

EXPLORING THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF PARTICIPATORY
JOURNALISM: A FIRST LOOK INTO SELF-REPORTS BY ONLINE JOURNALISTS AND
EDITORS IN TEN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Based on a comparative study of user-generated content in ten countries, this article explored the developmental features of citizen participation in online media with special emphasis on political economic issues regarding the phenomena. We dealt with the emerging practices for audience participation management and their relationship to news production routines, as well as the larger epistemological and ontological questions regarding the redefinitions of the traditional roles of professional journalism in the light of the developments of user-generated content (UGC) in online media. UGC has become one of the most dominant features of online news media development. Research has so far shown that numerous forces drive the phenomena, including the technological, cultural and social. It is possible to assume that political and economic forces significantly influence changes within the traditional media and changes in online media development. While some argue that the number of jobs in online newsrooms is increasing, while the traditional journalism positions are disappearing, others argue that large newspaper corporations see ways of downsizing newsrooms and increasing user-generated content as a way to work up more profit for the corporation. In other words users may become a source for free content with lesser costs for the corporate media industry. Hence, this paper is a report of self-evaluations by interviewees and their self-reported perception on the UGC with particular emphasis on the perceived political-economic influence on the transformation of the traditional media and the development of UGC content.

INTRODUCTION

It is an obvious statement that the media, including newspapers, are an intrinsic part of the economics of knowledge. Recent changes within the media industry, heightened by the evolution of information technology, illustrate Babe's (1995) argument that the economic significance of commoditized information necessitates the painstaking task of monetizing the evanescent nature of information and information exchange.

This paper explores the ongoing migration of readers to web-based news sites and online newspapers. Specifically, it focuses on reports from journalists in 10 countries about the economic motivations for engaging with online journalism and, in particular, with the participatory journalism phenomenon. Empirical data for this study were gathered in seven European countries, Israel, Canada and the United States. Reports are based on interviews with online journalists and editors of the two market-leading online newspapers in each country. This analysis is tied to the neoclassical – neoliberal understanding of economics, markets and technology, as well as to globalization processes. Information technology has an extraordinary capacity to alter our sense of time and space (Lash and Urry, 1994; Deibert, 1997) and to further create a sense of displacement in the ongoing processes of virtual exchange.

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE MEDIA

Economics, markets and technology are what Babe (1995) labels hegemonic doctrines, and political economy calls for integration with moral philosophy. Journalism particularly relates to that consideration since one core premise of

journalism is to democratize communication, widen information exchange and work towards closing of the participatory gap through open and balanced reporting.

Journalism by this idealistic definition has true democratic value only if it is seen as a service to the public's ever-growing need to be informed promptly and correctly.

In the economies of the new capitalism -- or what Jameson (1991) calls the logic of late capitalism, in which everyone in everyday life is potentially engaged with creating and distributing information -- the concept of citizen as informational laborer (Castells, 2001), seems to bring considerable appeal to media industries. Granted, media industries from the early 1980s saw a rapid consolidation trend. The convergence of ownership in the context of neoliberal capitalism means the media industry currently functions much as any other profit-making organization. But media organizations have found it difficult to find an economic model to sustain their growth. The main difficulty is, to invoke Babe (1995) again, in the inadequacy of the old economic model based on the traditional factors of labor, capital and production. Once information joins the mix, outcomes become inevitably unpredictable since information transforms production processes.

We could argue that in this globalized and networked society (Castells, 2001) media industry dived into the opportunity to benefit from what is in essence a democratic notion of participation, but as recent trends show, it would be premature to declare any profit-making expedition a success. In a "bandwagon" mentality, characteristic of the neoliberal economic logic in the context of disorganized capitalism, media economists failed to figure in the transformational power of information. Hence, faced with the ubiquitous nature of information

technology, the media industry is uncovering a weakness of the traditional economic model.

Before we engage with a deeper understanding of participatory journalism in political economic terms, we would like to emphasize that participatory journalism or “user-generated content” is apparently a part of the commodification of work under the capitalist system. Lash and Urry (1994) argued that in the new capitalism guided by information economies, time has been divided between work and leisure and hence between production and consumption. With this perspective, what makes user-generated content in journalism news production so compelling, is the fact that it blurs the distinction between work and leisure. The ideology behind this approach suggests that work, e.g. contributions from users, is basically seen as leisure. Hence users both produce and consume information almost simultaneously.

For all of the above reasons, we feel that the political economy of participation in online news production and consumption merit deeper understanding and continuous reconceptualization. In the next section. we will lay down some theoretical premises upon which we based analysis of the data we gathered from online journalists and editors.

PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM - CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE

A number of scholars have attempted to define and explore contributions to online news media from people who are not professional journalists. Deuze (2001) refers to the phenomena as open-source journalism; others connect it to public

journalism (Black, 1997; Paulussen et al., 2007). The term “user generated content” (UGC) has become widely accepted. However, Bowman and Willis’s (2003) term “participatory journalism” seems to us to be more apt because the phrase places the phenomenon in the larger context of participatory culture, or what Jenkins (2006) calls “convergence culture.” In this context, media industry efforts to distribute their products across multiple platforms end up empowering the users to appropriate, reshape and redistribute those products.

Jenkins (2006) reminds us that media in the digital age are accomplishing a process of convergence arising from two mid-1980s phenomena: the growth of new media technologies and cross-media ownership. For Jenkins, convergence culture is a result of the industry’s economic desire to distribute content across multiple platforms. He argues, “Digitization set the conditions for convergence [while] corporate conglomerates created its imperative” (2006, p. 11).

As we will suggest from the perspective of journalists and editors, participatory media channels created in online newsrooms are not merely the result of the democratic goals of journalism to foster participatory culture and empower the public. Rather, as Jenkins (2006) argues, “convergence culture is a paradigm shift – a move from the medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels” and is “driven by the economic calculations” of the media industry (p. 254). He lists several motives or reasons why the industry embraced convergence. They include creation of “multiple ways of selling content to consumers” and of a platform for shaping consumer behavior, as well as a desire to cement consumer loyalty at a time when market fragmentation and the rise of file

sharing threaten old ways of doing business (p. 254). Even though market logic is evident behind participatory or convergence culture, the process itself is rather new; it leaves gaps through which the public can assert its bottom-up power to change the rules of participation and hence exert its own rules and needs.

Dean's (2008) notion of communicative capitalism, defined as "a form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communication technologies" (p. 104), also is useful here. Participation in this sense is no longer a simple expression of democratic actions by citizens but rather the result of the market value of participation, as well as expression of commodity culture and consumption of information.

Like others, we see journalism as a result of historical and social development. In the current social circumstances, informed by new media technology, journalism is taking a new form. In proposing a model to explore how participatory journalism works at various stages of news production, Domingo et al (2008) argue:

This model implies that some of the institutionalized communication functions of agencies and journalistic media can be performed by individual society members and organizations, while others still lie in the hands of communication institutions (p. 331)

In that sense, this paradigmatic shift is a part of both technological development and economic logic. As our data will show, it works primarily by building consumer loyalty or brand sustainability. It also can be driven by a management desire to cut cost of information gathering by engaging audiences to perform a journalistic function that previously was performed by paid professionals.

In this study we try to address a need for more empirical research into this trend, as well as to contribute to theoretical and methodological understanding of the motives behind practices of participatory journalism.

METHOD AND DATA GATHERING

This study is a logical continuation of our preliminary study of participatory features on the websites of 16 newspapers in eight European countries (Finland, Croatia, Slovenia, Spain, France, Belgium, Germany and United Kingdom) and the United States (Domingo et al., 2008). We have added two more researchers, two more countries and four more newspapers from Canada and Israel (See Table 1); Slovenia has been dropped from the list, with another newspaper from Croatia added instead. As the only non-EU nation among the European countries in the study, Croatia can provide insight into the processes outside the dominant European Union.

Table 1. Countries, online newspapers and number of interviewees included in this study

Country	Newspaper Online	Web address	Editors and Journalists
Belgium	De Standaard	standaard.be	3
	Gazet van Antwerpen	gva.be	3
Canada	The Globe and Mail	theglobeandmail.com	3
	National Post	nationalpost.com	3
Croatia	24 Sata	24sata.hr	3
	Vecernji list	vecernji.hr	3
Finland	Ilta-lehti	iltalehti.fi	3
	Helsingin Sanomat	Hs.fi	3
France	Le Monde	lemonde.fr	3
	Le Figaro	lefigaro.fr	3
Germany	Spiegel	spiegel.de	3
	Frankfurter Allgemeine	Faz.net	3
Spain	20 Minutos	20minutos.es	3
	El País	elpais.com	4

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Israel	Ynet	ynet.co.il	3
	NRG	nrg.co.il	3
	Ha'aretz	haaretz.com	3
United Kingdom	Guardian	guardian.co.uk	2
	Telegraph	telegraph.co.uk	5
United States	Washington Post	washingtonpost.com	3
	USAToday	usatoday.com	3

Following our preliminary study in 2007, we interviewed journalists and editors of these online newspapers in 2008. In most cases, we interviewed three professionals in each online newsroom: an executive in charge of newsroom strategies, an editor overseeing the news production process, and a journalist directly dealing with audience participation. We developed a code sheet for qualitative coding based on the preliminary results of the 2007 study. Most researchers used qualitative data analysis software such as Atlas TI or Max QDA. Because qualitative coding is polysemic in nature, an “Other” option also was available in each coding category to accommodate statements that did not fit one of the pre-determined options.

