
USER GENERATED CONTENT IN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS: BETWEEN CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND CHEAP CONTENT

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Abstract

Newspaper readers increasingly have the possibility to participate in the news making process due to computer mediated communication, either as content providers (commentaries, reader reporter, SMS or online surveys) or as content evaluators or disseminators (recommending, linking, sending). This article explores in which forms this participation can be realized in the case of online newspapers, and it makes a distinction between different medial-technical variants of newspapers (online edition, tablet, smartphone); in addition single possibilities of participation are analyzed in more detail. The article also asks what is the status of these new possibilities of participation: Are they part of 'real' citizen journalism, democratizing journalism? Or as means for newspaper to produce cheap content?

Keywords : newspaper (print version, online version, app, mobile version), citizen journalism, metajournalism, web 2.0, readers' comments

1. Participation in the news process as Citizen Journalism?¹

For a long time, as a private person there were only very limited means to participate in the news process in mass media beyond mere reception. If one disregards the possibilities of grassroots journalism to publish an independent mass media product (newspaper, magazine, radio programme), for a long time the letter to the editor was the only way to make one's voice heard in the mass media (Blaagaard 2013: 1077). The advent of Web 2.0 (John 2013; Runkehl 2012) has opened up unprecedented opportunities for private individuals to participate; citizens can often report more quickly than the traditional mass avoidances. This was not only the case in connection with the famous tweet about the plane crash on the Hudson River on January 15, 2009 (<http://twitpic.com/135xa>), but also in connection with the "Arab Spring", in the coverage of which the established mass

¹ This article is a revised and translated version of Luginbühl (2016).

media regularly used information published on Flickr, Twitter or Facebook. Such news sources probably became important for the first time during the Second Iraq War in 2003, when, in the absence of other eyewitness reports, so-called warblogs were used as news sources, such as the blog "A family in Baghdad" (<http://iraqwardiary.blogspot.ch>; for blogs in general see Herring et al., 2005; Puschmann, 2013). Since then, communication platforms such as Twitter have arisen, as well as photo and video sharing sites. YouTube films, for example are often used, especially in the case of television news. In addition, however, there are many other possibilities for participation in the area of online newspapers: Readers can take part in SMS and online surveys, comment on articles, recommend them to others, link them, 'like' them (mark them with "like") or rate them (give them a positive or negative rating), send them and in some cases also 'tag' them (add a thematic keyword).

When in the following I talk about 'participation' in the news process, I mean active participation in the collection, presentation, analysis or distribution of news via mass media (see Goode 2009: 1288). If one refers this participation to privately acting individuals, one can also understand all these forms as citizen journalism, as Goode (2009) does in his definition (for discussion of the term see also Lasica 2003):

'Citizen journalism' refers to a range of web-based practices whereby 'ordinary' users engage in journalistic practices. (Goode 2009: 1288) [...] it is possible to situate citizen journalism within a framework of *mediation* [highlighted in the original, ML] that can account for a wide spectrum of news-making practices, from activists blogging about local public body corruption, through cell phone photojournalists, to taggers who contribute to shifting memes of public discourse through the simple act of labeling news stories already in circulation. By situating these practices within the framework of mediation, it can be argued that citizen journalism constitutes a complex and layered mix of representation, interpretation (and re-interpretation), translation, and, indeed, remediation [...] whereby news and comment, discourse and information, is reshaped as it traverses a range of sites and varying media platforms (Goode 2009: 1291).

This understanding of 'citizen journalism' represents a very broad understanding of the term, since it also takes into account forms of action in which citizens do not produce any news *content*, but also those in which they *comment* on, *evaluate* or *disseminate* existing content. In addition, forms of participation that do not necessarily take place outside established media institutions and have an oppositional character are taken into account, unlike in the definition of Radsch (2013), which describes citizen journalism as an "alternative and activist form of newsgathering", that take place "outside mainstream media institutions" (Radsch

in prep. quoted in Deutsch, Karlekar & Radsch 2012: 16). This is particularly not the case if this participation is integrated into the products of established mass media (Goode 2009: 1289).

