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1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

ProPublica is committed to journalism in the public interest and recognizes that you help make much of that journalism possible. So today, we're launching another way for our readers to take part in our mission: Get Involved. [...] We care about likes and shares, but we care more about connecting with people like you with insights, expertise and stories to share.

The above is a short excerpt from the website of *ProPublica*, a New York-city based independent news room devoted to investigative journalism in the public interest. In March 2013, *ProPublica* set up a specific infrastructure on its website to enable readers to participate in its journalistic activities, called *Get Involved* (Journalism.co.uk, 2013). Depending on the story and the staff's needs, *ProPublica*'s website offers several ways for readers to get involved: sometimes, the editorial staff invites readers to share their own stories through a 'Share your own story' button; sometimes, readers are asked to help dig data through a 'Read the transcript' button; at other times, the staff invites readers to join a *Whatsapp* discussion group and to ask questions on the staff's investigative efforts. The list of stories to which readers have contributed is steadily growing and encompasses a broad range of topics: from stories on 'outside spending' in the 2012 presidential elections (ProPublica, 2012) and a project on discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace (ProPublica, 2014a), to news on Louisiana's disappearing coastline (ProPublica, 2014b).

With its technology-fueled audience participation, *Get Involved* can be considered an example of so-called 'participatory journalism'. The term participatory journalism was coined in 2003 by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis. In their influential paper *We Media. How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*, they anticipated how digital technologies would impact the making of news:

Armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information (p. 3).

Bowman and Willis expected that digital technologies – so-called Web 2.0-technologies – would radically lower barriers to publish, potentially turning everyone into a publisher. They envisioned that this would result in a participatory kind of journalism, in which not just professional journalists, but the audience, too, would contribute to the making of news.

By opening up journalism to anyone with a cell phone or a laptop, participatory journalism has been considered to essentially reconfigure the relationship between journalists and the audience, and, by doing so, to potentially reinvent our idea of journalism as such. As will be explained further down this introductory chapter, our understanding of journalism is inextricably bound up with a notion of professionalism (e.g. Barnhurst and Nerone, 2009;

Deuze, 2005) that is fundamentally challenged by the advent of participatory media. This dissertation focuses on the potential reinvention of journalism in the wake of participatory developments. The aim is to study how developments in the area of participatory journalism affect our understanding of what counts as ‘real’ journalism and who counts as a ‘real’ journalist (Deuze, 2005).

This introductory chapter will, first, discuss participatory journalism’s relevance for journalism research by placing it in the context of ‘conventional’ journalism and by linking it with the idea of journalism as a ‘social construction’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). This notion underpins the ontological outlook of this dissertation and sets the stage for outlining the main goal of the research and formulating the central research question. After phrasing an initial working definition of participatory journalism, a concise overview of the scholarly research on the phenomenon will be provided and the knowledge gaps that are further explored in this dissertation will be described. Next, the Dutch context in which this dissertation is situated will be briefly discussed, after which the research questions of the various chapters will be phrased. Finally, the outline of the research will be presented.

1.2 Participatory journalism: breaking with conventional journalism?

Bowman and Willis’ paper on ‘we media’ marked the beginning of a period of roughly a decade in which journalism practitioners and scholars have been occupied with participatory journalism. News organisations around the world have been exploring audience participation. Both established national broadcasters and newspapers, as well as regional television stations, small-town newspapers and experimental online platforms have offered a range of opportunities for the audience to participate. To name but a few examples, there have been discussion platforms (*Have your say* – BBC), websites to which the audience can upload its own material (*IReport* – CNN, *Yo, Periodista* – *El Pais*), projects that solicit the audience as eyewitnesses (*Guardian Witness* – *The Guardian*, *NOS Ooggetuige* – NOS), websites focused on citizen coverage of hyperlocal news (*Het Belang van mijn Gemeente* – *Het Belang van Limburg*; *UindeWijk* – RTV Utrecht, *Dichtbij.nl* – *Telegraaf Media Group*), as well as audience blogs hosted on news organisations’ websites (*LePost* – *LeMonde*, *VKBlog* – *De Volkskrant*, *USAToday*). Participatory experiments such as these have been food for media observers and journalism scholars, who have studied such initiatives from many different angles.

The various experiments with, and numerous discussions about participatory journalism illustrate that, apparently, the kind of participation we are talking about with participatory journalism, is considered as essentially new and different from forms of audience participation that since long have been part and parcel of journalism. Consider the *Letters-to-the-Editor* section, which has been a fixed element of newspapers for decades, or think about tipping off a journalist by calling a ‘tip line’ – both are examples of audience participation, but they have not, by far, raised as much dust as the phenomenon of participatory journalism has done over the past 15 years. So what is it, then, in participatory journalism, that raises the interest of journalism researchers and practitioners?

