Audience participation in online news websites: a comparative analysis

Rosa Franquet*, Maria Isabel Villa**, Ignacio Bergillos***

*GRISS - Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
** GRISS - Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
*** Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Abstract

In a moment of transformation of media as a result of ongoing processes of digitalization and convergence, television broadcasters are increasingly betting on tools that allow the public to assume a more active role in the production of contents. Emergent phenomena such as participatory journalism, user-generated content or the integration of social networking websites are becoming more and more relevant in the online public sphere.

This paper compares the models for online news websites participation developed by RTVE (Spain) and BBC (England). The analysis focuses on the different participative resources, the access protocols, the technical mediations and the restrictions of the content produced by the audience in these two influential broadcasters.

The concept of participation is articulated from the perspective of studies that understand it as new feedback opportunities provided by digital technology. Particular obstacles and requirements are detected in each media. Although television broadcasters seem to offer a large variety of tools that would allow the public to assume a more active role, it is still peripheral and complementary.

The results included in this paper are part of the research project "Cross media environment: broadcaster's organizational and productive transformations" (CSO 2009-09367), undertaken by the Image, Sound and Synthesis Research Group (GRISS) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Keywords: Participation, Internet, information, Public Service Broadcasting.

Introduction

Europe's audiovisual sector is going through a period of change replete with great challenges. Processes of digitisation, convergence and improvements in content production and distribution are leading to transformations in the structure of broadcasters, particularly those that are publically owned (European Broadcasting Union, 2002; Harrison & Wessels, 2005; Lowe & Bardoel, 2007; Arriaza, 2008; Debrett, 2009; Kjus, 2009).

The traditional definition of public service broadcasting established its role as facilitating public debate, distributing information universally to the whole population and helping build a common identity of states (Moe, 2008a). An analysis of the strategic documents of a good part of European public broadcasters reveals that corporations are interested in opening up new communication channels with the public (Enli, 2008). For example, the BBC's *Building Public Value* (2004: 5) proposes ending 'the traditional one-way

traffic from broadcaster to consumer' and fostering 'a true creative dialogue in which the public are not passive but active audiences'.

With regard to audience participation, certain resources such as the press ombudsman, phone-ins and polls have been part of mainstream news production for decades (Hibberd et al., 2000; Deuze, 2006; Moe, 2008b). Indeed, we can talk of 'older forms' of user generated content (UGC), such as letters and faxes and 'newer forms', such as the tools offered by the internet as a technical platform (Scott, 2009). According to Deuze (2006: 19), 'online participation goes farthest, as media corporations move towards what has been called "citizen journalism" websites, combining editorial filtering with user-generated content'.

The development of tools that contribute to audiences submitting material has grown in recent years and this trend is likely to continue (López, 2007; Wardle & Williams, 2008). Although its main benefits and the challenges that it raises have been carefully studied (Scott, 2009), there is no consensus on UGC planning and management (Hermida & Domingo, 2009).

One of the most widespread acceptances of the term 'participation' in digital media was coined by Jenkins (2006:3), according to whom the participative culture, 'contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship'. In the new digital context, consumers' and producers' roles are interchanged. 'Rather than talking about media producers and consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands' Jenkins (2006:3). Material produced by audiences requires an interaction process that is embodied in the act of sending and participating in invitations made by the broadcaster. Yet to be defined, however, are the terms on which that process is to be based.

For the objectives of this project, we assume audience participation from the perspective of studies that are understood 'as new feedback opportunities provided by digital technology. These opportunities are incorporated in various combinations of traditional broadcasting and new media' (Enli, 2008: 106).

Although previous research has identified different media participation resources, there is limited literature that tells us how an established and successful public service broadcasting system can move from an analogical system to a digital one, and maintain quality and creativity while taking advantage of the potential for participation offered by the new platforms.

This analysis is concerned with news content, being one of the fields that has awakened the most interest among academia in recent years. Our aim is to bring together information about the changing nature of public service broadcasting in the digital era and look at where citizen participation and internet-based public information services cross over.

For this task, we will examine the participative tools offered on the news programme websites of two European public radio and television services: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Spain's Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE).

Both corporations have a long broadcasting history. The BBC represents a model followed at a European level that stands out for its progressive development of digital services, through a restructuring process that started at the beginning of the new millennium. On the other hand, RTVE, which appeared to have lost the digital race against its Spanish competitors, re-launched its portal and multi-platform strategy in 2008, placing significant emphasis on participative features such as blogs and online interviews.

Given these historical backgrounds for achieving digital transformation (progressive versus sudden), our aim was to find out how these features are reflected in audience participation management strategies. The comparative study of the two Public Service Broadcasters will be used to define the two models in relation to the participative tools they offer within their online news content as well as their particular features, differences and common trends.

