EDITED PARTICIPATION

COMPARING EDITORIAL INFLUENCE ON TRADITIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY ONLINE NEWSPAPERS IN SWEDEN

KRISTOFFER HOLT

MICHAEL KARLSSON

Abstract

Although participatory journalism involves publishing content created by users, editorial influence is an important aspect of participatory online media. Editors shape the conditions under which user generated content is produced, the context of publication and the perceived prominence of the content. It is still unclear how this influence manifests itself, and how it can be related to the discussion about participatory media's potential for revitalising democracy. In this paper, three online news media in Sweden are analysed comparatively: *Sourze* – the first Swedish participatory newspaper; *Newsmill* – a social media focusing on news and debate; and *DN* – the online version of the largest Swedish morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*. The question is how participation is affected by editorial influence. The findings suggest that participatory arenas are constrained by the logic of their context of production. People from different categories in society participate on different terms. Furthermore, editors influence the agenda by suggesting topics, and by rewarding articles that follow their suggestions. These findings do not challenge assumptions about participatory newspapers as more accessible channels for citizens and therefore interesting as possible means of allowing a more democratically involved citizenry, but it challenges assumptions about freedom from constraints related to traditional mass media, such as agenda setting, gate-keeping and media logic.

Kristoffer Holt is Research Associate and Senior Lecturer in Department of Information Technology and Media, Mid Sweden University; e-mail: kristoffer.holt@miun.se.

Michael Karlsson is Assistant Professor in Department of Media and Communication, Karlstad University, Sweden; e-mail: michael.karlsson@kau.se.

19 javnost–the public Vol.18 (2011), No. 2, pp. 19-36

Introduction

Research on public participation in the creation of news has focused on the central question of how new ICTs may facilitate and increase civic participation in political discussions by making it possible for users to actively take part in discussions and publish or react to already published content. (Papacharissi 2002; Rheingold 2002; Downey and Fenton 2003; Lawson-Borders and Kirk 2005; Dijk 2006; Jenkins 2006; Deuze et al. 2007; Paulussen and Ugille 2008; Wojcieszak and Mutz 2009; Rebillard and Touboul 2010). The rise of new communicative tools – often commonly referred to as the "web 2.0" has sparked hopes about new levels of participation and many have predicted a communicative shift away from disseminatory mass media, to the sharing of content among citizens and their digital networks. However, the large amount and the differences between these new participatory media makes it impossible to lump them all together and treat them as one and the same – in order to make sense of the changing patterns of participation, it is necessary to look at specific aspects and attributes of participation at individual digital media outlets (Witschge 2008). Furthermore, in order to grasp the participatory features of these new media channels, it is necessary to look closer at the conditions under which participation occurs – conditions that may be very different from one case to another.

The possibilities of social media have been the subject of much idealistic discourse that hail the dawn of a new age – blurring the border between what is actually happening, and what many hope, or think ought to happen (Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009; Rebillard and Touboul 2010). In spite of much rhetoric surrounding the web 2.0, the most noticeable of the participatory, or social, media (i.e. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc.) cannot be considered idealistic projects, aimed at increasing citizens' involvement in the democratic process, but are rather lucrative businesses with other main purposes. But some commercial social media explicitly state as an aim to improve democracy by providing a public platform for online deliberation and for participatory journalism. In many cases, news media that publish user-generated content are run by professional editors. Sites like *Ohmynews* in Korea, *Newsvine* in the USA, *Janjannews* in Japan and *Newsmill* and *Sourze* in Sweden – who mainly publish articles written by their users – are often presented as enterprises that stem from visions about a better democracy (Janjannews; Newsmill; Newsvine; Ohmynews; Woo-Young 2005). This is visible on their homepages in the way they describe themselves. *Janjannews* calls itself the "Japan Alternative News for Justices and Newscultures," and *Newsmill* invites writers to participate in an effort to create a "better and more democratic" public discourse (Holt 2009). At the same time, anyone involved in news media will find themselves facing established notions of journalism, institutionalised ways of operating media organisations and a need to find a policy for what is suitable to publish or not. Consequently, the potentialities of ideal participation must be understood and investigated in the everyday operation of news media restrained by local and global economical, political and cultural realities (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Schudson 2003). For instance, in order to be successful financially and by means of reach and influence, the editors have to take into account issues that have to do with click-through traffic and therefore find themselves in a position not remarkably different from that of editors of tradi-

tional mass media – competing for the audience's attention by available resources. This is an important part of the context that surrounds participatory journalism. It challenges assumptions about how participatory media bypass the mechanisms of journalistic exclusion associated with mass media like media logic, gatekeeping and agenda-setting (Meraz 2009). Furthermore, it places emphasis on looking into how the editors of such sites operate and in what ways they influence the production and publication of content.