What stands out when overlooking the scholarly literature on participatory journalism, is that it is usually not treated as an isolated phenomenon considered interesting by itself. Rather, participatory journalism is constructed as a phenomenon that interferes in another, pre-given context: the context of existing or ‘conventional’ journalism. The kind of participation that participatory journalism revolves around is not something that can simply be added to existing journalism, without affecting the latter. Rather, it is anticipated as having the potential to interfere in existing journalism in a fundamental way. In this respect, another fragment from Bowman and Willis’ (2003) paper on ‘We media’ is telling. Regarding participatory journalism’s impact on conventional journalism, Bowman and Willis state that:

The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves (p. 3).

The excerpt casts participatory journalism as doing something unique and potentially revolutionary: Bowman and Willis write that it enables the audience to participate in a way that ‘threatens’ journalism as a *profession*. The next paragraph will describe how the term ‘profession’ is pivotal for our Western understanding of journalism, and, by consequence, for the way in which participatory journalism has been positioned vis-à-vis conventional journalism.

1.3 Journalism’s professional model

Since the nineteenth century, when processes of professionalization in journalism began, there have been ongoing discussions about whether journalism is to be considered as a profession, like medicine or law, or more as a craft (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005). Journalism differs from classic professions like medicine or law in the sense that its knowledge base is less clear-cut and closed-off to outsiders. As Witschge and Nygren (2009) point out, this is inherent to the freedom of expression within which journalism operates. As a result, media scholars have often labeled journalism as a “*quasi*” or a “*pseudo*” profession (e.g. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986: 145). At the same time, journalists have gone through great lengths in claiming a form of professionalized knowledge (Schudson and Anderson, 2009), considering, for example, the founding of journalism schools and unions, press agencies, and the drafting of codes of ethics (see Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005; Schudson and Anderson, 2009). Developments in the field of journalism studies reflect the debate on journalism’s professional status. In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers focused on occupational traits, to “*measure the degree to which professionalization has occurred within journalism*” (Schudson and Anderson, 2009: 91). In the last 20 years, scholarly inquiry has shifted to analyzing “*the social process through which journalists struggle to claim professional status*” (p. 90).

Notwithstanding the debates about journalism’s professional status, there is a broad consensus that twentieth-century journalism in the US and Northern Europe has been

characterized by a so-called ‘professional model’. This model was centered, as McNair (2009) summarizes, on the idea of *“a trained professional delivering objectively validated content to a reader (or viewer, or listener)”* (p. 347). During the second half of the twentieth century, in Western countries, this model was increasingly institutionalized through the forming of professional institutions and codes of practice (Schudson and Anderson, 2009; Witschge and Nygren 2009). This process of professionalization, furthermore, went hand in hand with the development of a professional ideology, consisting of a set of values to which journalists in all media types, genres and formats refer in the context of their daily work (Deuze, 2005: 445). Although national differences in interpretation exist (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), journalists in elective democracies worldwide all consider themselves as committed to providing objective information (neutral, fact-based), as operating autonomously (free, independent from external forces), as being guided by a sense of immediacy and a certain ethics (a sense of validity and legitimacy), and, as committed to *“doing it for the public”* (Deuze, 2005: 447).

Journalism’s public role has generally been imagined as being an intermediary between the public and the political process (Peters and Witschge, 2015: 29). Strömbäck (2005) describes how distinctive perspectives on democracy have resulted in various ideas on how journalism can best serve the civic needs of the public: ‘procedural democracy’ needs journalism to make sure that democratic procedures are respected and to expose wrongdoings; ‘competitive democracy’ requires journalists to focus on political actors and those that engage in elections; ‘participatory democracy’ needs journalists to foster citizen engagement in public life and requires a focus on problem-solving; ‘deliberative democracy’ requires journalism to mobilize citizens’ engagement in public discussions (pp. 338-341). Other perspectives on journalism’s core function in society have been developed as well. Journalism has, for example, also been conceptualized as a builder and facilitator of community and identity (Anderson, 1983; Castells, 1997), stressing a sense of belonging, social ties, and fellowship (Nip, 2006: 215), rather than public sphere and politics. In general, however, under the professional model, journalism has widely been considered to act as democracy’s watchdog and as provider of factual, civic information about public sphere and politics (Costera Meijer, 2001; Strömbäck, 2005).

1.4 Journalism as ideology and boundary work

Apart from providing a shared set of values and common purpose to guide journalistic practice, Deuze (2005) argues that journalism’s culture of professionalism is also ideological: it serves *“to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who was a ‘real’ journalist, and what (parts of) news media at any time would be considered examples of ‘real’ journalism”* (p. 444). Following this line of reasoning, a ‘real’ journalist has been considered to work in the public interest and also to publish mainly about matters dealing with the public sphere and politics; to practice objective and detached reporting; and as working for an established ‘quality’ news organization (Costera Meijer, 2001). By providing such an idea about what is or what should be journalism, journalism’s ideology, thus, has long provided a sense of who is

‘in’, and by, consequence, also of who is ‘out’: professional journalists are ‘in’, while, amongst others, sources, the audience and those from neighboring occupations, like public relations and communication, are ‘out’.