We start with two basic questions: first, 'What participative tools have been implemented?' and 'How are the participative tools integrated into daily news?' The study provides a record and taxonomy for the participation services offered. Rather than being concerned with the volume or quantifying the website features that enable audience-participation processes, here we focus on a qualitative evaluation of the tools identified.

Methodology

This analysis takes as its approach an explanatory case study (Yin, 2009) that is suitable not only for identifying which resources and how many resources have been used, but also for analysing their impact and function within an online news corporate strategy.

The sample for this study is based on taking a screenshot of the news websites of RTVE (http://www.rtve.es/noticias/) and the BBC (http://www.news.bbc.co.uk) over the week of 22-28 February 2010, between 5 and 6 pm. Our analysis focused on participative tools found on the homepages, the news stories presented on the homepages, and specific sections aimed at encouraging participation.

Participative tools include any service, content or application through which a communication connection is established between the broadcaster and the audience. This concept covers all the ways in which the public has the opportunity to participate in the news website.

This definition has its roots in studies on mediated human interactivity -a field of analysis according to which the communication experience is mediated by a technological environment, which provides specific interaction tools that provide a potential framework for communicational action (Rafaeli, 2008).

There are no general agreements over the participative elements for online news and each author has created his own taxonomy. For example, Domingo et al. (2008) in research about 16 online newspapers identified up to 17 participation variables offered on their websites. Similarly, Wardle & Williams (2008) propose a typology divided into five types of UGC and others -such as Chung y Robinette (2008)- organise participative resources based on a scale with five categories that refers to levels of interactivity on news websites.

In line with proposals made in previous studies, and for the purposes of clarifying the different tools based on their functionality, we differentiate between four groups of participative tools that apply to different propositions within the communication: 1) Elements that encourage debate - this group includes forums, chat services, citizen's blogs and comments on news, and special sections where the public has the option of challenging their points of view; 2) Elements for socialising and sharing contents through social bookmarking such as Digg, Delicious and Menéame, and links to networks such as Twitter and Facebook where users exchange, share and distribute content; 3) Elements for making contributions through which the public can send still or moving images, texts and audio to the media's editorial staff; 4) Elements for evaluating information - such as polls and ratings through which a current news event can be recognised, considered or endorsed. These mechanisms are aimed at defining preferences and are presented with closed-end questions.

In order to identify the characteristics of these elements, we examine: 1) The access protocol - which considered whether the audience member needs to register previously with the website in order to be able to participate; 2) Technical mediation – which determines if audience contributions can be made via mobile telephone, landline, email or post; 3) Restrictions on content - technological limits are defined such as format type, file size, the possibility of accessing servers in order to send the files and size limitations such as the number of characters a message can contain or the length of a video or audio file.

From the visual point of view, graphical elements were considered such as photographs or illustrations that accompany the participative services as well as where they are located. We noted whether the elements were inserted on the same page where the news story appeared or in a different section, separate from the journalistic information.

Procedure used for interpretation and analysis

The information collected was recorded in a data bank where the results and observations were described qualitatively for each day that sampling was done. The homepages and other news items analysed were captured as static images and later edited and shaded for identifying the location of the participative tools.

An initial evaluation focused on observing whether there were noticeable differences for each of the days analysed. Once it was confirmed that there were not, we opted for an overall qualitative analysis in which we identified the particular features of the participation tool implemented by the publisher for the purposes of identifying the participation strategies followed by each broadcaster.

Our initial analysis also demonstrated few quantitative differences and this prevented us from understanding the nature of the participative invitations made by each of the broadcasters. Thus, we carried out a qualitative analysis to investigate similarities and differences in the intensity of the participative processes offered on the homepages of the news websites.

For example, quantifying the aforementioned blogs or news might produce significant data about the volume of implementation of these elements, but does not help us to find out how they influence and articulate the news content. If we were to limit ourselves to counting the participative resources, we could at least partially consider that its abundance is the result of the media opening up or democratising and fall into analytical reductionism driven by novelty, instead of reflecting on the structure that governs and determines the communicative discourse (Carpentier, 2009).

This methodological position is based on a critical vision of participation and at the same time on studies on the social adoption of the technology, innovation and technological change, where authors such as Mahler & Rogers, 1999; Latour & Woolgar, 1995 and Bijker, 1995 - in spite of their more or less relevant differences - agree that the processes of technical evolution are linked to and contingent upon a specific social context.