This study addresses the question of how editorial involvement affects processes of publishing in different participatory journalism outlets. More specifically, it explores a) who the producers of content are b) how editors influence the content by inviting contributions on specific subjects and c) how they attribute salience to different texts by the way they present them when they are published (editorial embedding). In addition, we d) compare the editorial embedding of texts that are written by different author categories and are written on editorially suggested topics or not.

Web 2.0 and Collective Intelligence. Participatory media are often described as having a potential for revitalising democracy by serving as remedy for what has been called a democratic deficit – the lack of active, present and visible "ordinary" citizens in mediated political and cultural debates (Coleman and Blumler 2009). One of the early visionaries about the Internet's possibilities is Pierre Lévy. Lévy's notion of "collective intelligence" – characteristic of the emerging digital "knowledge space" – is one important idea behind the concept Web 2.0 (Lévy 1997; O'Reilly 2005). Lévy envisioned a future, in which citizens participated in the political communication-process in other ways than merely as voters. The "virtual Agora" would help individuals in tailoring their political identities by allowing plurality and independence from party-identities. Political identity would be shaped by "contributions to the construction of a political landscape that was perpetually in flux" and by support for various problems, positions and arguments, rather than identification with a specific party, ideology or politician (Lévy 1997, 65). To many who formulated this kind of hopes, the development online was disappointing. The internet was originally intended to serve mankind as a free and open "universe of network accessible information" (Berners-Lee 2006). Instead, it became increasingly exploited by commercial enterprises, the interactive possibilities were not taken advantage of. Web 1.0 did not live up to the expectations of interactivity, participation and democratic development. Web 2.0 is often described as a grassroots reaction against this tendency.

Lévy's and Berners-Lee's ideas continue to have a significant impact on the academic interpretation of the development since. Jenkins (2006), Deuze (2007) and Bruns (2008) draw on Lévy's ideas about collective intelligence in their attempts to explain how culture in general and journalism in particular is being changed by the increasingly participatory nature of media production and consumption. Jenkins, following Lévy's assertion that collective intelligence is a "realisable utopia," calls himself a "critical utopian": someone who identifies the participatory aspects of Web 2.0 as "possibilities within our culture that might lead toward a better, more just society" (Jenkins 2006, 258). The development and restructuring of the media-landscape, therefore has both political and cultural implications (Jenkins 2006). According to Deuze the emerging participatory media culture is possible only through

the "flourishing of a 'collective intelligence' particular of cyberculture" (Deuze 2007, 39). For Bruns, Lévy's notion of collective intelligence is central for his argument about the changing nature of content creation and publishing, "produsage," that is based on "access to public participation" in journalism. This access will lead to a "more profound transformation of journalism, enabling a greater focus on public deliberation in and through its coverage" (Bruns 2008).

Participatory Media = Strukturwandel 2.0? The structural change of the public sphere that Habermas described concerned the shift from a culturally involved public, that took part in the political and cultural debates as citizens – to an increasingly passive mass-audience (Habermas 1989). The shift was a result of the growth and commercialisation of disseminatory mass media. As Dahlgren (2005) points out, mass media are considered by many to have failed in the task of providing a forum for participation in the ongoing debates: sitting at home consuming media products is not enough to be considered participation (Dahlgren 2005; Bruns 2008). Furthermore, the hierarchical structure of mass communication (from one to many) has some inherent problems, such as commercialisation, the unavoidable occurrence of framing, media logic and the privileged position of journalists as producers of commentary and opinions, rendering traditional, "industrial" journalism "entirely insufficient to support the functioning of complex modern societies and democracies" (Bruns 2008). Different phenomena, like blogging, have given reason to suggest that the old order is no longer functioning and that citizens are now taking it upon themselves to interpret news and share views. Kahn and Kellner (2004) show how blogging can have an impact on society and lead to "a reconfiguring of politics and culture." The shift from web 1.0 (that was mainly used as a complementary publishing tool) to web 2.0 (where the interactive and social potential of internet communication is being exploited more fully) – certainly justifies the thought that if the *public space* on the Internet also contains *public spheres* it might again be going through a major structural change – in reverse. The explosion of new, internet-based media provides arenas for public communication that lend themselves to speculations about a return of a Habermasian public-sphere (Papacharissi 2002; Dahlberg 2004; Habermas 2006). Big media are challenged by citizens who have the means to create and "co-create" media content as well as disseminate it to larger audiences; issues are debated in new contexts where the audience have a greater possibility of both participating and dissenting publicly, in front of audiences of a different fabric than of traditional mass media (Boler 2008; Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009). As well as opening up new arenas for public-formation, political participation and civic deliberation, the internet also provides the means to form "counter-public spheres" (Downey and Fenton 2003). Public discourses are created, shared and stored in new ways. Traditional journalism is getting competition from "citizen journalism" and "participatory journalism" – where the audience is invited to produce journalistic material themselves as well as to interact with the journalistic products of others, submit content and have a say in the interpretation of news events (Domingo et al. 2008).

