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SUMMARY

The advent of digital technologies has fueled the idea that journalism could be opened up to anyone with a cell phone or a laptop. As such, digital technologies have been ascribed the potential to reconfigure the traditional relationship between journalists as producers of news and the audience as receivers, and, by doing so, to reinvent our idea of journalism as such, bringing about a much more ‘participatory’ type of journalism. Over the past decade, participatory journalism has been much debated, researched and experimented with. The goal of this dissertation is to study how participatory developments in the field of journalism have affected conventional understandings of what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist. To that end, participatory journalism is investigated from the perspective of various actors that have played a key role in the debate on participatory journalism as well as in the conventional construction of journalism: participatory journalism is consecutively examined from the perspective of journalism scholars, from the perspective of traditional producers – (a specific type of) professional journalists, and from the perspective of those who traditionally belonged to the audience – the audience participants. Finally, this dissertation turns to the study of participatory content. By investigating participatory journalism from these various perspectives, this research is geared towards examining the similarities and differences, and potential tensions and paradoxes between the various constructions of participatory journalism, in order to gain insight into the possibilities and limitations for innovation in journalism.

Chapter 2 focuses on the perspective of journalism scholars. By systematically reviewing 119 scholarly articles on the phenomenon, published between 1995 and September 2011, an analysis is presented of how scholars have interpreted participatory journalism, outlining the main trends and developments in scholarly thinking on the subject. Four *normative dimensions* in the literature are identified, these being 1) ‘enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities’: this dimension, present in 95 percent of the literature, entails that participatory journalism harbors the potential to democratize both journalism and society at large; 2) ‘disappointment with professional journalism’s obduracy’: scholars observe that journalists and news organizations resist change toward participatory and express a sense of disappointment with this attitude – this dimension is present in more than a third of the literature; 3) ‘disappointment with economic motives to facilitate participatory journalism’: scholars observe that news organizations embark on participatory journalism for strategic-economic motives instead of democratic ones, and express a sense of disappointment with this type of engagement – this dimension is present in more than a quarter of the literature; 4) ‘disappointment with news users passivity’: scholars observe that the audience uses participatory opportunities only moderately, and often for entertainment instead of democratic reasons, and scholars express a sense of disappointment with this type of engagement. This dimension is only marginally present (<2%) in the literature. It is argued that these emphases and gaps in the study of participatory journalism are inextricably

linked with the regularities and practices that govern the field of journalism studies - these in a nutshell being 1) the dominance of normative theories about journalism's democratic assignment; 2) the dominance of sociological and anthropological studies of professional news production; 3) the marginal presence of audiences in journalism studies. In summary then, this type of analysis demonstrates how the field of journalism studies has formed an ordered participatory journalism as its object of study, thereby producing but also constraining the space for what is "*sayable and thinkable*" (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 42) about the phenomenon.

In *Chapter 3*, participatory journalism is approached from the perspective of professional journalists. The chapter builds on previous studies that have demonstrated how news organizations and journalists reassert control in the face of participatory developments, thereby demonstrating the norm for what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist. In this chapter, the possibilities for stretching that norm are investigated. Other than previous studies, this chapter does not focus on journalists' opinions about and attitudes towards participatory journalism, but examines the practical consequences of journalists' language use. Through a systematic analysis of 22 interviews with frontrunners in Dutch journalism who are all pioneers in audience participation, the practical consequences of their language use are examined. The results show that frontrunners draw upon six interpretative repertoires: 'innovation', 'craftsmanship', 'marketing', 'being one's own boss', 'education', and 'profitability'. Each of these repertoires grants journalists and participants with different roles and rights. All frontrunners speak the innovation repertoire and at least one of the other repertoires, often in mutual contradiction. Taken together, the repertoires reveal that a notion of 'control' is pivotal: repertoires that put journalists in control over content and audience participants in a subordinate position (for instance, as assistants, consumers or followers), are considered compatible with what counts as journalism; repertoires that grant participants with more control over content turn out to be problematic and difficult to think as journalism. This analysis demonstrates the current paradox of how journalism is criticized for its traditional and paternalistic culture of exclusion and at the same time valued and protected as a profession and craft. It is concluded that even innovative journalistic frontrunners are subject to this paradox, despite their willingness to realize participatory journalism. In summary then, this chapter demonstrates how routine deployments of cultural understandings in journalistic linguistic practices produce certain possibilities for innovation in journalism, while constraining others.