The broad concept of citizen journalism includes not only journalistic achievement in the narrow sense (the production of new content) but also what Goode (2009) calls "metajournalism": All forms of interpreting, reproducing, modifying, supplementing. These are forms tightly connected to the affordances of web 2.0 environments. If one excludes these procedures in the analysis of citizen journalism, then a large part of professional journalistic work would also have to be classified as non-journalistic, since journalistic texts generally consist to a large extent of modified, supplemented and newly compiled texts that already exist (cf. Luginbühl *et al.* 2002).

In Schäfer's terminology (2011), such a broad view of citizen journalism includes both *explicit* and *implicit participation*. Explicit participation refers to the "conscious activity of cultural production" (Schäfer 2011: 51), i.e. the conscious production of news content, for example in eyewitness blogs, in texts of independent news outlets, in the publication of photos and films of news relevant events on social-sharing sites, etc. Implicit participation, on the other hand, is "channeled by design, by means of easy-to-use interfaces, and the automation of user activity processes" (ibid.). This is about less conscious participation such as recommending, linking, likening/advising, sending or tagging a post or about imperceptible participation by clicking on a page that is registered and can be reflected in "most read" rankings. The commenting of media texts can thus be done explicitly (writing a comment), but also implicitly (e.g. by mere recommendation). This also means that participation has to be studied as "action in context" (Johansson 2014: 31) with different participation status and roles within different forms of participation (ibid.).

The potential citizen journalism (in a broad sens) is often highly valued; for example, there is talk of a "paradigmatic shift" (Blaagaard 2013: 1077) in which citizen journalism becomes a "fifth estate" (Cooper 2006) (alongside the institutions of the state and the "fourth estate" of the established media). Citizen journalism is also seen as a means to compensate for the democratic deficits of established mass media by producing a "convergence culture", "where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2006: 259f.).

2. Participation in printed and online editions of traditional newspapers

The following three examples will address the question of what forms of participation are available to users of traditional newspapers published by a publishing house. It is therefore not a question of grassroots journalism mentioned above, but of the extent to which the great expectations in new forms of citizen journalism (understood in a broad sense) are fulfilled in the context of traditional newspapers. In particular, I will discuss the digital editions of newspapers (online newspaper, app, mobile version), but also new developments in printed newspapers, where free newspapers seem to play a pioneering role in Switzerland. The following qualitative, explorative study is based on a review of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from Germany, the Austrian *Standard*, and the Swiss newspapers *Tages-Anzeiger* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* as well as the free newspapers *20 Minuten* and *Blick am Abend*.

2.1 Participation in the printed and digital versions in comparison

The following, everyday example of newspaper reporting informs about the abolition of the "collar duty" in the Zurich Casino. In the print version of the *Zürcher Tages-Anzeiger*, a report was published with the headline "Zürcher Casino abolishes collar duty" (my translation), the article consists of the headline, a lead and the body text, which comprises five sections with a subheading. Within the print version, this report allows only one follow-up action that is effective in the mass media: the writing of a letter to the editor. Things are different in the case of the online version. The following article was published (Fig. 1):

Figure 1: Article in the online edition of the "Tages-Anzeiger" of 17 April 2013

Startseite · Abo · Immo · Job · Auto · Anzeigen · Partnersuche

Tages-Anzeiger ZÜRICH


ZÜRICH SCHWEIZ AUSLAND WIRTSCHAFT BÖRSE SPORT KULTUR PANORAMA LE

Stadt Zürich Winterthur Region Verkehr Bildstrecken

Zürcher Casino schafft Kragenpflicht ab

Von Peter Aeschlimann. Aktualisiert um 12:21 [38 Kommentare](#)

Das Geschäft im Casino an der Sihlporte läuft nicht nach Wunsch. Jetzt hat der Betreiber den Dresscode gelockert. Erlaubt sind neu T-Shirts und löchrige Jeans.



1/7 Im Las-Vegas-Stil gehalten: Das neue Zürcher Casino will mit Farbigkeit, Öppigkeit und einer warmen Atmosphäre überzeugen.
Bild: Nicola Pilaro

Artikel zum Thema

- Das Zürcher Casino kämpft mit Anlaufschwierigkeiten
- Mehr Automaten, mehr Süchtige?