This development may reshape the conditions for the production of culture and public discourse essential to any democratic society (Dahlberg 2004; Jensen et al. 2007). Accordingly, some theoreticians herald a new age of audience participation, a boost for democracy worldwide and a shift from traditional hierarchical

one-way dissemination of content to a media-environment characterised by interaction, dialogue, participation and equality, resonant of Lévy's vision (Jenkins 2006; Bruns 2008). In the culture of participation that is supposedly emerging, one thing is constantly pointed out: The audience no longer tolerates being passive receivers – they want to interact and be taken seriously. They want to have a say and be able to influence, and they can pool their resources in collective efforts to promote change (Jenkins 2006; Bruns 2008). There is, according to Bruns, a strong desire "by citizens to engage significantly more actively in politics and society," and a dawning awareness of the fact that "the more passive role bestowed on audiences by the mass media was never a conscious choice" but a "by-product of the predominant media technologies of the day" (Bruns 2008, 92).

The term "participatory journalism" can be used in slightly different ways – but is generally understood as the increasing amount and various ways in which what Jay Rosen has called "the people formerly known as the audience" actively contribute to journalism by submitting texts, images and film or by interacting with news in various ways like, for example commenting or recommending it to others (Bruns 2005; Deuze et al. 2007; Domingo et al. 2008; Paulussen and Ugille 2008). Journalistic practice is no longer limited to the work of professional journalists, but is becoming participatory in that it is increasingly open to "non-professional expression" (Rebillard and Touboul 2010, 328). Most research that has been done about participatory journalism has focused on the way in which user generated content is dealt with in the newsrooms of traditional mass media and the way that this material is valued, treated and presented (Deuze et al. 2007; Domingo et al. 2008; Paulussen and Ugille 2008; Rebillard and Touboul 2010). Deuze points out that participatory news sites often emerge from organisations "with a strong public service agenda or a strong connection to clearly defined local or interest communities, or are set up by commercial news organizations" (Deuze et al. 2007). Participatory journalism is a concept that indeed evokes notions both of how the idea of collective intelligence is realised in practice in the web 2.0-context and how the Habermasian ideal of dialogue and citizen participation in the public use of reason might be possible to realise. Bruns points out that news is "inherently social" and "requires broad societal participation" which "been missing from public involvement in the news debate for some time" (Bruns 2008).

However, many researchers are sceptical about the actuality of this participation: contemporary theories "express a demanding 'ought' that faces the sobering 'is' of ever more complex societies" (Habermas 2006, 411). There is a risk that the ideals and wishes will dictate the interpretation of the communication in new media forms. Assuming that citizens will decide to participate on a large scale is not supported by empirical evidence, and the opportunities for participation still rest, to a high degree, at the mercy of editors (Rebillard and Touboul 2010). Furthermore, empirical research also indicates that most users are still passive consumers and those active are not representative of the population or driven by an urge for a common good (Dijk 2006; Bergström 2008; Chung and Yoo 2008; Chung and Nah 2009; Hindman 2009; Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009; Chu 2010; Rebillard and Touboul 2010).

Dialogue or Dissemination? In history, we have the problem of finding accurate manifestations of an existing public sphere that corresponds to Habermas' model (Habermas 1989). In theory, the concept has been somewhat overused, creating

confusion about what is actually meant by it (Hacker and Dijk 2000). Nevertheless, it captures something essential about the function of media in democracy and contains a necessarily normative definition of what good democratic communication should look like. The seemingly trivial dictionary-distinction between discourse as either dialogical communication, or one-way communication brings us immediately to one of the core questions about public discourse and the hopes that are expressed about the democratic potential of participatory media. Good, democratic communication, is as good as always described as "dialogue" in contemporary democratic society (Peters 1999). It is valued higher than its counterpart: dissemination, the hierarchical, one-way-communication of radio, TV and newspapers. Dialogue – by virtue of its reciprocity, mutuality and interactivity – is the very essence of "participatory democracy" (Peters 1999, 33). Theories about deliberative democracy imply that it is in dialogue – not dissemination – that the foundation of democratic society is to be found (Dewey 1991; Habermas 1991, Dahlgren 2005). However, Peters' argument is more intended as a "rehabilitation of dissemination" as a communicative form (Peters 1999, 35). He believes that the celebration of dialogue as a superior communicative form, is often uncritical, and that dissemination has qualities that are sometimes overlooked, when the key to improve democracy is described solely as increasing dialogue among the citizens. This point, we argue, is relevant also in discussions about the dialogical qualities of participatory media. Especially when discussing social media, the dialogic potential is sometimes overestimated. After all, what most social and participatory media do, is to create spaces where the users can make their own (or someone else's) content available to others. And this does not automatically lead to increased levels of dialogue among the content producers and consumers.