Chapter 4 brings the audience into focus. Through a series of in-depth interviews with 32 participants from two different participatory journalistic environments in the Netherlands set up by professional news organizations, it is investigated how participants view and evaluate their participation in journalism. The choice for the two projects is rooted in the repertoire analysis of frontrunners' talk on participatory journalism in *Chapter 3*: departing from the key importance of professional 'control', two environments were selected that were opposites in terms of professional control (little versus great editorial control). By

conducting an inductive, qualitative analysis, based on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), it is demonstrated how participants' views progress through a series of four stages: anticipation, participation, evaluation and reconsideration. A clear breach between the stages of anticipation and evaluation is observed. Participants' expectations and experiences of participatory journalism diverged on two main elements: the relationship with the professional journalists involved in the projects and the outcome of their participation. Participants from the project characterized by great editorial control emphasized that they wanted journalists to be much more responsive: they had expected to engage in an interactive and co-operative relationship with journalists, but felt overlooked, and sometimes even used, instead. Participants from the project characterized by little editorial control were satisfied about the relationship with the journalists involved, which they experienced as supportive and as providing the space to publish how and what they wanted, but they worried about the outcome of their participation. They thought little of the overall quality of the project, therefore doubted that it would attract an audience, and thus, that participating was worth the effort.

It is proposed that the breach between the anticipation and evaluation stage can be couched in terms of a need and wish for reciprocity, but also a lack of it. Reciprocity plays a role here, first, on the level of ethics. In this regard, the findings elaborate on an idea of 'reciprocal journalism' (Lewis et al., 2014), which refers to a type of journalism that focuses on the development of patterns of mutually satisfying exchanges, in which the contributions of others are recognized (Lewis et al., 2014: 2). Second, reciprocity plays a role on the system level, building on the idea of journalism as a 'social system' (Loosen and Schmidt, 2012) that only functions well if there are stable and reciprocal expectations of what all actors involved will deliver and receive. The findings demonstrate that reciprocity on the ethical level had only partly been developed in the project characterized by little editorial control, and that reciprocity on the system level had not materialized in either one of the projects. This analysis complements previous studies in which patterns of moderate audience involvement in participatory journalism were established, by suggesting an additional explanation for not, or no longer, participating: the viability of participatory projects could also be diminished by a need and wish for, but a lack of, reciprocity.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of participatory content. Existing content analyses have mainly compared (hyperlocal) forms of participatory journalism to conventional professional journalism, suggesting a break with professional journalism's mode of detached and objective reporting. In this chapter it is investigated, first, how the contents of five very different examples of participatory journalism, including and beyond hyperlocal forms, manifest themselves on two key notions that have traditionally been associated with journalistic quality, i.e. 'objectivity' and 'diversity'. Second, considering the key role that a notion of professional 'control' plays in debates on participatory journalism, it is examined if these manifestations are associated with the degree to which professional journalists have control over the participatory content published within these projects. The participatory

projects were selected based on their great variety in the level of freedom granted to participants in the production and publication of content versus the level of control over the production and publication process exerted by professional journalists involved in the initiative. This selection was, again, rooted in the findings from the interpretative repertoire analysis presented in *Chapter 3*. Objectivity is conceptualized as 1). keeping personal views and values out by avoiding the use of subjective language; and 2). relying on external sources. Diversity is conceptualized as the variety in offer of topics covered, sources used and news criteria used underlying news selection.

The analysis demonstrates that a notion of professional control indeed is a useful concept to interpret differences between participatory journalistic environments regarding traditional interpretations of objectivity and diversity. The findings show that reporting style is more subjective as professional control over content is weaker, and that topic diversity increases. Source diversity and news criteria diversity do not increase as professional control weakens, but participants do place different emphases regarding source use and news criteria when they have more room to maneuver: they are more likely to rely on personal experience or first-hand witnessing and to select news based on soft news criteria. These results demonstrate that, when given greater freedom in participatory journalistic environments, participants, at least partly, move away from conventional journalistic understandings of objectivity and diversity. Combining the results from the analysis in this chapter with the findings from *Chapter 4*, it is suggested that participatory journalism can be considered a space of ‘boundary work’ (Gieryn, 1983) that invites both rethinking as well as reinforcement of the boundaries of conventional quality journalism. Rethinking is implied in the tendency towards a more subjective reporting style, soft topics, and the use of personal experience. *Chapter 4* demonstrated that, if participation takes place in hyperlocal contexts characterized by little editorial control, participants may use the opportunity to publish for communicative purposes connected to ‘marketing’ rather than ‘journalism’. Participants themselves label such activities as ‘not journalism’. This acknowledgement indicates an intuitively clear line between what counts as journalism and what goes beyond, and reconfirms existing boundaries between journalism and marketing, advertising, or ‘PR’.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the consecutive chapters and discusses the implications for innovation in journalism. Five main conclusions are drawn. It is, first, observed that scholars, journalism practitioners and participants have all been concerned with promoting audience participation, but for different purposes, granting journalists and participants with distinctive roles and rights. This leads to the conclusion that participatory journalism is not a homogenous phenomenon, and that scholars, professional journalists and participants have each constructed very different participatory journalisms. It is argued that these are based on distinctive (democratic) ideals that translate into various ideas about what should be journalism’s function and various ideas on what constitutes good journalism. What counts as ‘good journalism’ in one construction of participatory journalism, can be