This paper draws on data from the “Motives for Participatory Journalism” coding category, which reflected journalistic reasons for pursuing participatory journalism initiatives. Options in this category included technological, economic, political and ideological, “inevitable” (a view that the phenomenon could not be stopped and media needed to get on board) and “other” motives. Although our focus in this paper is on economic motives, interviewees often referenced other motives within an economic context, one of the interesting findings described below.

We now turn to a description and discussion of the results. Because we were dealing with a vast amount of data, we chose to identify themes across different countries and newspapers. Although we understand and acknowledge that media cultures and traditions vary, we found that the similarities greatly surpassed the differences, and a thematic analysis best served our purposes. Questions that guided our thematic analysis were:

* What economic discourses and motivations for participatory journalism were identified by the journalists and editors?

* How did journalists and editors talk about economic motivations behind participatory journalism?

Our analysis identified four themes as dominant discourse across dozens of interviews:

1. Branding – building newspaper consumer loyalty;
2. Strategies for increasing website traffic: “Numbers still scream profit”;
3. Bandwagon effect – media competition: “Everyone is doing it, so we should do it better”;

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Branding – building newspaper consumer loyalty

This was the most dominant theme across interviews analyzed in this study. It appeared in every country, though not in every interview. The fragmentation of both media and audiences seems to be resulting in a move away from traditional mass media marketing strategies and toward journalism as strategic communication,

both to address needs of newspaper consumers and to shape their behaviors. It is important to note that journalists who are also editors would be more likely than others in the newsroom to take an economic or marketing perspective, while journalists lower in the management hierarchy would be more inclined to emphasize the importance of journalistic motives for participatory journalism. Even so, it seems that strategic communication methods are gaining visibility for many inside as well as outside the newsroom in the new media environment – more than ever before, newspapers will be seen as brands through which consumer loyalty is created. One of our interviewees from outside the newsroom, the chief information officer of *Telegraph Media Group* (UK) said:

I think you must never ignore the community that you've got at the moment because you do that at your peril.

Building communities around newspapers seems to be a strategy for creating a sense of belonging as a loyal reader in times when, as one *Telegraph* editor mentioned, “everything is so fragmented.” Moreover, this loyalty is seen as related to building an economically sustainable brand, creating a competitive edge and spurring further communication technology development. For example, the community manager at *Het Belan van Limburg* and *Gazet van Antwerpen* in Belgium felt that newsrooms should be open to the marketing department and that communication between the two is key to a successful newspaper industry. Hence marketing and strategic communication becomes a prerogative for creating so-called communities or interest groups, or even stakeholders:

We want to create a platform where local football clubs can have their own page. We are trying to implement a lot of social network features in this platform, so that we got a lot of interaction between clubs and their fans. The idea is that such a platform should not focus on news only, but it must rather stimulate the whole social network around and between these football clubs...so for instance if [the marketing department] wants to set up something for a certain target group, I will try to think of possible ways to do that.

Brand recognition also seems to be driving the perceived need to integrate social network features and traditionally non-journalistic forms such as blogging -- or at least brand recognition seems to be an excuse for engaging in non-journalistic forms at the potential expense of reporting and news production. User blogs, for example, can encourage user loyalty by, among other things, providing a value to users that other sites cannot deliver. The communities editor of telegraph.co.uk said:

The people who are doing it [blogging] want to associate themselves with us and our brand and what we stand for, because we represent their views. The other answer that I usually give is that we're not giving people a blog. We are giving people an audience....you can go and start a blog on Blogger today, but nobody is going to read it apart from your mum...and it would take you months to build an audience. You can start blog with the *Telegraph* today, and I can deliver tens of thousands of people straight to your blog from Day One.

In Israel, although economic motives were often coupled with motives of inevitability, the NRG editor commented, "We are a part of the global market, and we have to keep up with it by adding new features...and constantly checking needs and demands." Clearly, maintaining and increasing audiences was seen as important, and wooing potential customers seems to be one of the primary strategic goals. If used well, editors of Israeli newspapers believed, participatory journalism can strengthen the website, which is ultimately considered to be a product. One *Ha'aretz* editor remarked:

People's attention threshold today is a lot lower, and they want more and more...The web surfer moves rapidly from sites, to the radio, to the TV...I want to make him stay here as long as possible. How do I achieve this goal? I engage him and motivate him to stay with me. He can add his own contents, see them and arrange the web page to his preference.