This distinction points to the object of study: the most interesting thing about participatory media, when it comes to determining whether or not it holds any potential to revitalise democracy, is perhaps not *what* is being said, but the new context it constitutes for the dissemination of texts – and the increased availability of these texts to the general public (Witschge 2008). Furthermore, the way that participatory media let *everyone* have a say, might not automatically create better public discourse. In his later work, Habermas emphasises the function of "filtering" that should result from mediated political communication – in other words, the "public sphere forms the periphery of a political system and can well facilitate deliberative legitimation processes by 'laundering' flows of political communication through a division of labour with other parts of the system" (Habermas 2006, 415). In traditional mass media, this "filtering" was performed by editors and journalists at the gates. In participatory media, where the threshold to publicity is lower, this privilege is not necessarily exclusive to journalism professionals (Deuze et al. 2007). However, we argue that editorial influence is an important aspect of participatory journalism as the threshold to participate is lowered rather than abolished. Consequently, there is still a role for editors to sift out information and decide the relative importance of contributions – not all can occupy the most attractive spots simultaneously.

Therefore, it can be misleading to direct the major focus towards the dialogical aspects of participatory media when discussing democratic gains. In participatory newspapers, articles are disseminated much like in an online version of a

traditional newspaper. The commentary function is there, but what makes them participatory, is the fact that the articles are written by, or linked to by, the readers/users/"producers," and not by journalists (Bruns 2008). However, the format resembles traditional online-newspapers. Important in this discussion is the question about how the conditions for publishing content are shaped by editors. Even if "the lowered threshold for citizens to enter the public sphere" means that new channels are now available for citizens to publish their own material, these texts are still published in editorially controlled contexts (Deuze et al. 2007, 323). The question of how editorial considerations matter for the shaping and publication of online news, is therefore relevant to the discussion about participatory media's potential as remedy for the democratic shortcomings of mass media.

Shaping the Content of News in Different Media. Editors are important in deciding what shall be published but they do not operate in a vacuum, rather they are guided and constrained by several conditions such as; audience demand, legislation, advertising, technological infrastructure, sources, news agencies, ownership, culture in the editorial office and by widespread notions of what news and journalism is (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Schudson 2003). Taken together it can be argued that these factors contribute to shape a more or less articulated policy of what the news organisation should publish. Since every news organisation work within somewhat different conditions it can be expected that the published content of each media outlet will have a fairly distinct accent. Traditionally it has been understood that the news sources has had the largest external influence over news and that these news sources reside in or close to political and economical power (Bennett 1990). With the advent of participatory media it is suggested, as the above literature review illustrate, that citizens will gain power and elite holds will lose theirs. On the other hand these new interactive possibilities must be implemented in already existing structures. Or as Pablo Boczkowski puts it "… new media emerge by merging existing sociomaterial infrastructures with novel technical capabilities and … [this] … evolution is influenced by a combination of historical conditions, local contingencies and process dynamics" (Boczkowski 2004, 12).

In this study we compare similarities and differences in editorially attributed salience to news items on the front page on three rather diverse Swedish media outlets. *Sourze* – one of the first Swedish sites that invited citizens as primary contributors and says that it is written by and for ordinary people (ranked as number 3968 in Sweden by *Alexa.com* in September 2010). The editorial office sees its primary concern to market the content making it meaningful for writers to contribute. *Newsmill* (ranked as number 252) is a social media stemming from *Bonniers*, one of largest media corporations in Sweden, focusing on news and debate. *Newsmill* runs "Our readers know more than we do" as their slogan. They have been remarkably successful in Swedish journalism, especially by attracting celebrities to write articles, and by impact on traditional media. *DN* (ranked number 14) – the online version of the largest Swedish morning paper *Dagens Nyheter* thus running a traditional news business but in a digital environment. These sites all face the issue of participation but approach the matter with their different institutional identities and backgrounds. We are looking at four different, but correlating, aspects of editorial influence on participatory journalism: Different categories of authors, editorial embedding, editorially attributed salience and editorially suggested topics.