As such, journalism has also been described as subject to ‘boundary work’ (Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Lewis, 2012). The notion of boundary work notion originates from the field of science and technology studies and was coined by Thomas Gieryn (1983) to describe how scientists attempt to demarcate science from non-science and pseudoscience. Boundary work can be considered as a rhetorical exercise and an ideological device. It refers to the creation of boundaries by professional or social groups to distinguish themselves from others (Riesch, 2010: 454). As such, the metaphor of boundary work can be applied to the field of journalism: it is the rhetorical exercise of creating, maintaining and reconfiguring distinctions between, for example, professional and amateur, producer and user, or journalist and non-journalist (Lewis, 2012: 842) with the purpose of constructing and sustaining journalism’s expertise, social authority and public legitimacy.

The idea has been that the long considered self-evident boundary between who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’ in journalism has become blurred by the rise of digital technology and by the advent of all kinds of groups – citizen journalists, bloggers, users generating content – who make use of the technology’s potential. In other words, journalism’s professional ideology is considered as no longer able to effectively define who is in and out regarding the production of news and information. As a consequence, journalism finds the basis of its social authority and public legitimacy fundamentally challenged. In this dissertation, I set out to investigate if, and how, the rise of participatory journalism influences ideas about what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist.

1.5 Journalism as a construction

For decades, our and journalists’ understanding of journalism remained fairly stable. In his study of the professionalization process in American journalism, Hallin (1992) mentions the “*wholeness and seamlessness*” (p. 14) in practitioners’ vision of journalism. Deuze (2005) notes that, despite subtle changes over time in professionals’ evaluations of ‘real’ journalists and ‘real journalism’, these evaluations “*always served to maintain the dominant sense of what is (and should be) journalism*” (p. 244). The audience has largely followed this construction in commonly held views of ‘serious’ or ‘quality’ journalism (Bird, 2003; Costera Meijer, 2007). Seeing that the idea of journalism for a long time has seamlessly coincided with the professional model and its corresponding ideology, ‘journalism-as-we-know-it’ has almost come to be experienced as if it is some kind of factual or pre-given existence. However, since the 1990s, a tangle of technological, cultural and economic developments has challenged our taken-for-granted understanding of journalism, revealing it as a ‘social construction’ rather than a natural given.

The social constructionist approach is a theoretical orientation that was introduced into the social sciences by Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) seminal work *The Social Construction*

of Reality. Berger and Luckmann abandoned essentialist views from the traditional social sciences – in a nutshell, being the idea that there is some pre-given essence in things and people. Instead, they argued that the world is socially constructed through people’s daily interactions, while at the same experienced by them *“as if the nature of their world is pre-given and fixed”* (Burr, 1995: 7). Social constructionism can be summarized as questioning our taken-for-granted knowledge of the world by emphasizing that our understandings are historically and culturally specific and that they are a product of the social practices between people in which *“shared versions of knowledge”* (Burr, 1995: 3) are negotiated.

Research has demonstrated that modern journalism is a twentieth century construction. Hallin (1992, 2006), in particular, has shown how the journalism’s professional model and its corresponding ideology were dependent on a specific combination of political, economic and socio-cultural conditions. During its ‘high modern moment’ (Hallin, 1992) between, roughly, the 1960s and the 1990s, the professional model could become firmly established, firstly, because of the rise of the welfare state and a toning down of corporatism after the second World War. This reduced commercial pressures, which *“allowed professional autonomy and the ethic of social responsibility to prosper”* (Hallin, 2006: 1); secondly, because political ideological diversity was limited, which Hallin termed a necessary precondition for the idea of the *“objective”* journalist that served a *“unitary public interest”* (p.1); thirdly, because public trust in political institutions was *“quite high”* (p. 2) and fourthly, because public affairs had a *“high degree of prestige”* (p. 2).

As early as 1992, Hallin observed that the conditions underlying journalism’s professional model were *“passing away”* (p. 1). Increased commercialization, declining newspaper readership and declining public trust in politics and media were increasingly shaking journalism’s foundations. What is more, the field has been confronted with unprecedented technological change, which, affecting all aspects of journalism, has contributed to the further erosion of the professional model and, by consequence, to the questioning of the ‘high modern’ construction of journalism. The next paragraph will sum up some of the most important changes that 21st-century journalism has encountered.

