slightly open
Croatia	jutarnji.hr	Slightly open	Closed	Slightly open	Closed	Moderately open
Slovenia	dnevnik.si	Slightly open	Closed	Moderately open	Closed	Moderately open
Finland	hs.fi	Slightly open	Closed	Slightly open	Slightly open	Slightly open
	iltalehti.fi	Slightly open	Closed	Slightly open	Closed	Very open
France	lefigaro.fr	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Closed	Moderately open
	lemonde.fr	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Slightly open	Moderately open
Germany	faz.net	Closed	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Moderately open
	spiegel.de	Closed	Closed	Closed	Moderately open	Slightly open
Spain	elmundo.es	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Slightly open	Slightly open
	elpais.com	Moderately open	Closed	Moderately open	Slightly open	Moderately open
UK	guardian.co.uk	Slightly open	Closed	Moderately open	Slightly open	Very open
	timesonline.co.uk	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Slightly open	Moderately open
USA	usatoday.com	Closed	Closed	Closed	Moderately open	Very open
	nytimes.com	Closed	Closed	Slightly open	Moderately open	Slightly open

***Very open to participation**:* citizens can both participate as contributors and managers in that stage
***Moderately open to participation**:* citizens can only participate as contributors or managers in the stage, with loose criteria
Slightly open to participation: citizens can only participate as contributors, with very strict rules and filters
Closed to participation: citizens cannot contribute to this stage of the production process

An exception to this rule confirms that institutional media are not fully releasing their power over the production process to the citizen. In some online newspapers, users can vote for the stories they like, generating a ranking of `most recommended' stories at the distribution stage. The list is usually available in a specific page of the website, one click away from the homepage in some cases. But it is never shown side by side with the hierarchy of stories decided by the journalists, which of course is the one that every user finds when accessing the website.

A comparison of the levels of openness by country does not reveal clear national idiosyncrasies. There are both differences and similarities between the two online newspapers of every country in the sample. Low levels of openness in any stage but interpretation are widespread in all the countries. In some cases (Spain, USA), the market leader shows far less openness to participation than the second pick, but in other countries (UK, Finland), it is the other way around. The relative diversity of approaches (only two online newspapers share the same openness profile) suggests that attitudes toward audience participation in online newsrooms are locally constructed not only in every country but also in every case, apparently shaped by specific contextual factors. These data suggest that beyond the common core of journalistic culture that may be relatively homogenous across countries, professional singularities, market characteristics, social particularities and regulatory differences may explain the diverse understandings and developments of participatory journalism in each online newspaper.

In the following paragraphs, we summarise the participation opportunities offered by the online newspapers in each stage:

Access/observation: Few websites explicitly invite their users to participate in the access and observation stage. In most of the cases there is some way to contact the newsroom or specific journalists, but relatively few websites explicitly invite the audience to submit story ideas. The Finnish and Croatian online newspapers do, as well as *GVA.be* and *USA Today*, which has a blurb at the bottom of the homepage asking for `tips about government corruption, business ripoffs, safety violations or other serious problems'. A journalist might decide to work on the story if it is deemed newsworthy; citizens are not involved in subsequent stages of the production process. *El País*, which started its citizen journalism section in 2007, has a different strategy: The newspaper suggests topics to be covered by the amateurs, who can also decide what they want to report about. The range of topics is wide, including mostly cultural chronicles and lifestyle issues, but also hard news witnessed by contributors. Although separated from actual newsroom-produced content, it can be considered a form of crowdsourcing, where the journalists try to loosely guide the priorities of citizen journalists.

Selection/filtering: As mentioned above, no participation opportunities are offered in this stage. Even in *El País'* `Yo, periodista' section (mimicking CNN's `I-reporter'), the newsroom is the sole entity responsible for choosing what stories will be published. *The Times* experimented with a Reader Panel, which responded to regular online surveys, with a £1,000 monthly prize as an incentive. However, this did not empower the citizens as managers or collaborators of selection and filtering.