Different Categories of Authors. In journalism, it is not only important to determine the newsworthiness of topics – there is also a difference between how different people are valued as sources and writers. The journalistic profession is partly built on the exclusive access to write news stories (Singer 2003). In other words, people who already have a reputation, celebrity status or influential position in society, are traditionally regarded as more newsworthy than the Average Joe. Indeed, this is where traditional journalism most obviously collides with ideals of collective intelligence and participatory culture. An important question, therefore, is if the editors maintain traditional journalistic valuation principles even in these new participatory media-forms, or if people are valued more on the merit of the strength of their contribution than on the merit of who they are. In this study, we investigate who the participants are by dividing the authors of the articles into four different categories:

1. Journalists. Even though most of the articles are written by non-journalists, some professional journalists write articles for this kind of media. When they present themselves as journalists, this places them in a different category than "ordinary citizens," because being a professional journalist entails experience of writing awareness of journalistic principles.

2. Spokesmen for organisations. Not all authors write articles simply as concerned citizens, but as spokesmen for different organisations (companies, political parties, NGO's etc.). These people address their audience from a different rhetorical platform than other categories. They enjoy an exclusive closeness to the organisation they represent and can therefore claim expert knowledge of things related to the organisation. Furthermore, it is arguable that they also represent specific interests. Speaking as a representative of an organisation is also indicative of an important position in society.

3. Publicly known personalities. This category includes celebrities, cultural personalities or otherwise famous people i.e. musicians, athletes, actors, artists and writers etc. This group is characterised by the fact that all included are persons that most people know who they are. Admittedly, it is difficult to define exactly who would be eligible for this category, but nevertheless it is important to analyse if fame is rewarded with editorially attributed salience.

4. Ordinary people. Authors who do not present themselves as journalists or spokesmen or who cannot be considered famous or publicly known, have been placed in a category of ordinary people. Again, this category is hard to define, but is central to the discussion about participatory media and democracy. The other three categories already enjoyed access to the public arena in the age of mass media. The hopes of realising a society in which collective intelligence can be harnessed, rests on the assumption that "ordinary people" step up and contribute to public discourse by making their voices heard. What is of interest here is if this category is treated differently than the other categories, by the editors.

Editorial Embedding and Editorially Attributed Salience. In all journalism, some texts are considered more important than others. In newspapers, some articles are advertised on the front page, and some appear in the paper without getting advertised. Some articles get big headlines while others don't. Some texts get published others don't. These are manifestations of editorial considerations about what is significant, entertaining, commercially attractive or appealing in

other ways. The research on how the media works in this way, is extensive and shows that the format of news, as a part of "media logic" plays a significant part for the reception of news, because "it refers to the rules or 'codes' for defining, selecting, organising, presenting, and recognising information as one thing rather than another" (Altheide 2004). In this, the role of the editor is crucial, because they make the decisions about the format and context of the news item. These decisions affect the reader's perception of the news item as for example important, or not important. Therefore, one way to approach the question of editorially attributed salience to news articles in participatory journalism is to look at *how* different texts are published. Initial observations from Swedish participatory media revealed that some articles, but not all, receive extra attention from the editors when they are published on the site, in the form of small texts that introduce the topic of the article, texts that present the author or pictures that accompany the article (Holt 2009). The news items were therefore editorially embedded in different ways. This difference is construed as an indicator of attributed salience. The question we want to answer is if there is a detectable pattern behind the differing ways in which different news items, written by people from different categories, receive editorially attributed salience in the form of extra embedding.

Editorially Suggested Topics. Another way of editors' influence is by requesting texts on specific subjects. This can be done in many ways, more or less explicitly, either by asking people to write something for the publication, or by posting clear suggestions for the writers directly on the start-page of the website. The latter is customary at *Newsmill*, where three "daily topics" are announced on a daily basis (Holt 2009). At *Sourze*, the editors sporadically signal that they want debates about specific themes. This is done partly by inviting people (for example politicians) to write, and partly through creating headlines on the front page with special graphics for each debate (*Sourze*). Where the editors are actively placing focus on events that receive much attention in the traditional news media, it can be argued that they are also imposing the logic of traditional journalism on the participatory news media. What is important to find out in relation to this, is if this matters for the way the editors attribute salience to different texts.

Research Design

For this study we chose to do a content analysis to investigate how the different dimensions of participation outlined above manifested in the end product of news – the content published on the respective news site.

Content on the Internet is especially challenging to research since it changes constantly and allows archiving huge amounts of information. Online newspapers like *Dagens Nyheter* simultaneously publish hundreds of thousands of news items and more are added every hour. Thus, any study approaching content on the Internet needs to be profoundly restricted. The method utilised in this study is a content analysis of the news items of the front page of the three websites. The front page was chosen as this is the place where the news sites place their most recent and important items (Bucy 2004; Karlsson and Strömbäck 2010). The sample consists of a constructed week and the front pages were downloaded each day at 12.30 during the spring of 2010 utilising download software, pdf prints and screen shots. A total of 675 articles were analysed (*Newsmill*: 164, *Sourze*: 137 and *DN*: 374).