Teilen und kommentieren

21 [Anmelden](#) 4 [Kommentare](#)

Facebook [Twitter](#) [Email](#) [Kommentare](#)

Der Laie denkt bei Casino an James Bond: Männer in perfekt sitzenden Smokings, Frauen in atemberaubenden Abendroben, die am Roulettetisch an teuren Drinks in Kristallgläsern nippen und mit einem 1000-Dollar-Chip auf Zahl setzen. Der Realitycheck im Casino Zürich ist ernüchternd: Hier vergnügt sich am Wochenende hauptsächlich die Jugend vor dem Clubbesuch. Das Tenü: T-Shirt und Jeans. Getränk: Bier, Cüpli oder Cola. Einsatz: 2

(<http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/zuerich/stadt/Zuercher-Casino-schafft-Kragenpflicht-ab/story/18438380>, viewed April 17, 2013, 5.37 pm)

There are not only several subsequent options within the online newspaper or via links from the online newspaper to social networks, but the text also offers these options directly and explicitly (see 'share and comment': *Teilen und kommentieren*). Readers can use the buttons at the bottom left to link the article via their Facebook account or to share the link (not visible in the illustration, as there is no registration on Facebook), they can send the article by e-mail or they can write a comment (cf. 2.2. on such comments). The activities of liking, sharing or sending do not remain without consequences for the content of the online newspaper: On the newspaper's homepage there is a box at a prominent place (to the right of the first article, i.e. visible on the homepage screen without scrolling) under the heading "Most read" (my translation) with a ranking list of the five most read (or simply clicked on) articles, and the link "More..." (my translation) then takes you to the same ranking list, but with the first 30 places. In addition there are links to "most sent articles" and "most discussed articles" (my translations). These are typical cases of implicit reception. In addition, as shown in Fig. 1, a counter is displayed for each connection option, which changes when one of these

options is used. If a comment is written, this includes explicit participation and (via the influence on this counter) implicit participation at the same time.

Things are somewhat different in the app for tablet computers. Here the same article looks like this (Fig. 2):

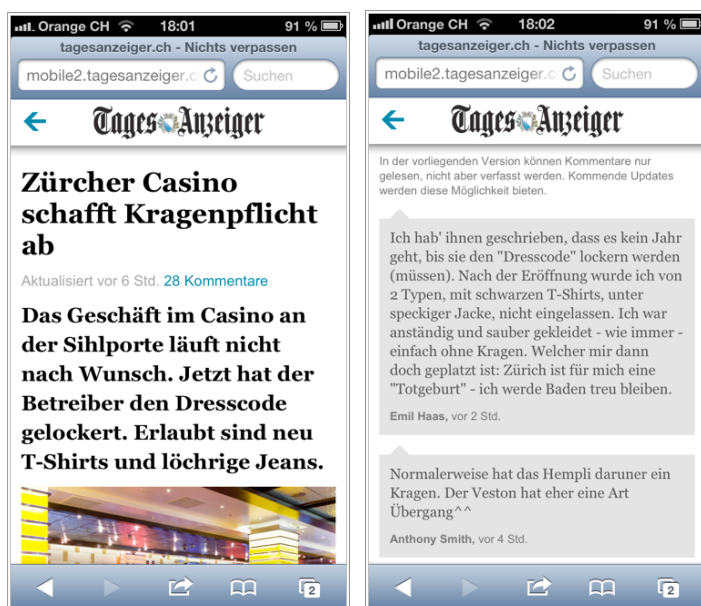
Figure 2: Screenshot from the Tages-Anzeiger-App from 17 April 2013 for tablet computers (viewed 17.4.2013, 5.48 pm)



The report can be recommended by clicking on the prominently placed star, it can be sent by clicking on the icon to the right of it (two rectangles above each other); the 'invitation' for these subsequent actions is relatively high due to the size as well as the placement of these icons. You can also use the top right icon, which has the shape of a speech bubble, to write a comment, and the right icon (square with arrow) to post a link on Facebook or Twitter. The number of written comments can be read in the speech bubble; here again, participation is both explicit and implicit. The possibility to write comments in the app version is currently not available in some newspaper apps (see the analysis of the *Salzburger Nachrichten* in Schwarzl, 2015). What cannot be found in the app version are the rankings prominently placed in the online newspaper on the homepage.