Processing/editing: Few online newspapers in the sample allow citizens to submit news stories. Audience blogs and audio-visual material are more common but are always clearly separated from professional content, with specific sections and labels. Blogs tend to be the most open form of participation, when they are available, as there is no moderation prior to publication. *Le Monde* has one of the most extensive collections of audience blogs, but authoring one is only available to paying subscribers. *Iltalehti* has an entertainment-oriented special section called "One's own" where readers can publish their own blogs. Besides this, news texts, photos and other materials are carefully selected by journalists. Furthermore, in most of the websites that enable citizen participation in producing news content, this option is limited to specific topics such as entertainment and travel, leaving hard news as a journalist-only venture. That is the case in the British websites, as well as *El Mundo*, which just lets users submit local news or TV program reviews, and *The New York Times*, which allows registered users to rate and review movies, books, theatre plays and travel destinations.

El País and *Dnevnik* are the only case with a user-generated content section explicitly devoted to news of all sorts. The motto presented by the Spanish online newspaper is clearly inspired by the citizen journalism movement: `If you have witnessed a newsworthy event, send it and we will publish it. Now readers become journalists'. Only registered users can submit content, be it text, photos or audiovisual material. The user must agree to detailed terms of contract when registering: His or her personal data are genuine, the submitted content is original, the people shown in photos or videos agree to be in the story, and the stories do not affect the rights or dignity of other people. Selection and distribution stages related to the citizen news are controlled by journalists. One story is chosen each day by the newsroom to be shown on the main homepage, in a box that clearly states that it is a `reader' story. To further motivate audience participation, *El País* explored for six months giving out a money prize for the best story selected by the newsroom weekly (€500) and monthly (€1,500), but they have discontinued the prizes.

Some online newspapers explicitly ask the readers to submit immediate feedback if they detect a factual error on a story. This suggests a responsive attitude from the journalists, but it is hard to consider this as a real opening of the news editing process.

Distribution: As mentioned before, the participation options at the distribution stage are very restricted. Most of the websites create user-driven story rankings based on automatic counts of most-read or -emailed stories. Some websites let users vote on the news they like, but users cannot change journalistic decisions directly. The *Times* is the newspaper that most prominently shows user news rankings, in a box at the right of the homepage. *USA Today* has a tab on the main page of every section, and *NYTimes.com* and *El País* show user rankings at the right column of each story page. Tools to ease the redistribution of

news are not widely used in the sites analysed. The most popular are Digg.com, del.icio.us and Technorati. German and Spanish websites additionally provide links to social networking and bookmarking sites in their own languages.

Interpretation: Most of the online newspapers see audience participation as an opportunity for their readers to debate current events. There are two main strategies for user participation in the interpretation stage. Some websites allow user comments below each news story. Others prefer to keep participation separated from news and have forums or debate spaces, usually referenced from selected stories or other items that the newsroom feels suitable for discussion. For example, the *Guardian* has an extensive but distinct section of its site called `Comment Is Free,' where user input is encouraged. Comment management strategies range from open options (post-publication moderation, just an email as author identification) to strict and filtered systems (supervision of posts before they are published and registration required). Guidelines are sometimes very brief (*New York Times:* `Comments will be posted if they are on-topic and not abusive. They may be edited for length and clarity.'), but a full page of rules is usually provided.

The websites that opt for post-publication supervision tend to make users co-responsible for policing the submissions, offering a `report abuse' link besides every comment; some, including the *Guardian*, *FAZ.net* and *USA Today*, also enable users to recommend comments they find interesting. Some sites, such as *De Standaard,* only allow comments on blogs, op-ed columns and forums, not on news stories. *Le Monde* and *The Times* have a variable comment moderation strategy, based on the sensitivity of the news topic.