Two coders (the authors) performed the content analysis. The code scheme was tested and slightly changed before a Holsti test was performed on 30 percent of the *Sourze* sample with satisfactory results (0.95). Firstly, the population of contributors was categorised in order to distinguish between different kinds of authors (coded as either "Journalists," "Publicly known personalities," "Spokesmen" or "Ordinary people"). Secondly, the articles were categorised according to the nature of subject (i.e. is the article written on a topic that has been editorially suggested or independent of editorial requests).[1] Thirdly, the frequency of editorial embedding was measured (coded as either embedded or not). Lastly, it was measured how different types of contributions were editorially embedded.

Who Are the Authors? The data gives us an interesting view of the distribution of authors in the different categories (see Table 1).

Table 1: Authors According to Category (percentages of articles written by different categories of authors)

	Newsmill	*Sourze*	*DN*
Authors according to Category	% (n=164)	% (n=137)	% (n=374)
Journalists:	9 %	9 %	96 %
Publicly Known Personalities:	10 %	1,5 %	0,50 %
Spokesmen:	62 %	27 %	3,50 %
Ordinary People:	18 %	63%	0 %
Total:	100 %	100 %	100 %

In the traditional newspaper, *DN*, almost every article is written by a journalist (96 percent). The remaining 4 percent is divided between "Spokesmen" (3.5 percent) and "Publicly Known Personalities" (0.5 percent). Consequently, there are no articles in *DN* written by "Ordinary people." In both of the participatory journalism sites (*Newsmill* and *Sourze*), "Spokesmen" and "Ordinary people" dominate, accounting together for 89.5 percent of the articles at *Sourze* and 72 percent at *Newsmill*. Interestingly, the amount of "Spokesmen" at *Newsmill* is roughly the same as the amount of "Ordinary people" at *Sourze* – just over 60 percent of the articles. Likewise, the amount of articles written by "Spokesmen" (27 percent) at *Sourze* is comparable to that of "Ordinary people" at *Newsmill* (18 percent). Journalists account for 9 percent of the articles at both sites, and "Publicly Known Personalities" 10 percent at *Newsmill* and 1.5 percent at *Sourze*.

Editorially Suggested Topics. The second string of results concerns to what extent editorially suggested topics get published (see Table 2).

In *DN* all of the articles were coded as "Not editorially suggested," because this variable is not relevant in a traditional newspaper. When it comes to the two participatory newspapers, the image is rather complex and reveals differences between *Newsmill* and *Sourze*. At *Sourze* only 17 percent of the articles were explicitly dealing with editorially suggested topics, while the number for *Newsmill* is 55 percent (inlcuding the "sponsored seminar").

Table 2: Editorially Suggested Topics (percentages of articles written on a subject that has been suggested by the editors in advance)

	Newsmill	*Sourze*
Editorially suggested topics	% (n=164)	% (n=137)
Editorially suggested:	55 %	17 %
Not editorially suggested:	45 %	83 %
Total:	100 %	100 %

Note: Articles from *Newsmill* include those coded as "Sponsored seminar" (10 percent of all the articles).

Editorial Embedding. The final parts of the results involve editorial embedding. First the overall editorial embedding is presented (Table 3), then editorial embedding according to author category (Table 4) and finally the relation between editorial embedding and editorial suggested topics (Table 5).

Starting with the overall percentage of editorially embedded articles in the participatory newspapers, *Newsmill* and *Sourze* are presented in Table 3. *DN* was excluded from this and the following tables as news items by definition are editorially embedded on a mainstream news media and the media outlet does not claim to provide anything else either. Again, as in the previous cases, *Sourze* and *Newsmill* differ substantially from each other.

Table 3: Editorial Embedding (percentages of editorially embedded articles)

	Newsmill	*Sourze*
Editorial embedding	% (n=164)	% (n=137)
Editorially embedded:	55 %	22 %
Not editorially embedded:	45 %	78 %
Total:	100 %	100 %

At *Newsmill*, 55 percent of the articles were found to have received extra attention from the editors in the form of embedding explained above, while the same can be said of 22 percent of the articles at *Sourze*. Thus, the editors are active at both the participatory news sites but differ in their intensity.

Editorially Embedded Articles According to Author Category. Going deeper into the results and investigating how the editorially embedded articles in the participatory newspapers related to different categories of authors, both similarities and differences were found (see Table 4).

Table 4: Editorial Embedding and Authors

	Newsmill	*Sourze*
Embedded articles and author category	% (n=90)	% (n=30)
Journalists:	13,5 %	3,5 %
Publicly Known Personalities:	13,5 %	7 %
Spokesmen:	64 %	77 %
Ordinary People:	9 %	13,5 %
Total:	100 %	100 %

Table 4 shows the percentages of the editorially embedded articles written by different author categories.