Results of the analysis

The analysed websites have used different participative resources. As can be seen in the shaded areas of Table 1, on both the BBC and RTVE news websites, we find comments, audiovisual material sent in by users, links to and inclusion of social networks, as well as bookmarking. On the BBC website we found no polls or rating of contents; and we found no forums, chat services or blogs by the general public on either of the broadcasters' sites. The results show that comments on the news have replaced the role played by the chat services and the forums as communicational resources that enable communication between users. Nevertheless, as shown in the analysis below regarding the characteristics of each of these tools, there is a

uniform use of these resources based on their terms and conditions of use and location within the news websites of the BBC and RTVE.
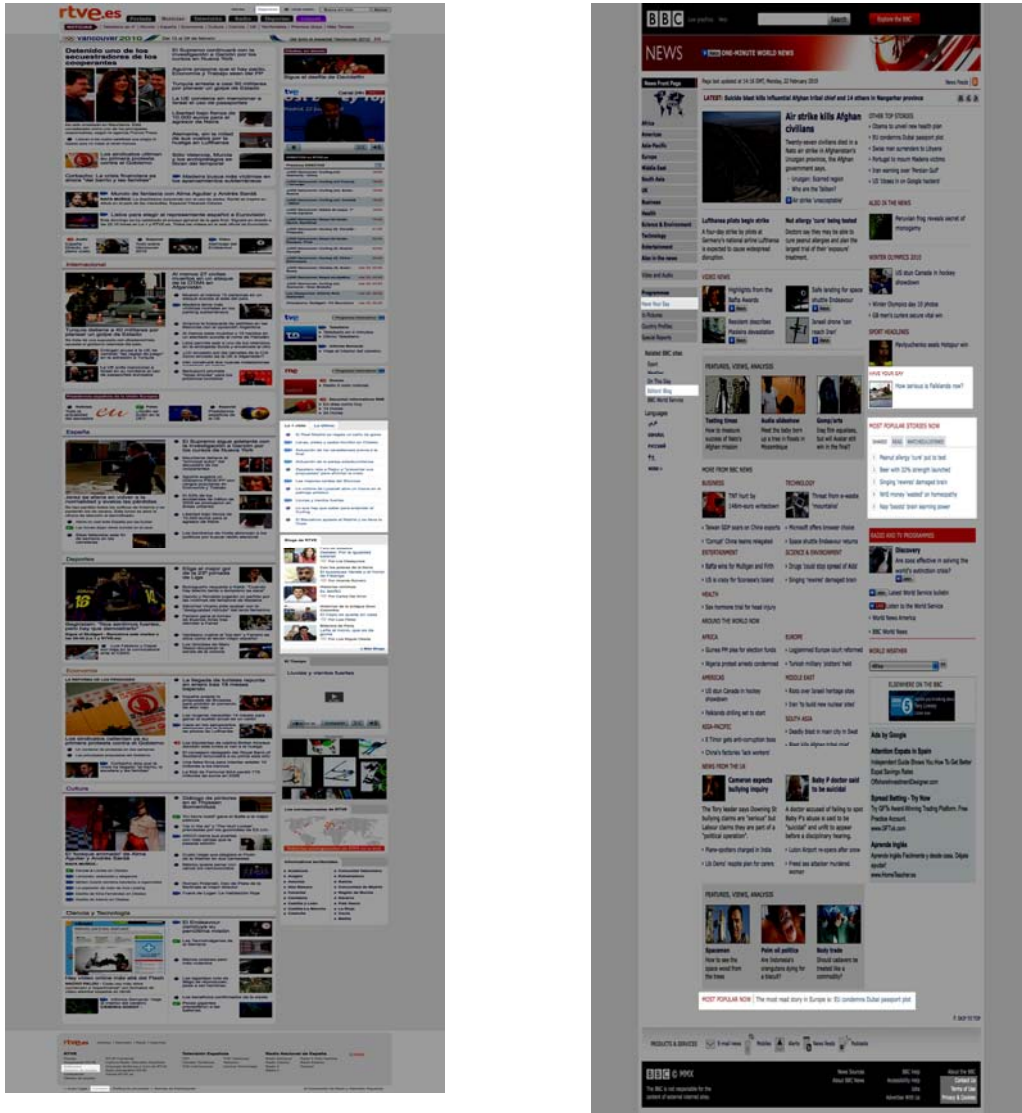
Table 1. Participation tools identified

		BBC	RTVE
Discussion tools	Forums		
	Chat services		
	Blogs by general public		
	Comments	X	X
Socialisation tools	Social bookmarking	X	X
	Social networks	X	X
Contribution tools	Static or moving image	X	X
	Text	X	X
	Audio	X	X
Rating tools	Polls		X
	Rating of content		X

Source: authors' database

Positioning of participative tools

The position held by participative tools on the homepages of the news websites shows us how audience-generated content and news written by the editorial teams co-exist. As can be seen marked in light colour in Image 1, there are few invitations to participate on the homepages of the BBC and RTVE news websites. Apart from user registration, which is on the top bar of the RTVE website, on both websites the elements designed to drive audience participation appear below the first third of the news homepage, with users having to scroll down, and in the left- and right-hand columns, with the central space being reserved for information. Invitations to participate are regularly presented in independent insets, with a significant distance between the discussions generated by members of the public and those generated by the broadcaster. This location denotes their secondary and complementary role compared to the information produced by the broadcaster.