Things are similar to the app version in the mobile version for smartphones (Figs. 3a and b):

Figures 3a and b : Screenshots from the Tages-Anzeiger Mobile version of 17 April 2013
(viewed April 17, 2013, 18.01/02 pm)

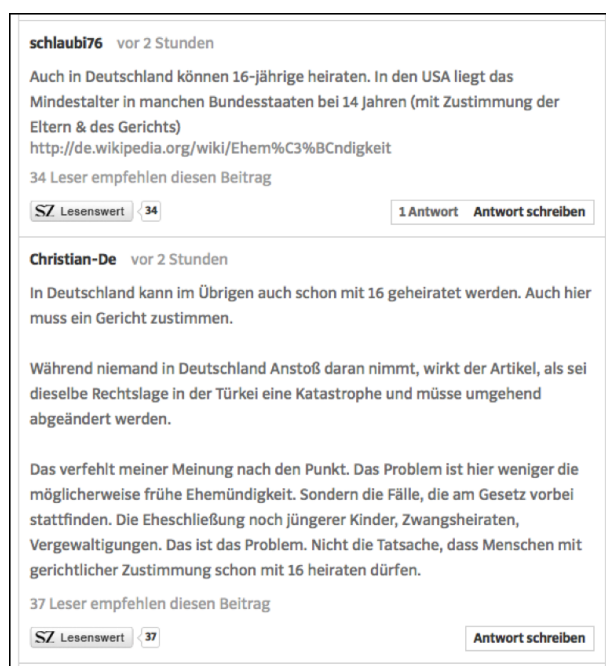


Users are clearly referred to the comment page here: The corresponding link is in color and placed between the headline and the lead (Fig. 3a). However, if you click on the link (Fig. 3b), you can only read the comments already published via the online newspaper or the app. As in the app version, the article can be sent by e-mail via the icon in the middle of the bottom bar and the link to the article can be posted on Facebook or Twitter.

2.2 Online comments

The online commentary is the most important opportunity for explicit user participation for readers of traditional newspapers (Emmer *et al.* 2011). Online comments are central with regard to participation because they enable readers to comment on the reporting themselves *within* the online newspaper to a completely new extent and doing so to critically question the reliability of the established mass media; this also opens up the possibility of participating in the agenda-setting process, which has so far been very limited through letters to the editor (Goode 2009: 1293, see also Landert & Jucker 2011; Drewenoswka-Vargane 2001). Examples of a critical commentary on news coverage can be found in the following comments on a report by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on child weddings in Turkey (see fig. 4, followed by a translation).

Figure. 4: Readers' comments in the online edition of the Süddeutsche Zeitung of 16 January 2014



(<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/kinderhochzeiten-in-der-tuerkei-eine-tiefe-blutende-wunde-1.1863934>, viewed January 16, 2014, 1.02 pm)

schlaubi76 2 hours ago

16-year-olds can also get married in Germany. In the USA, the minimum age in some states is 14 years (with parental and court consent).

[Link to Wikipedia]

34 readers recommend this contribution

Christian-De 2 hours ago

In Germany, it is also possible to get married at the age of 16. Here, too, a court must agree.

While nobody in Germany takes offence at it, the article acts, as if the same legal situation is a disaster in Turkey and must be changed immediately.

In my opinion, this misses the point. The problem here is not so much the possibility of early marriage. It is the cases that go past the law. The marriage of even younger children, forced marriages, rape. That is the problem. Not the fact that people with court approval are allowed to marry at 16.

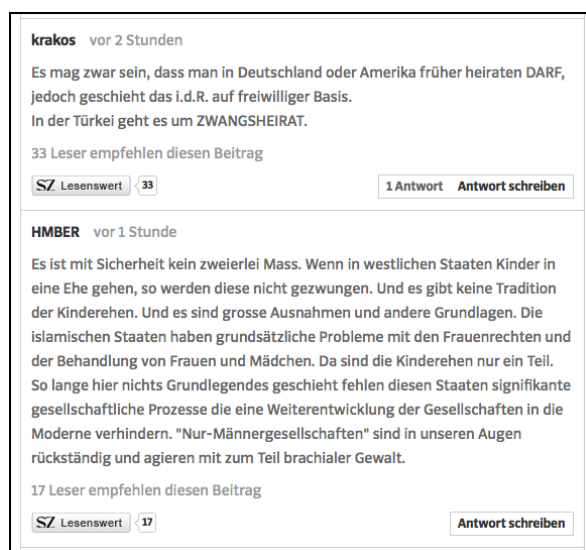
37 readers recommend this contribution

The first commentary contains thematically relevant information with a reference to Germany. The author of the commentary provides what he considers to be important additional information that is not given in the editorial article itself. This example shows that commenting on articles can go beyond mere evaluative statements and thus exceed the limits of what is described as "metajournalism" (see also Goode 2009: 1292): Additional information is provided, the readers "participate and position themselves as informed citizens" (Johansson 2014: 41). The second commentary not only refers to this information regarding the legal situation in Germany (and thus also suggests that this information is missing in the article itself), but also criticizes the presentation of