1.6 Challenges to journalism’s construction

To start with, digital technologies have provided news consumers with more possibilities than ever to decide when and where to get their news from. Nowadays, news is online. It is abundantly and 24/7 available, from all kinds of sources – and most of it is free of charge (e.g. Allan, 2006; Bruns, 2008). As a result, traditional news media are faced with declining audience ratings, although some legacy media are doing better than others. While television news is still in a quite safe position (Pew Research Center, 2015; Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek, 2015), the newspaper industry, in particular, finds itself in stormy waters. Since the end of the 1990s, newspapers worldwide have witnessed severe drops in circulation numbers. In the Netherlands, by 2004, two thirds of the population read a paid newspaper on a daily basis; in 2014, this number had fallen to 50% percent (Bakker and Scholten, 2014: 24).

The Netherlands are not unique in this respect: Western European countries (see Leurdijk et al., 2012: 41) and the United States (Pew Research Center, 2013) are faced with a similar trend.

Declining audience ratings have gone hand in hand with declining advertising revenues, which fundamentally challenges journalism's traditional business model. For years now, the global newspaper industry has witnessed a steady decline in revenues from print advertising (see Leurdijk et al, 2012: 62). The *Newspaper Association of America* calculated that, with advertising revenues in the United States down 49% from \$65,8 billion in 2003 to \$17,3 billion in 2013, print ad revenues hit an all-time low since 1950 (Perry, 2014). Revenues from digital advertising are rising: according to research by *PwC* and *Wilkofsky bl Associates* (2011), digital advertising accounted for 2% of the global spending on newspapers in 2005, rising to 4% in 2010 (in Leurdijk et al, 2012: 62). However, as of yet, online revenues cannot, by far, compensate for the losses in print revenues (Pew Research Center, 2015, 2013; Leurdijk et al. 2012). News organizations are experimenting with alternative business models for (digital) news and new money from venture capitalists, philanthropic money, but also crowdfunding, is entering the scene (Pew Research Center, 2014), but the definite answer to the crumbling down of traditional business models has not been developed as yet.

Technological change and economic pressures have also affected the institutional and organizational facets of journalism. Deuze (2008) describes how ownership in the news industry used to be organized by medium type, but that, since the mid-1990s, large cross-media enterprises have emerged. The Dutch situation is illustrative of the global trend: between 1980 and 2014, the number of newspaper publishers in the Netherlands dropped from 25 to 8 (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek, 2015). This so-called 'convergence' is considered as profoundly changing labour relationships and working conditions for journalists, leading to *"more flexible, multi-skilled and highly moveable [...] workforce"* (Deuze, 2008: 8), which is understood as primarily beneficial to the management and not so much for the news worker. Research by the Pew Research Center (2013) corroborates these conclusions: they have observed a fall of 29% between 1989 and 2011 in fulltime employed professional editorial staff in US newsrooms, meaning that news production is increasingly done by freelancers. The Netherlands are faced with a similar trend: in 2010, around a quarter of all journalists in the Netherlands worked on a freelance basis; in 2015, this was 30% (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek, 2015). Convergence and digitization have also made themselves felt in journalists' daily work, changing, among other things, traditional divisions of labor within the newsroom. Witschge and Nygren (2009) have observed a trend towards 'multi-skilling': *"Today journalists across all media deal with technology to a much greater extent than ever before. They have taken over work that was previously done by technical staff"* (pp. 47-48).

To top it all, the 'emancipated news user' (Costera Meijer, 2009) has not only fragmented its news use over different platforms, digital technology has also provided him (her) with the possibility to step into the journalist's shoes. The audience is no longer dependent on journalists for access to the public sphere. News users can now produce their own news

and even their own communication channels to bring their news. As such, participatory journalism potentially reconfigures the conventional relationship between the journalist as sender of news and the audience as receiver, which again, would fundamentally change one of the conditions on which the professional model was built. As such, participatory journalism can be considered one of the many developments in the field of journalism, which suggest that the conditions underlying journalism as a construction are considerably changing. As Witschge and Nygren (2009) write: *“The trends [...] point to a process of deprofessionalization”* (p. 56). Seeing that journalism as a construction for a long time has been inextricably bound up with an idea of professionalism, this invites renegotiations of what is, should be, or can be journalism.

1.7 Rethinking journalism?

Participatory journalism has over the years manifested itself as something that one can either support or oppose. Discussions about participatory journalism have been consumed by fierce debates about its potential benefits and threats. Well-wishers have enthused about participatory journalism as an instrument for journalists and news organisations to reconnect with the audience, capable of turning the tide of declining viewing figures and newspapers subscriptions, or, more idealistically, as a means to make journalism and even society at large more democratic (e.g. Bruns, 2005; Carpentier, 2007; Gillmor, 2004; Jarvis, 2006; Rosen, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Naysayers have voiced concerns about the quality of news and information, doubting that the audience would be capable of fulfilling a professional journalist’s task of filtering and selecting and making quality news (e.g. Keen, 2007). Divided on whether to treat participatory journalism as a remedy or disease, many seem to agree on the idea that the phenomenon is part of a series of developments that puts at stake the definition of journalism.