In *Newsmill*, 13.5 percent were written by "Journalists," 13.5 percent by "Publicly known personalities," 64 percent by "Spokesmen" and 9 percent by "Ordinary people." Of the few embedded articles found in *Sourze*, 3.5 percent were written by "Journalists," 7 percent by "Publicly known personalities," 77 percent by "Spokesmen" and 13.5 percent by "Ordinary people." A similarity between the sites is that a majority of the editorially embedded articles were written by "Spokesmen." They obtain similar numbers regarding the embedding of articles written by "Ordinary people": only 9 percent at *Newsmill* and 13.5 percent at *Sourze*.

Editorially Embedded Articles and Editorial Suggested Topics. Finally, Table 5 presents the proportions of embedding the editorial suggested articles was compared to the embedding of non-editorial suggested articles.

Table 5: Editorial Embedding and Suggested Topics

	Newsmill	*Sourze*
Embedding and suggested topics	% (n=90)	% (n=30)
Editorially suggested:	60 %	60 %
Not editorially suggested:	40 %	40 %
Total:	100 %	100 %

Table 5 shows the percentage of the editorially embedded articles that are written on topics suggested by the editors in advance. The articles from *Newsmill* include those coded as "Sponsored Seminar" (13.5 percent of the embedded articles).

Among the editorially embedded articles, a majority were written on an editorially suggested topic: 60 percent of the articles on both *Newsmill* and *Sourze* (see Table 5). Thus, it seems that the editors on both news sites were more likely to give the extra attention that embedding entails to articles that responded to their calls for topics compared to those that did not.

Analysis: Contested Participatory Arenas

In the literature concerning participation there is often an emphasis on the interactive possibilities of Web 2.0. The findings in this study show in various ways that user participation is conditioned by the circumstances and context in which it is produced. The differences between the compared sites regarding author category, editorially suggested topics and editorial embedding reveals substantial differences. Some of these differences can be explained by the different nature of the compared media. At a traditional newspaper like *DN*, almost all of the articles are, as can be expected, written by journalists. The only ones who break that monopoly are representatives from organisations and on one occasion publicly known personalities (a former prime minister writing without explicit connection to his political party). Also there are no attempts to suggest topics as users have little role in the production of the actual news stories (commenting on them after the fact is, however, a different issue not covered in this paper). Thus, in the case of *DN*, journalists are still in control of the production (all other things being equal) despite that the production takes place in an allegedly participatory environment. The promise of participation is quenched by professional, economic and other constraints surround the production of news – well documented within journal-

ism studies. While this is far from surprising in a traditional outlet like *DN* there are some other interesting observations at *Newsmill* and *Sourze* that both claim to offer an arena for the common user.

At *Newsmill* the items on the frontpage to a large extent stems from organisations. Thus, *Newsmill* is an example of how organised interests, rather than citizens, move in when institutionalised journalism moves out. The average user has a role as a producer but it is restricted to about one in five news items. Ordinary people play a more active part on *Sourze* where they contribute with nearly two thirds of all news items.

One dimension is who gets to produce news items; another is the prominence of each contribution. Overall the findings in this study suggest that users are participating in the production of news. But it also shows that users do not equal citizens or ordinary people and that some contributions are valued more than others. Ordinary citizens far less well than corporations, political parties and other organised powers – at *Newsmill* only 9 percent of the contributions that are given an extra push by editorial embedding stems from ordinary people while they contribute with 18 percent of the overall content. The three other categories of contributors, journalists, famous people and spokespeople from organisations all have higher shares of embedding than their actual contributions.

The arena in which ordinary people have the greatest access is the one with least connection to commercial interest but also with miniscule traffic. But even at *Sourze* the contributions from spokespersons are valued higher in terms of editorial salience than those from ordinary people. Here ordinary people contribute with 63 percent of the content while getting roughly one eighth of the editorial embedding. Conversely spokesmen produce about one quarter of the content but have 77 percent of the embedding. Consequently, all across these participatory news sites it seems that the social status of authoritative sources trumps the participation of the common people. Thus, traditional patterns from analogue mass media are to some extent reproduced in all of these new and allegedly different participatory arenas.

Although previous research is split over the extent to which users demand to participate in the creation of content this study indicates that it is not only a question of wanting to or not but, more importantly, to be allowed to participate and to do it on equal terms. In this context the "sponsored seminar" on *Newsmill* is an interesting phenomena as it places further emphasis on, not only cultural but also, monetary capital as a leverage to participate.