Image 1. Participation areas of the homepages

Source: On the left, screenshot from the website http://www.rtve.es/noticias on 22 February 2010; and on the right, screenshot from the website http://www.news.bbc.co.uk on 22 February 2010.

On each of the days that we took screenshots, the RTVE homepage had a list of blogs on the right-hand side and a link located at the end of the homepage through which users can contact the broadcaster and press ombudsman. Infrequently, participative tools appear alongside news content, such as polls, blogs

(see Image 2) and links to online interviews where the audience has the opportunity to chat with special guests.

Image 2. Poll and blog within the sports section of the homepage

Source: Screenshot from the website http://www.rtve/noticias on 25 February 2010.

With regard to the BBC's news homepage, invitations for the public to participate are channelled via the 'Have Your Say' section, which is accessed via the left- and right-hand columns of the homepage. As with RTVE's news website, under the link for accessing this section is a list of the most read and most shared news stories. We consider this kind of tool as involuntary participation, since the audience does not necessarily have the intention to take part in this ranking. This type of participation does not provide an independent story for the broadcaster; on the contrary, it serves to reinforce and promote the news content.

For both the BBC and RTVE, the visual resources that accompany the participative tools are small and serve to draw the reader's attention to these areas of the online page. The BBC draws attention to its 'Have Your Say' section via the right-hand column; RTVE uses blogs on the left-hand column of the homepage together with photos of the journalists that write them.

In addition to inviting participation on Have Your Say, the only regular participative tools on the BBC homepage are the editor's blog in the left-hand column and a link to contact the broadcaster at the bottom of the web page. No participative elements are noted alongside the news on the homepage, as is the case
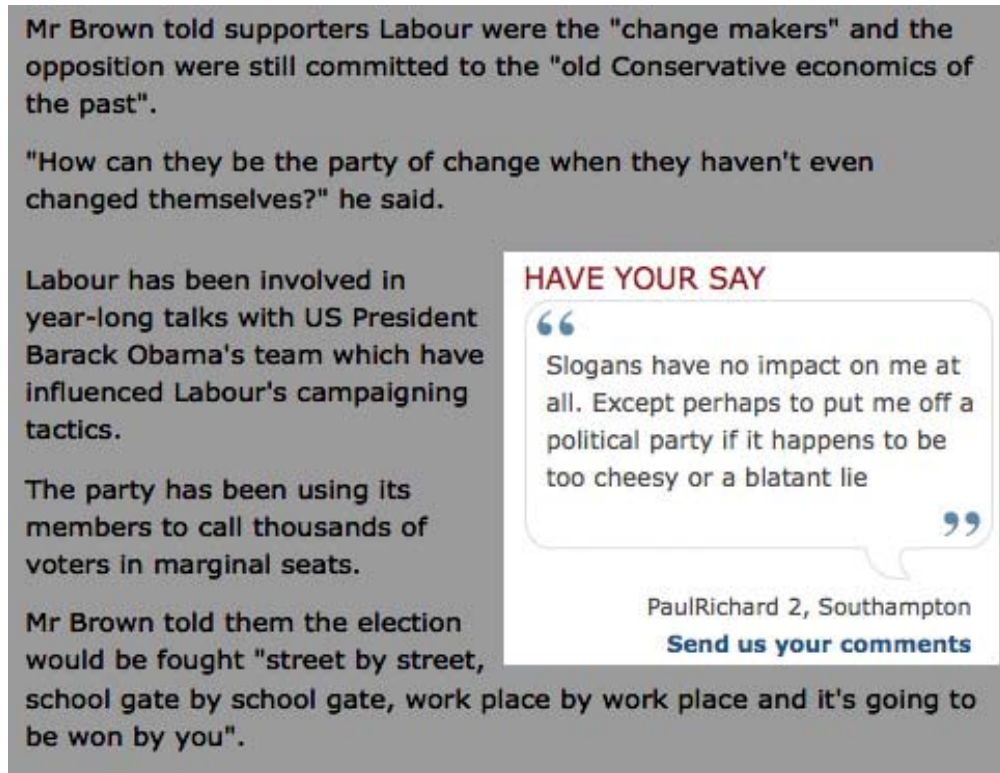
occasionally with RTVE. However, this does not mean that audience participation is not integrated with the news discourse because, as we will see later, audience-generated content can be channelled to a different non-news section but then inserted into the news by the website's editorial team.