Regarding the future of journalism, many scholars and media observers have proposed to fundamentally question the conventional construction of journalism, stressing the need for innovation within and of journalism. The Dutch Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek [Dutch Journalism Fund] released a study exploring various scenarios for journalism in 2025, strongly emphasizing the need for the sector to renew itself (Kasem et al. 2015). In a similar vein, scholars have pressed for a ‘rethinking’ (Peters and Broersma, 2013; Nolan, 2009; Lewis and Usher, 2013; Deuze, 2005); ‘reimagining’, (Kennedy, 2013), ‘reconsidering’ (Deuze, 2005; Heinonen and Luostarinen, 2008) and ‘rebuilding’ (Anderson, 2013) of journalism. The interest of this dissertation research lies in the extent to which journalism as a construction is affected by developments in the area of participatory journalism. The aim is to study participatory journalism in order to contribute to answering the larger question of who, in journalism’s shifting landscape, counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism and to what end. Seeing that participatory journalism has been subject to heated debates within journalism studies and practice, this dissertation sets out to examine how the phenomenon is constructed by several key actors and from several key perspectives. What are the main

similarities and differences, tensions and paradoxes between these various constructions of participatory journalism? And how do these enable and limit the possibilities for innovation journalism?

1.8 Participatory journalism in this dissertation

In the scholarly and professional literature, one comes across a wide range of terms referring to the phenomenon of the audience taking part in journalistic activities: not only ‘participatory journalism’, but also ‘citizen journalism’ (e.g. Rosen, 2006), ‘grassroots journalism’ (Gillmor, 2004), ‘networked journalism’ (e.g. Beckett et al., 2008; Jarvis, 2006; Russell, 2011), ‘collaborative journalism’ (e.g. Bruns, 2003; Blood, 2006; Rusbridger, 2009), ‘crowdsourced journalism’ (e.g. Muthukumaraswamy, 2010), ‘open-source journalism’ (e.g. Lewis and Usher, 2013), ‘pro-am journalism’ (e.g. Bruns, 2010), and ‘liquid journalism’ (Deuze, 2008). The prevailing terms, however, are ‘participatory journalism’ and ‘citizen journalism’, although they do not describe the exact same phenomenon. Despite the fact that the two terms are sometimes used inconsistently and interchangeably, Nip (2006) distinguishes between participatory journalism as *“User contribution [...] solicited within a frame designed by the professionals”* (p. 217) and citizen journalism as journalism *“Where the people are responsible for gathering content, visioning, producing and publishing the news product [...]”* (p. 218). Thus, according to Nip’s definition, in citizen journalism, professionals are not involved.

Assuming that the confrontation between professionals and those from outside the profession, and therefore also the confrontation between conventional and potentially deviating interpretations of what counts as journalism, is strongest in settings where both type of actors are present, in this dissertation, Nip’s (2006) description of participatory journalism is used to phrase a working definition of the phenomenon:

participatory journalism is the participation of non-professionals in frames designed by professionals, enabled through digital technologies.

A few specific comments to this definition are needed. Firstly, the term ‘non-professionals’ should be read in light of the professional model as outlined above. By ‘non-professional’ is meant: ‘what is considered as non-professional from the perspective of the professional model’. This implies that this dissertation does not follow the so-called ‘trait approach’ (Schudson and Anderson 2009: 91), a strand in journalism research that measures the degree to which professionalization occurs. Rather, the term ‘professional model’ refers to a particular construction of journalism through which journalists have raised and achieved their professional status and that has become increasingly institutionalized over the course of the twentieth century (e.g. through formal education, professional associations, codes of ethics and ethical councils, collective employment agreements – see Schudson and Anderson, 2009). This professional model has set certain parameters for what has long been considered

professional, even if official ‘legal’ occupational status was never achieved. Key examples of these parameters are: operating according to specific norms and values (e.g. providing a public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy (Deuze 2005: 447)), having a particular degree or having received specific training, working for an established news organization, and getting paid for one’s journalistic activities. By consequence, the professional model has also set the parameters for what has been considered ‘non-professional’.

The second remark about the working definition of participatory journalism that is used in this research pertains to the term ‘digital technologies’. This notion implies that, although ‘old-fashioned’ letters to the editor are essentially a type of audience participation in journalism, they will not be addressed in this dissertation.

Thirdly, although in this definition of participatory journalism, non-professionals are positioned as the ones participating, at the same time the term ‘participatory’ journalism also implies the potential participatory and collective character of the kind of journalism that might result from people’s taking part. It implies that, in theory, in a participatory kind of journalism, all actors – be they professionals or not – are participants. In this respect, this dissertation follows the approach of Singer et al. (2011) in their work *Participatory Journalism. Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers*. Regarding their choice for the term ‘participatory’ journalism, they, posit:

People inside and outside the newsroom are engaged in communicating not only to, but also with, one another. In doing so, they all are participating in the ongoing processes of creating a news website and building a multifaceted community (p. 2).

