

EDITORIAL

In late modern societies, communication is shaped by concepts such as heterogeneity, fragmentation and individualisation. Social networking sites, blogs, and micro-blogs have recently joined the billions of websites enabling different individual and collective actors that are scattered across the locales to participate in public communication in a variety of unprecedented ways. These online forms of communicative engagement have also facilitated the ideas of the collaborative and the collective in contemporary journalism of traditional media organisations. The “people formerly known as the audience”, as Jay Rosen acknowledged almost a decade ago, have actively started to contribute to the on-going processes of creating news websites in mainstream media and became variously engaged in participatory journalism, which is also known as the “user-generated content”, “pro-am journalism”, and “citizen-engaged press”, among other phrases. Despite the fact that the idea of participatory journalism engages people both inside and outside the newsrooms to communicate, not only to, but also with each other, there have been indications of inclusivist, and also exclusivist principles and practices, of collective and collaborative news making.

The different modes of audience participation in journalism have, in some cases, eliminated some of the traditional ideals in journalism, such as truthiness, the principle of objectivity, and a disinterest in the shaping of political life, and have replaced them with alternatives, such as deliberation, multiperspectivity, and participation in political life. In this sense, the ordinary people have with professional-assistance captured and published through words, photographic, or video stories of worldwide significance, and have shared personal perspectives or particular views from their small communities on issues of a larger significance, thereby reshaping the dynamics between the global and the (micro-) local in public communication. At the same time, traditional media organisations have developed models of audience engagement that do not involve non-professionals on an equal footing, as they enable professional journalists to retain control in news making. In what appears as the struggle among professionals and non-professionals for legitimacy in public communication, a clear business motive is often at work concerning the pursuit for additional sources of income, the potential to sell targeted advertising across offline and online media, and reclaiming the now fragmented mass audience.

Considering the possibilities and the constraints for audience participation, can we speak about the dominant models of participatory journalism or the common modes of audience-engaged news-making across the locales? How has the relation-

ship between journalists and the audience changed with the rise of participatory forms of public communication? How has audience conceiving among journalists shifted? How has conceiving of journalists among people changed? How have these dynamics reshaped the prevailing roles of journalists in society? How has the notion of the audience from the mass media world been transformed? How has the social-organisation of traditional media organisations responded and the newsroom cultures shifted with regards to the ideas of the collective and the collaboration embedded in participatory journalism? How has audience interactivity and participation re-shaped news discourse at traditional news institutions? How has the news as a cultural product transformed the accounts of participatory journalism? The authors of the articles that have been included in this special issue of *Medijska istraživanja*/Media Research consider these questions to be the starting points of their explorations. The issue consists of five scholarly articles: one theoretical discussion on participatory journalism in the Internet age, and four case studies from the Netherlands, Slovenia, Serbia, and Belgium.

In the first article, Igor Vobič and Peter Dahlgren theoretically discuss the contexts, practices, and dilemmas of participatory journalism in the Internet age. They acknowledge that participatory journalism is embedded in larger dilemmas of access, interaction, and participation, where it is used as a general rubric to refer to all forms of non-professional activities of journalistic conduct that capture the ideas of collaborative and collective action. The authors stress that the relations between journalists and the audience have changed quite a bit in the last decade or so, particularly with the proliferation of social media in people's lives. While the members of the audience have started to operate as co-producers of the news, journalists are slowly beginning to develop a sense of how to reinvent themselves as the co-creators of content. Additionally, looking ahead to possible future research agendas in participatory journalism, Vobič and Dahlgren organised their reflections around the meta-themes of theoretical horizons, empirical focus, and methodological innovation.

The second text, written by Merel Borger, Irene Costera Meijer, Anita van Hoof, and José Sanders, provides insights into the repertoires of the Dutch journalistic frontrunners' talk on audience participation. Based on in-depth interviews, the findings of the study reveal six frontrunners' repertoires, where the possibilities, constraints, and dilemmas of audience participation are interpreted. This study indicates that journalism may be even more resistant to change than previous research suggested. Not only do the editorial staff from the mainstream news organizations hold on to classical ideas about what counts as journalism, but even pioneering

frontrunners endorse traditional notions of what counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist.

By exploring offensive speech in the comments under online news items, as well as journalists' and editors' opinions on offensive speech, Karmen Erjavec and Melita Poler Kovačič provide a theoretically informed study on the possibilities and constraints for participatory journalism on Slovenian news websites. They combine critical discourse analysis, and interviewing, and acknowledge that editors abuse the idea of participatory journalism – by using the excuse of audience participation, they allow for personal attacks on journalists in the comments under the news items, while their actual goal is to maximise profits. The reasons for the relatively frequent occurrence of offensive speech commentary on news websites, Erjavec and Poler Kovačič attribute to the centrality of market imperatives in media companies, the troubles of common political culture in Slovenia, and a general dissatisfaction with the larger social situation.

The next paper is also focused on the audience members' comments on news websites, but also follows a different goal. Jelena Kleut and Smilijana Milinkov argue that comments posted on the news websites of traditional media organisations still pertain to asymmetric relations between producers of mainstream news and interactive audiences. By using critical discourse analysis, the authors examine the relations between mainstream news discourses and the discourses of users' comments about the specific societal issue – poverty. While commenting as the practice of re-reading and re-formulating what is in the news challenges, the previously dominant status of the media as the constructors of reality, the results of the study indicates a significant level of contestation and shows that the most contested aspects of news stories are the boundaries of poverty, the legitimacy of sources and the attribution of responsibility.

In his article, Nico Carpentier uses key notions of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe to analyse the professional identity of journalists in the context of an increasingly complex interactive communication environment. The author argues that this identity is seen as being over-determined, contingent, and constructed, but it is simultaneously subjected to a hegemonic articulation, based on four nodal points: objectivity, autonomy, management of resources, and employee-employer relations. By analysing the phone-in broadcasts of the North Belgian public broadcasting company, the study illustrates both the contingency of the identity of the professional and the rigidity of the hegemonic articulation. With respect to audience participation, the author acknowledges, that the editorial team initially decides to engage in participatory modes of journalism, performs identity work to look for

new positions, and then returns to the hegemonic position that disables audience participation.

The review section of the issue is also focused on the transforming landscapes of journalism, and therefore gives a particular attention to recent monographs on the changing patterns of news and news work in late modern society, contemporary articulations between journalism and digital technology, and manifold manifestations of social media communication.

Guest Editor

Igor Vobič