Looking in more detail at the news stories on the BBC and RTVE homepages, the audience on RTVE is able to comment on some news features, videos and polls. However, this practice is not common and these elements are not always identifiable on the homepage, so users need to go to the specific news story to find out whether or not there are tools that enable them to participate. On the RTVE news site, comments appear on the same screen as the news stories, just below the text, though never as part of the information. This strengthens the relationship between the broadcaster's content and its audience. The BBC opts to redirect users who wish to add comments to its 'Have Your Say' section, where all participative tools for the online news site are brought together. However, in some cases audience comments are included within the body of news text itself and marked as quotations with the name of the contributing author (see Image 3).

Inserting comments by the public within the body of the news suggests a significant advance in audience-generated content management. They are starting to be seen - at least from a formal perspective - as a contribution comparable to those made by news professionals. This practice points to a change in the journalistic discourse and a more symmetrical relationship between the television channels and their audiences. However, it is worth clarifying that this does not mean a loss of control over the journalistic discourse as it is the broadcaster - represented by the editor - that continues to act as gatekeeper for the information and determining which comments are included and in relation to which news stories.

Unlike RTVE, which has no section devoted to audience participation, the BBC offers readers its 'Have Your Say' section, where people can take part in debates on current affairs, send audiovisual material to the editorial team, suggest ideas for news stories, access BBC blogs and participate in social projects. This structure helps with creating order, centralising audience-generated contents and building a community within the online site. At the same time, it also de-contextualises and differentiates the public's material from its own.

Although RTVE does not have an exclusive section that brings together the website's participatory elements, during our analysis we detected similar tools to those offered by 'Have Your Say' -for example, the option of commenting on news stories, debating current affairs and collaborating on news production by sending in audiovisuals, sounds or texts.

Image 3. Comments from 'Have Your Say' included in the middle of a news item

Mr Brown told supporters Labour were the "change makers" and the opposition were still committed to the "old Conservative economics of the past".

"How can they be the party of change when they haven't even changed themselves?" he said.

Labour has been involved in year-long talks with US President Barack Obama's team which have influenced Labour's campaigning tactics.

The party has been using its members to call thousands of voters in marginal seats.

Mr Brown told them the election would be fought "street by street, school gate by school gate, work place by work place and it's going to be won by you".

HAVE YOUR SAY

"
Slogans have no impact on me at all. Except perhaps to put me off a political party if it happens to be too cheesy or a blatant lie
"

PaulRichard 2, Southampton
Send us your comments

Source: Snapshot from the website http://www.news.bbc.co.uk, UK Politics on 22 February 2010.

Elements that favour debate: forums, chats, blogs and news commentaries

Venues for debate can end up changing online sites into *agorae* where audiences can discuss, compare opinions and exchange ideas about the information. Although their functions seem quite clear, the use of these participatory services on the BBC and RTVE differs considerably in some aspects.

The BBC and RTVE both have blogs, but they are always written and managed by journalists. The audience can not create blogs on the broadcasters' websites. On the BBC news homepage, blogs have little presence. The editor's blog can only be viewed on a list entitled 'Related BBC Sites', which states the distance of the blog from the news appearing on the homepage. This blog does not include news, but is employed to contribute opinions on current events and publicise issues related to how the website operates. Users access the BBC news blogs through the 'Have your Say' section, where there are several notable news blogs, which in turn contain links to other blogs.

In contrast to the low presence of blogs on the BBC news homepage, RTVE gives news blogs a prominent role on its front page. Journalists, correspondents and different radio and television news reporters create the blogs listed. These blogs are inserted into a special inset containing the authors' photos and a short news text to draw users' attention to this part of the page.

BBC and RTVE not only differ in the importance they grant to this tools on their homepages, but also in how they manage users' contributions to the blogs. RTVE does not require previous registration or email to comment on blog entries. Conversely, BBC asks users who want to participate for a BBC ID, a username they get when subscribing, as well as requiring the entry of a valid contact email address. In any case, both media groups first moderate and review audience contributions before publishing them.

Neither the BBC nor RTVE have chats or forum spaces for the audience, although RTVE does schedule interviews with special guests who occasionally offer the audience the chance to participate by sending in questions.

Although the two media groups allow viewers to comment on news and videos, the way the contents are presented is quite heterogeneous. RTVE users can add comments to the same page on which the information is presented, although this method is only offered exceptionally for some news articles and never in the sections on politics, economy and international affairs. This practice reveals a cautious stance about issues that could incite great controversy.

Conversely, BBC's news articles do not let users directly enter their opinions and comments on the same page. To opine and debate, users must go to the 'Have your Say' section, which contains summaries of some current events accompanied by comments, which are used to contrast opinions, like on forums. Some discussions accrue more than 10,000 messages per day. However, this great success worries managers, who have to deal with supervising the contents sent to the website (Wardle & Williams, 2008). Furthermore, this circumstance has also made passive readers reticent, annoyed by the comments of participants who seek popularity or give unfounded opinions, often not even directly related to the debate issues (Wardle & Williams, 2008).