The results reflect that editors do have an active and important role. But the results also show that the outcome of the editorial decisions differs from one media organisation to another and that the adaptation of user participation is indeed a process shaped by sociomaterial infrastructures. In a big media corporation like *DN* journalists are in almost total control while this is not the case in the other two. *Newsmill* is marked by its commercial origin and seeks to publish and promote items that contribute with social status and monetary capital arguably aiming at generating traffic and creating a position within the journalistic field. While the editors at *DN* can simply decide what to publish the editors at *Newsmill* resort to softer techniques of funnelling what should be published by being very active in embedding articles and suggesting topics. The editors at *Newsmill* are suggesting

topics in over half of the items that are published on the frontpage and are equally active in embedding the items. *Sourze* – without origin or major support from a media conglomerate and with a policy of being by and for the common people – have the fewest signs of editorial intervention in different forms suggesting topics in seventeen percent of the news items and embedding news items in similar numbers. However, articles on editorially suggested topics are rewarded with editorial embedding in 60 percent of the cases.

Conclusions: Editorial Influence Prevails

In this paper we have been exploring how editors shape the content of news on three different Swedish online news sites: one traditional newspaper and two with an explicit participatory agenda. More specifically, in order to answer this question, we have attempted to shed light on a) the distribution of authors from different categories, b) to what extent these authors write articles about editorially suggested topics, c) the frequency of editorial embedding and d) patterns of editorially attributed salience through embedding.

The mapping of the population of contributors revealed that a large portion of those who publish content through participatory media consist of representatives for different organisations. This is relevant from a democratic perspective, because it gives further reason to question assumptions about large-scale civic participation. The tendency that spokesmen also receive privileged treatment compared to ordinary citizens, uncover traditional journalistic valuation principles about relevance in the editorial approach to contributions from different groups.

Our analysis suggest that depending on how active the editors are in suggesting topics, they influence what users choose to write articles about. A strategy for a common citizen to increase the chances to be heard would be to contribute to issues deemed desirable by the editors. Another strategy would be to speak freely about issues but be prepared to reach a lesser audience. Consequently, the role of the editors serves to bring conformity to these potentially deliberative arenas. This problematises the view of participatory media as venues for alternative perspectives and as breeding grounds for diversity and pluralism in the news coverage. Surely, alternative perspectives do get published in these forums, but it is clear that the editors are setting the agenda, either by being very active in suggesting topics (*Newsmill*), or by rewarding articles on suggested topics with attributed salience through embedding (*Sourze*).

Regarding editorial embedding in participatory newspapers the results suggest that: a) texts written by ordinary people are less likely to be editorially embedded than texts written by publicly known personalities, journalists and spokesmen for organisations; b) texts submitted independently of editorial suggestions are less likely to be editorially embedded than texts that address topics suggested by the editors.

Taken together the findings suggest that these new and allegedly participatory arenas do not automatically foster an equal or uncontested discourse but are constrained by the underpinning logic of their context of production. The choices that editors make shape the conditions under which user generated content is produced, the immediate context of publication and the perceived prominence of the published content. The content of different participatory media is shaped

by different levels of editorial involvement in the publishing process. The role of the editors is central for the understanding of participation in participatory online news media. From the perspective of participatory media's potential to revitalise democracy by involving citizens actively in the public discourse, the results point at two important facts: Firstly, that participation is not the same for everyone, people from different categories in society participate on different terms. Secondly, editors significantly influence the agenda by suggesting topics, and, in various degrees, by rewarding articles that follow their suggestions.

Therefore, editorial influence is an aspect of the emerging participatory online mediascape that needs further consideration and research. If participatory journalism is indeed reshaping the mediatised public spheres, then more attention needs to be directed towards those who stipulate the conditions for them. But attention should also be directed to the conditions under which the editors' work as these conditions seems to guide editorial decisions.

Having said this, there are reasons to apply caution in viewing these results as universal; the study is limited by being a small sample from small country that may or may not provide special conditions for participation. Further research is recommended to increase the sample; a longitudinal approach would allow us to see if there are changes over time and comparing the results with functionally equivalent media in other countries would strengthen the analysis. In our view the results are encouraging enough to further investigate the role of editors and the conditions under which editors operate in participatory journalism.

Note:

1. At *Newsmill*, a special feature called the "sponsored seminar" complicated the coding of articles as either editorially suggested or not. The sponsored seminar is a service that lets different actors (i.e. unions, NGO's, companies etc.) pay for discussions about a topic of their own choosing. The discussion is open to all authors, and occupies a fixed spot in the upper region of the frontpage, where it remains for an agreed length of time. The problem is if the articles that appear in the sponsored seminar should be considered as responses to suggestions by the editors or as independent contributions? Since this feature means that editorial space is for sale, it can be argued that the editors are in fact paid to suggest to their readers that they should write articles about specific topics. Therefore, we decided to include those articles in the category "editorially suggested topics."

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