As such, using the term participatory journalism postpones a definite answer to the question who should actually be termed a ‘participant’.

1.9 Unanswered questions

Despite the fact that participatory journalism has been in the limelight of academic attention, several unanswered questions can be pinpointed in the existing literature on the phenomenon. Below, the four areas that are further investigated in this dissertation will be discussed.

First, over the past decade, scholars have studied participatory journalism from various angles, approaches and philosophies, producing a fair amount of research on the phenomenon. After nearly fifteen years of research on participatory journalism, the field of journalism studies could benefit from an overall perspective on what has been produced, reviewing how scholars have interpreted participatory journalism and overlooking the main trends and developments in scholarly thinking on the subject. Such an overall perspective should also take into account a meta-view on scholarly thinking about participatory journalism. Burr (2003) describes how, according to the principles of social constructionism, scientific knowledge itself should also be treated as socially constructed: *“If all forms of*

knowledge are historically and culturally specific, this must include the knowledge created by the social sciences" (p. 7). Scholars have played a key role in producing knowledge about the possibilities and realizations of participatory journalism, yet, a view that considers scholarly understandings as socially constructed themselves, does not yet exist.

Secondly, most scholarly research has focused on professional journalists and news organizations, investigating their ideas on, and evaluations of, participatory journalism. In general, these studies conclude that professional journalists adopt an ambivalent attitude towards the phenomenon. Time and again, scholars have found that journalists welcome audience participation when they consider it useful on their own professional terms (Domingo et al., 2008; Jönsson and Örnebring, 2011; Örnebring, 2008; Harrison, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Singer, 2010), but that they keep it at bay when it meddle with notions of 'control' that are inherent to their traditional gatekeeping role (Chung, 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Karlsson, 2011; Singer, 2010; Harrison, 2010; O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Wardle and Williams, 2010; Williams et al., 2010). This notion of control begs further investigation for two reasons.

To start with, the great majority of existing studies has been based on research of 'regular' editorial staff that operates within fairly traditional settings. Hence, the question arises whether more innovative potential can be found among a different group of journalism practitioners, that might be more prone to experimenting and innovation. Put differently: existing research concentrates on editorial staff in mainstream news organizations, whose views and evaluations can be considered representative of the *norm* for what counts as journalism, but that do not provide insight into the extent to which the norm can be *stretched*. Since it is the goal of this dissertation research to investigate the possibilities and limitations for innovation in journalism in the wake of digital technology and participatory developments, it is relevant to investigate the possibilities for stretching the norm for what counts as journalism. Furthermore, existing production studies have been revealing about journalists' opinions of and attitudes towards participatory journalism by focusing on the so-called 'descriptive' side of journalists' language use. However, the 'productive' side of journalists' language use has yet to be investigated. Studying the productive side of language is considered important in social constructionist approaches, since it can bring to the surface the possibilities, constraints, and dilemmas that language use produces (Burr, 2003; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Thirdly, while many scholars have paid attention to the professional perspective on participatory journalism, audience studies of the phenomenon are relatively scarce. Two main findings can be derived from existing audience research. To start with, a handful of studies suggest the strength of existing media habits rather than the development of revolutionary new ones. The *Pew Research Center* (2010) has indeed described people's relationship to news as "*increasingly participatory*" (p. 4), but at the same time observes that "*participation comes more through sharing than through contributing news themselves*" (p.4). Other researchers have found that the audience is appreciative of participatory opportunities, but

that it only uses these in moderation (Bakker, 2013; Bergström, 2008; Chung and Nah, 2009; Hujanen and Pietikäinen, 2004; Larsson, 2011). Next, a few studies point towards differences in participation agendas between journalists and audience participants. Participation seems to be based not on democratic ideals, but rather on personal reasons like ‘having fun’ and ‘being creative’ (Bergström, 2008; Hujanen and Pietikäinen 2004), or ‘publicizing themselves’ (Picone, 2011). Also, studies propose that participants wish to develop their own norms and values regarding news, which do not always coincide with professional norms and values (Robinson, 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2010). All in all, these studies offer only some initial insights into the audience perspective of participatory journalism. Little is still known about how audience participants view and evaluate participating in journalism, what they expect from taking part, and under which conditions they would be willing to participate.