Until 2005, two staff members could review and filter users' emails and comments (Thurman, 2008). However, with the unfolding of the 'Have your Say' section, the BBC has needed to employ tools like 'Complain about this comment', through which users can denounce offensive, racist and xenophobic contents, or contributions that undermine the channel's rules for participation, such as promoting products or including participants' contact details.

No explicit restrictions or limitations about the length of the comments on either of the two media were found during our analysis, although comments must always fit with the subject of the news article according to their rules of moderation.

The socialisation of information and participation contents through social networks

This research project has confirmed the analysis made by Emerett (2009) and Stassen, (2010) by verifying that social networks have a significant impact on the communications strategies of news organisations. The BBC and RTVE both have profiles on Twitter and Facebook with numerous followers who interact and are informed by these services.

On Twitter, both media present updated information about their contents with news so that followers (subscribers) can interact by posing questions, offering materials or responding to invitations. And on Facebook, BBC and RTVE readers receive updates, share photos, texts and videos, as well as starting new groups and recommending contents.

The vision and integration of these social networks with their news websites is not equal on RTVE and BBC. The British broadcaster has a link to Twitter in 'Have your Say', while the Spanish broadcaster has a link to Facebook next to some news articles and has added a Facebook application that lets the audience make live comments on sport events (Image 4). Users' contributions to these networks are not put onto the news websites of either media. Services tend to be designed and scheduled by professionals outside the public corporation and usage conditions do not seem to be defined by the channels. For example, the fact of being registered as a user on rtve.es does not give you permission to make comments on the Facebook tool. Furthermore, the moderation rules for these messages are not detailed.

This practice reveals an unequal approach to social networks and little interconnection in managing participation between participatory services on the Internet and very little development of strategies to allow for the integration of social networks on news websites.

Image 4. Facebook Chat. Tool that allows users to comment live

Source: Screenshot of the http://www.rtve.es website on 28 February 2010.

With regard to social bookmarking, both broadcasters provide users with tools to save their favourite pages and contents in a personal profile so that they can organise them, share them and recommend them. However, each website includes different bookmark services. In addition to being able to send information by email -available on both sites- BBC has links next to the news articles to Delicious, Digg, Facebook, Reddit and StumbleUpon and RTVE has links to Twitter y Menéame. This difference may respond to the popularity of bookmarking services in each country or sales agreements made by the broadcasters with other companies.

Audience-submitted materials

Both broadcasters invite their audiences to send in audiovisual contributions. This shows that they take advantage of the possibilities of new technologies like home video cameras and mobile tools that can record images and sound to let the public produce audiovisual material with no prior knowledge.

Efforts to simplify the sending process are different on each website. The BBC lets material be sent via mobiles (even from abroad), email or the web. Conversely, RTVE only invites participation through the website, although it accepts all file types, even when they are uploaded on other servers. The BBC restricts audience-generated material to a maximum of 50 MB, only accepts some formats and only receives files that have been uploaded using the online form on its server. Both require personal contact information to be provided in order to share material on the website.

Nonetheless, the largest difference between both channels is the availability of these tools and, particularly, the visibility of the material received. RTVE sends users to a new website, http://www.rtve.es/participacion. In addition to inviting people to send information into the 'Have your Say' section, the BBC also provides a form at the end of news articles so that citizens who live in the region where the news occurred or have related information can send in texts, photos or videos to the editorial staff. The BBC's strategy is based on its international presence and renown to obtain firsthand experiences from readers who are close to the news events. This was stated well by a BBC journalist in the United Kingdom (Wardle & Williams, 2008:17):

> 'There are two different ways of looking at the debate. For the Have your Say side
> of the operation, of course, everything is good quality, because the whole purpose
> of that is to give people a chance to have their say as they would on any other
> chat forum that is on the Internet. But from a UGC perspective, we are obviously
> looking for a very different kind of involvement, because we are looking for direct
> stories which we can use in different news outlets.'

Therefore, one could surmise that BBC professionals believe there is a hierarchisation of the material sent in by the public. Firsthand experiences that can provide direct testimonies, images or lead to interviews would seem to be of greater interest than comments or opinions included in debates in Have your Say, where the audience suggests news, reports and issues for debate.

No examples of this type, which implies a symbiosis between the audience participation processes and the news producers, were detected on the Spanish broadcaster. Conversely, a contribution tool that is promoted greatly on RTVE is the 'digital interview'. This is where newsworthy individuals are interviewed on the website in a chat format. The channel announces the guests on the website with some advance and posts a form for sending in questions. Participants can send their questions in before or live at the announced time. RTVE organises these interviews every day and, generally, the events are promoted on the corporation's homepage, although if there is great news interest, there are sometimes links to the interview from the news website. This tool is open to all users and no previous registration is required, although it is moderated and questions are filtered. They normally run from 30 to 60 minutes and the

person interviewed answers some 50 questions. No equivalent on the BBC was seen during observation and data collection.