the topic in the article: "The article acts, as if [...] In my opinion, this misses the point." The button *SZ Lesenswert* also allows users to mark a comment as 'worth reading', which has an effect on the counter in the small speech bubble to the right of the button.

The (not mandatory, but possible) implication that the reference to the legal situation in Germany puts the reported circumstances in Turkey on an equal footing with those in Germany is criticized in reactions to this commentary (Fig. 5):

Figure 5 : Readers' comments in the online edition of the Süddeutsche Zeitung of 16 January 2014



(<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/kinderhochzeiten-in-der-tuerkei-eine-tiefe-blutende-wunde-1.1863934>, viewed January 16, 2014, 1.02 p.m.)

krakos 2 hours ago

Although it may be POSSIBLE to marry earlier in Germany or America, this is usually done on a voluntary basis.

In Turkey it is about FORCED MARRIAGE.

33 readers recommend this contribution.

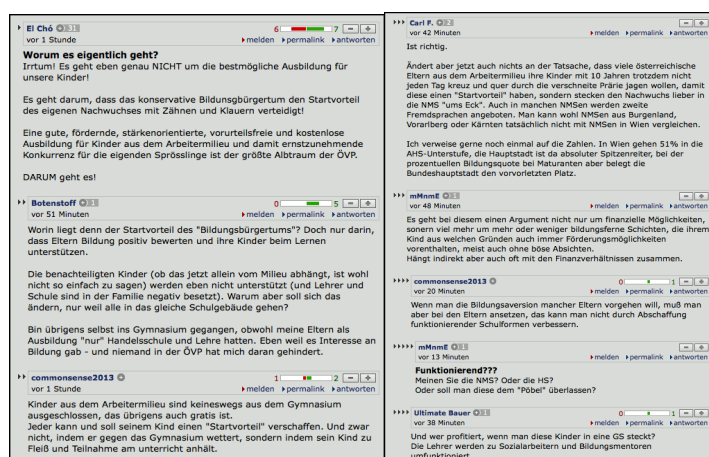
HIMBER 1 hour ago

It is certainly not a double standard. When children go into marriage in western countries, they are not forced. And there is no tradition of child marriages. And they are big exceptions and there are other backgrounds. The Islamic states have fundamental problems with women's rights and the treatment of women and girls. Child marriages are only part of it. As long as nothing fundamental happens here, these states are feigning significant social processes that prevent the further development of societies into modernity. In our view, "male only societies" are backward and act with violence, some of which is brute.

This example already shows that the mediality of online comments makes it possible for readers to enter into dialogue with one another to a new extent. This is discussed in media studies as an important indicator that such participation

increases the deliberative democratic public sphere (cf. Weber 2013). This mutual reference between readers becomes even clearer in the Austrian standard, where the references between comments, comments reacting to them and comments reacting to these comments etc. are graphically represented (Fig. 6a and b).

Figures 6a and b: Readers' comments in the online edition of the Standard of 16 January 2014



(<http://derstandard.at/1388651054857/Die-unselige-Gesamtschuldebatte>, viewed January 16, 2014, 1:46 pm)

The small arrows to the left of the subject line mark the hierarchy level of a comment and illustrate the references in form of this graphic: The first comment has an arrow, comments that refer to it two arrows, etc. The example (with comments with up to 5 arrows) illustrates the high dialogicity of these comments: It is by no means the case that here a commentary on the online newspaper report is simply added to the next commentary on the same report, rather a single commentary is taken up in two reacting comments, whereupon this second commentary in turn is discussed in two comments, to which three other comments react (no longer all illustrated in Fig. 6a and b), whereby two of these comments are reacted to again (the first of which can be found in Fig. 6b, with the title *Funktionierend???*). Not only is an argument developed and discussed in depth from a multi-perspective, users also use elliptical formulations ('is correct': *Ist richtig*) or demonstrative pronouns referring to the preceding comment ('This one argument is not only about [...]': *Es geht bei diesem einen Argument nicht nur um [...]*), which make efficient use of this specific arrangement of comments. As Ensink (2012) suggests, this kind of graphic representation of interaction references and the explicit invitation to respond favor interaction between readers.