5. Conclusions and further research

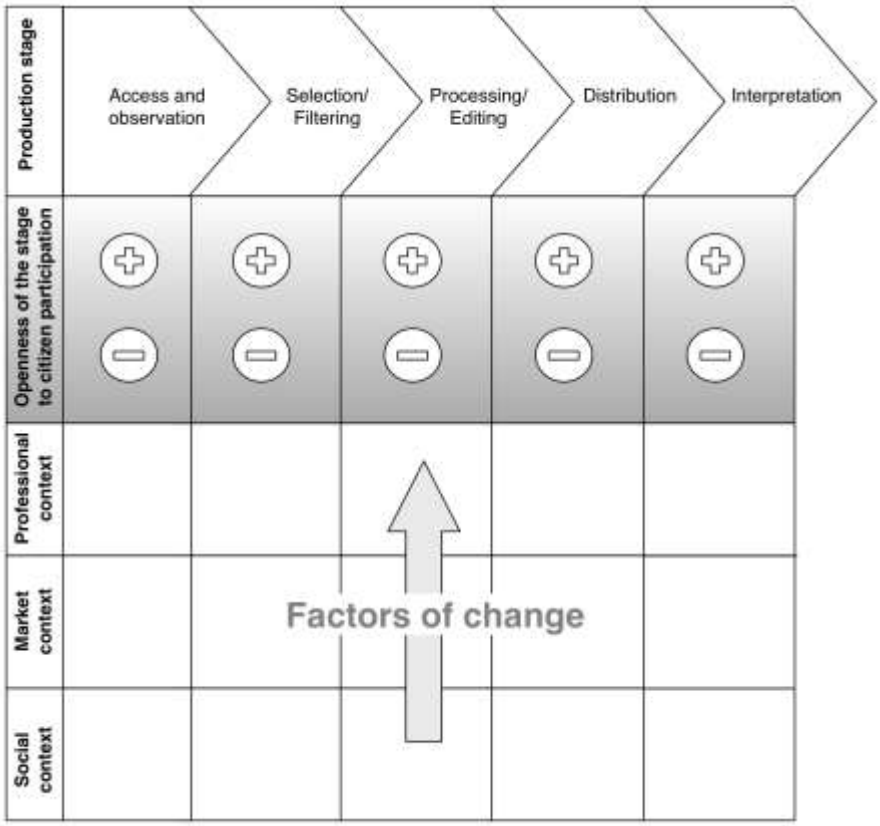
This preliminary study of audience participation opportunities in online newspapers reveals useful data about media industry trends in Europe and the USA. The proposed analytical model is successful in describing the diversity of strategies and the general reluctance to open up most of the news production process to the active involvement of citizens. These results suggest that the core journalistic culture so far remains largely unchanged in the 16 online newspapers analysed, as professionals keep the decision-making power at each stage. Journalists are `retaining the traditional gatekeeping role' in adopting user content on their websites (Hermida and Thurman, 2007:12).

Further research is needed to explore the motivations and context factors constraining or fostering openness at each production stage. The researchers plan interviews with key journalists at the news organizations in future iterations of this study. In addition, an extended version of the proposed analytical

grid could incorporate such influences and help explain the different approaches to audience participation (see Fig. 8). The analysis should pay attention to factors such as:

- **Professional context:** existing routines, newsroom organisation, journalistic culture, ethical guidelines, media tradition (press, broadcast, online).
- **Market context:** size of the company, ownership, competitors' strategies (both professional and citizen media).
- **Social context:** public sphere history, information society policies, media laws.

Figure 8. Extended analytical grid to include factors of change



In addition, the actual quality of citizen participation also deserves research attention. From a normative point of view, researchers should question whether user-generated content improves the overall quality of news products, journalistic work and the public sphere. While interviews with online editors and journalists will be crucial to address the study of factors and motivations, content analysis is needed to assess the quality of user contributions. A bigger and more representative sample may enable researchers to draw clearer profiles of the actual development of citizen participation in the news production process.

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