The evaluation of the contents

Evaluation tools include polls, voting and information tagging tools, with the last using web 2.0 developments. No content tagging tools were seen on the two news homepages analysed or on any other news pages. Bookmarking tools are limited to those detailed above about social bookmarking.

Weeks after data collection, the RTVE news website added a small application to its news articles. This lets Facebook users indicate if they 'like' the content and also has a counter showing the number of people who already stated 'I like it' (Image 5). Like the Facebook live comments tool mentioned above, this tool requires registration on the social network and registering for rtve.es is not enough. This trend by the Spanish channel of including tools with different identification systems (in this case, that of RTVE and Facebook Connect[1]) obligates users to start different sessions while browsing, if they want to use the full range of participation services. On the BBC, with the updating of the BBC ID identification system, users can make use of all the web's interactive resources by using a single identification system[2].
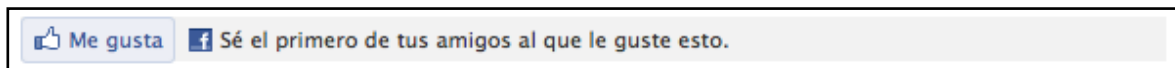

Image 5. Facebook's Like Button.

Image 5. Screenshot of the rtve.es website on 20 February 2010.

RTVE also has polls that encourage users to give their opinions about different current events. These are open to all visitors and you can participate without registering first. The results of the surveys are displayed on separate pages than the news and are accessible for discussion and comments made by registered users identified by email.

Similarly, some RTVE news articles can be rated with a score from one to five stars. In general, these articles tend to be videos or reports on a show that are included on the news homepage. However, the homepage does not detail which news articles have this option available. On the website of the British public broadcaster, there are no evaluation tools like this.

---

[1] More about Facebook Connect on its website: http://developers.facebook.com/docs/guides/web
[2] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcinternet/2010/03/why_did_we_build_bbc_id.html

Conclusions

Through this research, we have identified the participation tools implemented by the BBC and RTVE on their news websites and we have then determined their usage characteristics. We have analysed the elements that foster discussion, socialisation, the sending of text and audiovisual materials and evaluating the news stories. We also examined their access protocols, technical mediation, content restrictions and locations within the homepage.

With regard to our first research question about the participation tools implemented by each media, we discovered that both implemented quite similar participation tools. The BBC offers its audience the possibility to add comments to their news articles, blogs and discussions; to bookmark, subscribe and share contents through email, Delicious, Digg, Facebook, Reddit, StumbleUpon; a permanent link to the Twitter social network and send audiovisuals to the editorial staff. In turn, the RTVE news website offers the possibility of adding comments to news stories, polls and blogs; to share contents by email, Twitter and Menéame; to participate through integrated Facebook tools in the news stories; to send audiovisual materials; and tools to evaluate contents, such as polls and rating systems.

Neither of them have forums or chats. The function of these tools seems to be replaced by the ability to add comments and discuss current events. The news portals for the BBC and RTVE do not let readers create blogs on the online sites. This possibility doesn't seem to interest the broadcasters, maybe because implementing a technical support structure for this service could be too costly and provide few economic or editorial gains in exchange.

The second research question was an enquiry about how participation tools are integrated with the daily news. We found notable differences revealing the existence of two heterogeneous strategies for managing participation at the BBC and at RTVE. Firstly, BBC channels audience participation to a section entitled 'Have your Say', while RTVE distributes participation tools throughout the different sections of the news website, thus obtaining a less marked division between contents generated by its readers and the mainstream.

Secondly, while RTVE never includes audience comments in the body of the news article, the BBC adds them to some news stories, as highlighted sentences. This practice reveals the beginning of the penetrability of the journalistic discourse by participation. While it is already clearly identified, it is still peripheral and complementary.

Lastly, we noticed that although both media conglomerates seem to invite audience participation, the material produced by the users is given differing degrees of importance. The BBC focuses its interest on using the contents generated by the public to strengthen its own news dialogue through tools that lets users send in materials and information from the places where the news is happening to the news desk. In

turn, RTVE's strategy does not integrate this material with the news and channels communications between the editorial staff and the audience mainly through blogs.