The stylistic range of the online commentaries can be described as very broad. In addition to examples such as the above with relatively elaborate, collaborative argumentations, examples can also be found in which rather casually and ironically newspaper texts are briefly commented on, without any other comments

being made. This is the case in the following example (Fig. 7). The comments presented here refer to an interview with the Archbishop of Salzburg, Franz Lackner, published under the title (which is also a quote from the interview) *Zölibatäres Leben ist nicht der Idealtypus gelebter Sexualität* ('Celibacy is not the ideal type of lived sexuality').

Figure 7: Readers' comments in the online edition of the *Standard* from 16 January 2014



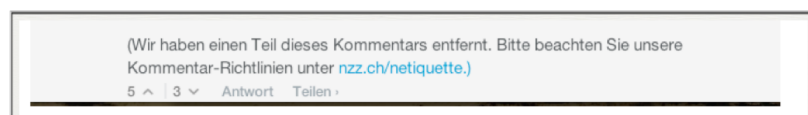
(<http://derstandard.at/1388651130549/Zoelibates-Leben-ist-nicht-der-Idealtypus-gelebter-Sexualitaet?seite=2#forumstart>, viewed January 16, 2014 1.29 pm)

Interjections ("wow") can be found here as well as inflectives (*such*, inflective of German 'search'), punctuation that does not conform to the rules ('having a sexuality. does not necessarily mean [...]', as well as capital letters (*SOLLEN*: 'SHOULD') or smileys (";-)))"); all these means establish an informal style. These comments are less targeting at an elaborated argumentative debate than at outdoing each other playfully with ironic comments by rephrasing the quote of the headline ('Having no sex is not the ideal type of sexuality', 'Being an atheist is not the ideal type of religiousness', 'But I say unto you: eating nothing is not the ideal type of nutrition. Not taking showers is not the ideal type of hygiene. Suffocating is not the ideal type of breathing').

Furthermore, the online comments of the *Standard* can not only be evaluated positively (equivalent to the 'worth reading' in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), but also negatively, which is also represented graphically by green or red bars. For example, the last commentary above with the three rephrasings of the quote received 13 positive and zero negative ratings.

Online comments as well as ratings are usually only possible after prior registration. The content of comments is checked and possibly partially censored, as can be seen from an entry in the online *NZZ*:

Figure 8: Part of a commentary in the online edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 26 June 2013 on the report "Ecuador's President Correa: Liberal to the outside, repressive at home", 26 June 2013



(<http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/international/reportagen-und-analysen/correas-widerspruechliche-politik-1.18105680>, viewed June 26, 2013 1:38 pm)

‘We have removed a part of this comment. Please note our commentary-guidelines on nzz.ch/netiquette.’ (Translation of Fig. 8).

The interventions in the comments by the editorial staff go beyond illegal, defamatory, racist, etc. passages. For example, the *Tages-Anzeiger* does not publish any comments ‘in dialect or foreign languages’, and in general the editors reserve the right not to ‘publish comments’.² Things are similar with the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. According to the netiquette³, spelling must also be taken into account here, and a commentary in French from 12 December 2014 was published, but commented as follows: ‘Dear reader, thank you very much for your comment. Please write it in German in the future. Thank you very much, the *NZZ* editorial staff’, but this was immediately commented critically in two subsequent comments.⁴

2.3. Contributions by readers in editorial texts

Free newspapers such as those that exist in Switzerland (Burger & Luginbühl 2014: 251-253) offer readers various opportunities to participate in the news production process. In the following I will not discuss all forms (see Demarmels 2012), but will limit myself to two: contributions by ‘reader reporters’ and online or SMS surveys.

Participation in the news production process in the role of a ‘reader reporter’ is the topic of the free newspaper 20 Minuten in a print version advertising banner: ‘Become a reader reporter! ... and design the news from now on. Leserreporter.20min.ch’ (*Werden Sie Leser-Reporter! ... und gestalten Sie die News von jetzt. Leserreporter.20min.ch*: front page of 20 minutes from 16 January 2014).