considered as not contributing to or even as potentially detrimental to democracy in the other.

Secondly, the conclusion is drawn that there still exists a dominant discourse, among journalism practitioners and participants alike, that holds that ‘real’ journalism is critical watchdog journalism. In this type of journalism, ‘real’ journalists are craftspeople who have accumulated their skills through education and experience at recognized journalistic media. Such journalists are appointed as the ones who create news, since they are generally considered as having the skills to decide what is ‘real’ news and to properly give shape to it. Participatory journalism’s right of existence in this construction is supporting and enhancing professional journalistic practices.

The third conclusion holds that, despite obduracy in understandings of what constitutes journalism, porous spots in journalism’s obdurate construction do exist. It is proposed that these porous spots are associated with foregrounding ‘ordinary’ people and everyday life in journalism. The repertoire analysis in *Chapter 3* demonstrated how, particularly on a local level, news organizations experiment with positioning citizens as producers of news. As for national and more established news media, ‘ordinary’ people were more likely to play a role as (expert) sources or eyewitnesses, especially in the case of breaking news events. This does not go so far as to suggest that citizens switch roles with journalists, but it does illustrate that citizens and their everyday lives have gained prominence in conventional journalism.

Porous spots furthermore exist regarding the type of content that is considered to be journalism, and the function of journalism in society. When provided with autonomy over content, participants create content that is more likely to be characterized by a certain sense of emotionality and personal involvement, and as dealing with the private sphere – rather than by rationality and detachment, and as dealing with the public sphere and politics (Costera Meijer, 2001). Precisely this *political* core is challenged, to a certain extent, in participants’ constructions of journalism. Instead, the types of content that participants produce are more likely to construct a journalism that fulfills a role as mediator of communities, much in the way Benedict Anderson (1983) proposed. Considering the fact that today’s societies are increasingly culturally diverse and the world increasingly global, it is not unlikely that the need for journalism that deepens people’s understanding of and connectedness with the world’s many physical and virtual communities increases. This suggests that key notions and ways of working that have originally been developed in the context of community journalism might become relevant for journalism broadly. ‘Attentive listening’ and ‘understanding’ in particular – which can be summarized as an attitude aimed at seeking, hearing, and interacting with diverse and marginalized voices and views – could be of service to journalism as a communal force.

Nevertheless, even though clues for porous spots exist in the direction of listening and understanding, these have not (yet) been established as a dominant journalistic value and practice – at least, not in the same way that ‘the hearing of both sides’ as a procedure to ensure objectivity has been central to journalism. This leads to the fourth conclusion that the

obduracy of journalism's 'professional quality' logic and genre, reconfirmed by the findings in this dissertation, is likely to be an obstacle for the aforementioned porous spots to be further developed. That is, digital technologies might enable the audience to speak up, but, do not naturally ensure that people are being heard. The latter requires serious effort: a cultural re-orientation of conventional journalism, and the investments of time and money, all of which is a challenge considering journalism's financially strenuous times.

Summarizing the main findings of this research then, it is finally concluded that participatory journalism has not brought about a radical reinvention of journalism's construction. It is suggested that future research could examine if and how porous spots in the direction of listening and understanding further develop. Social media networks, which were outside the scope of this study, are pinpointed as a potentially fruitful site for further study. Various scholars have established that reciprocity is a pivotal notion in social media networks, and recent studies suggest that processes of sharing and recommending could impact on how news is selected and produced, thereby potentially triggering new processes of listening and understanding. That being said, this dissertation suggests that, as long as commitment to conventional understandings of journalism remains strong, innovation in journalism is likely to occur as temporary, subordinate and experimental projects within the boundaries of conventional understandings of who counts as a journalist and what counts as journalism.