In summary and from the analyses done about the BBC and RTVE news websites, we have seen that participation is understood as feedback that is empowered by present-day technological advances and presumably enables a greater variety of contributions. However, participation processes are not added to online news strategies. Only the BBC makes attempts to unify the audience contributions, which are clearly identified in the news stories. This is in line with other authors speaking of this issue (Enli, 2008; Thurman, 2008). Further, Moe, 2008a points a similar general state of development in public service media online. Although efforts to facilitate dialogue are recognizable in websites through the development of different spaces of interaction, there is a lack of information about how broadcasters manage the contributions of the audience. If media operators, especially public service broadcasters, want to build a better online communication with their audience and establish a fruitful arena for opinion exchange, they need to create more transparent tools of participation and enable an improved online space of opinion exchange between users and journalists. Likewise, they should guarantee a competent capacity to process and moderate all the contributions recived.

Bibliography

Arriaza, K. (2008). La transformación de los medios públicos europeos en la nueva era digital. *Área Abierta, 20,* 1-11*.*

BBC. (2004). *Building public value. renewing the BBC for a digital world.* London: British Broadcasting Corporation.

Bijker, W. E. (1995). *Of bicycles, bakelites, and bulbs :Toward a theory of sociotechnical change.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Carpentier, N. (2003). The BBC's Video Nation as a Participatory Media Practice: Signifying Everyday Life, Cultural Diversity and Participation in an Online Community. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 6*, 425-447.

Carpentier, N. (2009). Participation is not enough: The conditions of possibility of mediated participatory practices. *European Journal of Communication, 24*(4), 407-420.

Chung, D., & Robinette, J. (2008). Fast forward into the future: Trends in the interactivity of online news publications. *Conference Papers - International Communication Association*, 1-33.

Debrett, M. (2009). Riding the wave: Public service television in the multi-platform era. *Media, Culture & Society, 31*(5), 807-827.

Deuze, M. (2006). Participation, remediation, bricolage: Considering principal components of a digital culture. *Information Society, 22*(2), 63-75.

Domingo, D., Quandt, T., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J. B., & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory journalism practices in the media and beyond. *Journalism Practice, 2*(3), 326-342.

Emmett, A. (2008). Networking news. *American Journalism Review, 30*(6), 40-43.

Enli, G. S. (2008). Redefining public service broadcasting. *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 14*(1), 105-120.

European Broadcasting Union - Digital Strategy Group. (2002). *Media with a purpose. public service broadcasting in the digital era* No. Version DSG 1.0.

García-Avilés, J.A. (2010). "Citizen journalism" in European television websites: lights and shadows of user generated content. *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal*, 4(4), 251-263.

Harrison, J., & Wessels, B. (2005). A new public service communication environment? public service broadcasting values in the reconfiguring media. *New Media & Society, 7*(6), 834-853.

Hermida, A., & Domingo, D. (2009). Open spaces, closed structures: The integration of UGC management in the routines of the online newsroom. *Conference Papers - International Communication Association*, 1.

Hibberd, M., Schlesinger, P., Kilborn, R., & McNair, B. y Marriott, S. (2000). *Consenting adults?*. London: Broadcasting Standards Commission.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Kjus, Y. (2009). Impact of prestige programs on production practices: The case of crossmedia and audience participation in public service organizations. *Journal of Media Practice, 10*(2), 167-184.

Latour, B., Woolgar, S., & Pérez Sedeño, E. (1995). *La vida en el laboratorio:La construcción de los hechos científicos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

López, X. (2007). Gestión de las vías de participación en el ciberperiodismo. *Estudios Sobre El Mensaje Periodístico, 13,* 111-121.

Lowe, G., & Bardoel, J. (2007). In Lowe G., Bardoel J. (Eds.), *From public service broadcasting to public service media*. Goteborg: Nordicom.

Mahler, A., & Rogers, E. M. (1999). The diffusion of interactive communication innovations and the critical mass: The adoption of telecommunications services by german banks. *Telecommunications Policy, 23*(10-11), 719-740.

Moe, H. (2008a). Dissemination and dialogue in the public sphere: A case for public service media online. *Media, Culture & Society, 30*(3), 319-336.

Moe, H. (2008b). Public service media online?: Regulating public broadcasters' internet services--A comparative analysis. *Television & New Media, 9*(3), 220-238.

Scott, M.(2009). *Guidelines for broadcasters on promoting user-generated content and media and information literacy*. London: Commonwealth Broadcasting Association.

Stassen, W. (2010). Your news in 140 characters: Exploring the role of social media in journalism. *Global Media Journal: African Edition, 4*(1), 1-16.

Rafaeli, S. (1988). Interactivity: From new media to communication. In R. P. Hawkins, J. M. Wiemann & S. Pingree (Eds.), *Advancing communication science: Merging mass and interpersonal processes* (pp. 312). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Thurman, N. (2008). Forums for citizen journalists? adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media. *New Media & Society, 10*(1), 139-157.

Wardle, C., & Williams, A . (2008). *UGC@theBBC: Understanding its impact upon contributors, Non-contributors and BBC news*. Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage Publications.