²<http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/Schweiz-schenkt-Italien-120-Millionen-Euro/story/12225542?comments=1>, accessed 28. January 2014, 7.00 pm.

³ <http://www.nzz.ch/startseite/willkommen-in-der-kommentarspalte-von-nzzch-1.18307909>, accessed 18. December 2015, 3.04 pm.

⁴ <http://www.nzz.ch/international/afrika/die-rebellen-die-frauen-der-urwald-teil-1-1.18438363>, accessed 18. December 2014, 3.06 pm.

On the corresponding website (http://www.20min.ch/community/leser_reporter/) texts like the following are linked (Fig. 9):

Figure 9: Text from the section "Reader-Reporter" in the online edition of "20 Minuten" of 6 January 2014



(http://www.20min.ch/community/leser_reporter/, viewed January 16, 2014, 10:47 am).

What is not obvious at first glance is that the text was written by a member of the newspaper's staff ("Christian Holzer"). What exactly comes from the 'reader reporter' and who this reader reporter is remains unclear - nevertheless a 'reader reporter' is explicitly cited as the author of the photograph. The contributions of the readers are apparently integrated into editorial texts and thus recontextualized and transformed.

Participation in surveys offers another possibility for contributions. This results in different types of text. For example, online surveys are conducted regularly, the results of which are published in the form of graphics in the print edition (Fig. 10).

Figure 10: Publication of the results of an online survey in the print version of 20 Minuten dated February 6, 2013, p. 22.



Feedback

Would you wear the partner's name on your face?

The majority of readers don't want the partner's name tattoo on their face.

In the free newspaper *Blick am Abend* there is another type of online survey, in which you do not have to choose from predefined answers, but can answer in open text form. A selection of the answers is then displayed in the graphic form of an SMS communication on a smartphone (Fig. 11).

Figure 11: Publication of the results of an online survey in the print version of "Blick am Abend" of January 8, 2013, p. 29., two of six entries.



Should the people elect the Federal Council?

What do you think?

The result of the popular elections would be that the Federal Councils would be tempted to adopt populist attitudes in the course of their legislative period so that they would be re-elected. Their term of office would increasingly turn into an election campaign. Federico Emanuel Pfaffen

Our people's representatives are not in a position to represent the people correctly. That is why the people should be given a direct opportunity to elect the government. Georg Tobler

[...]

Next week we ask: Should firearms still be allowed to be stored at home?

Answers to young@blickamabend.ch or post them on [Facebook.com/blickamabend](https://www.facebook.com/blickamabend).

In some other cases editorial reports based entirely on such surveys can also be found. In connection with a debate on sexism about the German politician Rainer Brüderle at the beginning of 2013, *20 Minuten* conducted an extensive online survey. In the online edition of 5 February 2013, the results are published in over 20 bar graphs. The questions asked were 'Is it sexist when a man whistles

after a woman?', 'Have you ever been a victim of sexism?' or 'Does it have to be touched that it is sexism?'; 3-5 possible answers were given in each case.

In the print version of 6 February 2013, a report was published under the headline 'Sexism: Gaffing is okay, whistling is not' in the section 'Readers on the Web', which takes up about two thirds of a page. About half of it consists of a (sexist) picture in which two young women are depicted from behind how they bend over a car engine and both turn their heads towards the camera. Both women wear very short, tight trousers.

The report itself then first addresses the survey itself. What was based on a call for participation is now presented like a survey commissioned: "[...] over 9000 readers were surveyed in a large-scale survey". The results are then summarized, upgrading them in terms of their news relevance:

The results make you sit up and take notice. This is surprising, for example: More men (44 percent) than women (36 percent) find it sexist when a man whistles after a woman. A third of women consider the situation to be sexist, but okay and at least another third of women classify the behavior as not sexist at all. [...]

This is a new genre in so far as information is first elicited from the readers through the newspaper in order to write an editorial text based on this information - and exclusively on it. The participants in the survey thus become the information providers for an event that makes people 'sit up and take notice', which was created by the medium itself.