Fourthly, research of participatory content is even more scarce than studies of the audience perspective. Existing content studies have mainly compared participatory journalism to conventional professional journalism, suggesting a break with professional journalism’s mode of detached and objective reporting. Non-professionals tend to cover ‘soft news’ instead of hard and factual news (Paulussen and D’heer, 2013), to rely upon first-hand witnessing and personal experience instead of on official, institutional sources (Carpenter, 2010; Reich, 2008; Paulussen and D’heer, 2013) and to define newsworthiness in terms of values like ‘consonance’, ‘self-promotion’ and ‘emotion’ instead of in terms of conventional news values like ‘unexpectedness’, ‘public relevance’ and ‘negativity’ (Paulussen and D’heer, 2013). Seeing that participatory journalism is an umbrella term for a wide range of participatory initiatives, across various media, and differing from each other in goals and set-up, further research is needed into the typical content of the various initiatives that shared under the header of participatory journalism.

Finally, the study of participatory journalism is limited in terms of its geographical scope. Participatory initiatives in the context of professional news organisations are especially well covered from a British perspective (e.g. Carpentier, 2003; Harrison, 2010; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Singer, 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2010; Wardle and Williams, 2010; Williams et al., 2010). Outside the context of professional frameworks, mainly (blogging) initiatives in the United States have received considerable scholarly attention (e.g. Bruns and Jacobs, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Tremayne, 2007). Researchers from the European mainland have provided some counterweight by zooming in on participatory journalism in their countries (e.g. Bergström, 2008; Paulussen & D’heer, 2013; Paulussen and Ugille, 2008; Domingo et al., 2008; Kovacic and Erjavec, 2008; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010; Pantti & Bakker, 2009), but still, the Anglo-American focus remains dominant. Studies of the Dutch situation are almost non-existent, whereas differences with the situation in other countries might be expected based on high levels of internet penetration, broadband access, and use of social media in the Netherlands (International Communication Union, 2014; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2015).

This dissertation will address the abovementioned knowledge gaps by a) doing a systematic review of scholarly articles on participatory journalism published between 1995 and 2011; b) studying a specific type of journalism practitioners who have been pioneering with audience participation, so-called ‘frontrunners’; c) bringing audience participants in focus; d) studying participatory content that is created in various participatory journalistic settings – all of which in the context of participatory journalism in the Netherlands.

1.10 Participatory journalism in the Netherlands

Like in the United States and elsewhere in Europe, participatory journalistic developments have also gained foothold in the Netherlands. In the past decade, participatory initiatives have been started by both print media and broadcasters as well as by online-only outlets. Participatory journalism has mushroomed both within and outside the context of professional news organisations and on all geographical levels, from the hyperlocal to the national. Next to offering opportunities like leaving comments under journalists’ articles or items, daily opinion polls or sharing articles through *Twitter* and *Facebook* – all tools with which many news organisations have experimented –, there have also been more extensive participatory projects. On a national level, there have been initiatives aimed at getting the audience to write (e.g. *VKblogs* by *De Volkskrant*, 2005 - 2011), to engage audience participants as experts on certain matters (e.g. *NOSNet* by *NOS*¹) or to involve them as eyewitnesses (e.g. *Skoeps* by *PCM Uitgevers* and *Talpa Media*, 2006 - 2008; *NOSOoggetuige* by *NOS*²; *Nufoto* by *Nu.nl*³; *Wat u Zegt* by *De Telegraaf*⁴). On a regional and local level, there have been several platforms where participants could create and publish their own news (e.g. *Dorpspleinen* by *Twentsche Courant Tubantia*, 2005 - 2009; *Dichtbij.nl* by *Telegraaf Media Group*⁵; *UindeWijk – RTV Utrecht*).

Despite high hopes and great enthusiasm at the outset of such participatory initiatives, many of them were short lived. They were stopped again out of disappointment with the results (Costera Meijer and Arendsen, 2010), either financially, in terms of journalistic quality or both, which has been grist to the mill of those who are skeptical about participatory trends in journalism (e.g. Drayer, 2011; Van der Gaag, 2009). At the same time, however, most news organisations have, by now, incorporated audience participation in one way or another into their ways of working (Van Oers and Pleijter, 2011). What is more, new initiatives are still being developed. In 2013, for instance, *Nu.nl*, a large news web site, called upon its visitors to assist in their research on drones. And in 2014, *Journalism*⁶ was started, a crowdfunding platform

1 <https://over.nos.nl/uw-reacties/nos-net>

2 <https://over.nos.nl/uw-reacties/ooggetuige>

3 <http://www.nufoto.nl/>

4 <http://www.telegraaf.nl/watuzegt/>

5 <http://www.dichtbij.nl/>

6 <http://journalism.nl/>

that turns readers into commissioners: readers can suggest subjects that journalists should look into, vote for each other's ideas and together finance journalistic investigations. The ongoing development of participatory initiatives fuels the hopes of those who still encourage the coming into existence of a more participatory kind of journalism (e.g. Brouwers, 2014; Costera Meijer, 2009; Van der Valk, 2011).

1.11 Research questions and outline of the dissertation

In summary, the goal of this dissertation is to study how developments in the field of participatory journalism affect conventional understandings of what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist. The approach has been to investigate how the phenomenon of participatory journalism is constructed by several actors that have been key in both the debate on participatory journalism as well as in the conventional journalistic construction. To be more precise, in this dissertation, participatory journalism is approached 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. Also, participatory content is analyzed. This research is geared toward 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

The approach of this dissertation research can be described as a mixed-method approach, with the methods of data collection and analysis depending on the specific research questions posed in the subsequent chapters. The methods employed include genealogical analysis, interpretative repertoire analysis, grounded theory, and quantitative content analysis in the study of a variety of data: scholarly articles, individual and group interviews, and news content. This mixed-method approach enables triangulation of the findings by revealing similarities and differences, and sometimes contradictory findings, between the various angles from which participatory journalism is studied (Mathison, 1988). What is more, by combining methods from the (critical) humanities and the social sciences, this dissertation unites the two perspectives that have played a central role in the study of journalism at large (see Deuze, 2005; also Zelizer, 2000).

By concentrating on producers, audience and content, the structure of this dissertation largely follows a media studies approach (e.g. Fourie, 2001). The categories of producers and audience are interconnected, and, in practice, it is often difficult to isolate them from one other. This was already true under the conditions of mass media, seeing that producers developed strategies to get an idea of their audiences and considering that audiences provided producers with feedback through writing letters-to-the-editor or through simply zapping on to another media outlet (Holliman, 2004: 109; Thompson, 1988: 364). In the present digital media context, producers and audiences as journalistic categories are all the more interconnected. Digital media are known for pushing the boundaries of these traditional categories – consider Bruns' (2005) invention of the term "*produser*" that unites the activities

of producing and using media in one actor. However, for the purposes of this study, the categories of the professional journalists as representing traditional producers and audience participants as representatives of the traditional audience are analytically separated. The choice for these traditional categories is rooted in the goal of this dissertation, being to understand how the conventional journalistic construction, in which these categories were key, is influenced in the wake of participatory journalism.

In *Chapter 2*, participatory journalism is approached from the perspective of journalism scholars. By looking back on more than a decade of scholarly research on the phenomenon, the goal of this chapter is to contribute to the forming of a consensual body of knowledge on participatory journalism. By systematically reviewing a total of 119 articles on participatory journalism, published between 1995 and September 2011, this chapter, first of all, aims to provide an overview of how scholars have interpreted the phenomenon, and of the main trends and developments in scholarly research of participatory journalism. Secondly, by conducting an analysis that is inspired by the principles of genealogical analysis (Foucault, 1970), this chapter, furthermore, examines the socially constructed nature of scholarly understandings of participatory journalism. It is investigated how scholarly ways of writing and thinking about participatory journalism are connected with the ‘rules’ governing the field of journalism studies at large.

Chapter 3 studies participatory journalism from the perspective of a particular type of journalism practitioners. The chapter builds on previous studies of participatory journalism that demonstrate that professional journalism can be resistant to change. In this chapter, this resistance to change is further investigated by interviewing 22 frontrunners in Dutch journalism who are pioneers in audience participation. The goal was to better understand how they made sense of audience participation in journalism. Through an ‘interpretative repertoire analysis’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), the possibilities, constraints and dilemmas that frontrunners’ discourse constructs are examined. By conducting this specific type of analysis, this study aims to gain insight in the routine deployments of cultural understandings in journalistic linguistic practices and to reveal practical consequences in terms of possibilities and constraints for audience participation and innovation in journalism.

In *Chapter 4*, participatory journalism is examined from the perspective of the audience participants. Through a series of in-depth interviews with 32 participants from two different participatory journalistic environments set up by professional news organizations, it is investigated how participants view and evaluate their participation in journalism. Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) is used to come to a better understanding of participants’ expectations and evaluations of taking part in journalism and to gain insight in factors that help some participatory initiatives succeed while many others fail.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the study of participatory content. It aims to contribute to a better understanding of what the participating audience produces in order to shed light on the question what this reveals about what counts as journalism in the eyes of these relevant stakeholders. The content of five very different examples of participatory journalism is

investigated. It is systematically studied how the content of these various projects might be characterized in relation to two notions conventionally associated with quality journalism: 'objectivity' and 'diversity'.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, provides an overview of the main findings of the research and draws the findings of the subsequent chapters into dialog with each other, discussing them in relation to the main research question. First, it is outlined how the actors and perspectives that have been researched in the various chapters construct participatory journalism. The chapter examines what these constructions reveal about their ideas on what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist. Secondly, it is investigated what a confrontation of these perspectives reveals about the construction of journalism at large, and, second, what this means for the possibilities and limitations for 'rethinking' journalism.

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