Meanwhile, such genres can also be found - at least in the online sector - in quality newspapers. In the online edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, for example, on June 4, 2014, comments from readers were reported under the headings 'Reader opinions on the video report "Life and Death in Texas"' (*Lesermeinungen zur Videoreportage «Leben und Tod in Texas»*) and '"In Doubt for the Defendant, Nowhere is the Death Penalty More Valid Than"' (*« Im Zweifel für den Angeklagten gilt nirgends so sehr wie bei der Todesstrafe»*) in the 'Debate' section of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (translation from German original):

The NZZ report on the suffering caused by the death penalty in the USA for the bereaved of the executed has prompted many readers to comment.

The report itself then quotes individual opinions:

The arguments used by the opponents of the death penalty to justify their stance are many and varied. On the one hand, for many, a killing state is not compatible with democratic principles. "A country that uses the death penalty and treats its prisoners so badly cannot call itself democracy," explains van Gaasbeek, a reader on Facebook. Cornelia Koenig also points out in this context that even today the US is not alone in its attitude: "Another modern and democratic industrial nation is often overlooked on this issue: Japan, where eight people were executed in

2013". On the other hand, some readers also refer to the biblical ban on killing - "Thou shalt not kill!" applies to the state as well!" – or to a certain illogical moral inherent in the belief in justice through death sentences: "Shouldn't the executioner himself also be sentenced to death?" asks reader Rathgeb-Cerullo rhetorically.

Here, too, the medium has elicited the opinions from its readers: In an article published on 25 May 2014, an explicit request was made to comment on a video report on the relatives of victims and offenders in connection with death penalty convictions:

Life and death in Texas - what do you think?

[...] The death penalty is the oldest and definitive legal instrument of a state. [...] Below are some quotes from relatives of the perpetrators as well as from the victims, which lead you to the individual video portraits:

[... 4 quotations, each linked to individual video clips]

Your opinion on the reportage:

Which of the stories moved you the most? How did the stories change your perspective on the death penalty - or even your understanding of justice? [Both questions are linked to the comments section at the end of the editorial text.]⁵

Conclusion

The examples discussed here explore the question how readers can participate in news production in various publication formats of traditional newspapers. A distinction can be made between explicit and implicit participation, whereby forms of implicit participation can only be realized in the digital variants of newspapers: recommend, like or rate, and send. All these actions, as well as clicking on a text itself, influence reader rankings, which usually appear prominently placed on the homepages of online newspapers.

In the case of printed newspapers, explicit participation is limited to the writing of letters to the editor. In addition, participation is possible in surveys, the results of which are then published. However, either one's own voice is only registered as a number - or one is quoted with very little probability and only briefly. In the case of free newspapers, there is the additional possibility of working as a reader reporter, whereby the corresponding texts are probably largely written by the editorial staff and the readers primarily act as image suppliers.

⁵ <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/startseite/wie-hat-sie-unsere-videoreportage-bewegt-1.18311434>, accessed 19. December 2014, 4.14 pm.

The situation is different in the case of the digital newspapers (online newspapers, apps and mobile versions): in almost all cases, comments can be sent in after registration. In addition, readers can participate in online surveys. Based on this, a new form of report is established, which is based on the compilation of survey results, whereby the newspaper itself carried out the survey - or simply asked the readers to do so.

Overall, the digital variants of newspapers have significantly increased and simplified the opportunities for reader participation. Participation in editorial texts remains very limited and is only possible through participation in surveys; and here it is primarily a matter of generating cheap content. But things are different with online commentaries. These can supplement the reporting and comment critically, which can be interpreted as democratization of the reporting – also due to the mediality of online comments with different accessibility and availability than printed letters to the editor, but also with new possibilities for reader interaction within the comment sections. However, in all cases the content is checked, restricted and possibly censored, whereby this control goes beyond a legal examination of the content (e.g. regarding spelling or variety). What at first glance looks like freedom of expression is still controlled, while it remains intransparent how strict this control is. Nevertheless, as the figures point out, forms of commenting, but also evaluating and disseminating newspaper reports are very widespread forms of participation in the case of controversial political events (cf. Weber 2013). Of course the comments show very different kinds of actions (like short positionings, ironic or cynic comments, elaborated argumentations, sharing of private stories etc.) and thus show different perceived affordances of the available resources. Overall the co-presence of reports and comments in web-based newspapers, but also the possibility of liking, recommending and sending, as well as the published rankings, could lead to a more active, 'reflexive' consumption of media texts, as well as to a more 'networked' reception of media texts (see Jenkins 2006: 244). In this way, news becomes less and less a product that is merely consumed.

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