In the United States, managing editors combined journalistic and economic motivation, but participatory journalism was seen as a necessary tool for attracting and retaining audiences. This process was deeply embedded with the notion of brand loyalty in their discourse. Further, a need to attract more audience members as stakeholders was reflected in a move to create niche communities, for instance around topics such as cruises. An editor at *USA Today* commented on this strategy:

As web content becomes increasingly distributed, as it becomes more and more difficult to maintain that walled-garden destination, you have to pose the question, "How do I maintain my brand?"

Similarly in Canada, *National Post* editors discussed both journalistic and economic motivations but were aware that newspaper readers are not just attracted by pure information delivery. They recognized that a process of relationship and brand building between readers and newspapers is a result of marketing. One editor remarked:

I think the role of a newspaper, the role of any media organization, is to inform the public. At the same time, you want to feel that connection with your reader...Without readers, there's no need for newspapers. Your job is to attract as many people as you can...[but] to be very cynical, from an advertising perspective, that is what you're delivering – the readers. So, yes you have to keep them occupied, keep them interested.

Journalistic motivations were especially prominent in interviews with French, Israeli, Spanish, and British and Finnish newspapers. Interviewees highlighted a

tradition of journalism based on the service to the public. Some journalists rejected economic discourses or repeatedly provided connections between journalistic and economic motivations. Further, economic or marketing motives are sometimes seen as negative and as something that “others” do, while journalists “protect the function of media in the public sphere.” The editor-in-chief of the Spanish *20 Minutos* explained:

I think that the mere fact that they thought it [UGC] a good marketing action is a victory and a recognition that other types of journalism are possible. Because they are implicitly acknowledging that the official classical discourse that we were taught in college is no longer valid (...) Today the receiver is a producer as well, and they may be much wiser than us all [the journalists]. (...) That is wonderful, and in any case the changes are happening, and we just can be attentive to adapt to them and foster them.

Finally, in addition to stressing the power of branding, the *Telegraph's* communities' also emphasized that it is not all about chasing consumers and that newspapers in Britain have always had a strong sense of public service: “It’s easy to see it in quite cynical terms with, you know, we’re chasing audiences and we’re just offering people a trivial way to occupy themselves. I don’t think that’s what’s going on,” he said.

Strategies for increasing website traffic – “Numbers still scream profit”

Interviewees identified increasing website traffic as one of the most common strategic goals. In Croatia, for example, it was clear that the pressure for numbers and an increase in traffic was applied top-down, from the management to the newsroom. Editors and journalists said their role is to perform and develop channels for participation that would make people stay longer on the site and

potentially attract new users. Growth in usage was often coupled with a desire to build brand loyalty, especially in regards to experimentation with social networking and community-building options for participation.

In Croatian as well as in Spanish and U.S. examples, this trend was seen as a strategy for the industry to survive rather than a way to promote public debate, fulfill a democratic role or endeavor to close the participatory gap. In Britain, the *Guardian's* network editor remarked that the point is not so much to grab new consumers as to encourage them to stay longer on the site, attracting them with a variety of features that would ultimately result in bigger traffic numbers. The head of editorial development of the same newspaper talked about what he termed “a crude kind of metric,” where only numbers matter: “In cold commercial terms, it’s is [about] page impressions.” However, he immediately added, “it does improve journalism. You can see why that kind of debate and discussion is an interesting proposition.”

The *Telegraph's* communities’ editor expressed strong links between branding and increasing traffic. The *My Telegraph* section of the website, which provides a space for users to create their own blogs and post other content, was designed specifically to attract consumers and encourage them to stay, building a community that will generate traffic. He remarked:

I really think once we get My Telegraph to a significant size, once we can make My Telegraph the central arena for all the community stuff we do, we’re suddenly going to see, we’re going to see UGC representing a huge chunk of traffic.

Because it is easily quantified and resonates with managers and investors, website traffic is a popular way of demonstrating market value. The number of “hits” any item receives can be tracked, unlike in print, which seems to be an appealing way of arguing for the relevance of online news.. The following example from the online news manager of the Belgium *Het Belang van Limburg* and *Gazet van Antwerpen* illustrates this point well:

A nice example concerned a caravan fire on a camping site in Dilsen-Stokkem, a small town in Flanders. For the paper edition of our newspaper, the story wasn’t relevant enough, because there was nobody injured and almost no damage. But for the community there, the people living on or nearby the camping, it was of course the talk of the town. Coincidentally we had one of our citizen journalists who made a piece about the fire and we placed that story on the website. Well, the story generated quite a lot of website traffic. I won’t say that the number of visitors was tremendous, but the good thing about it is that all these people read the story on our website and not somewhere else on the Internet.

The marketing director for the website of France’s *Le Figaro* said participatory journalism is an extremely valuable tool for drawing traffic, in part because the content created helps with indexing by search engines. In Croatia and Israel, editors and journalists were sometimes unable to articulate why and how they decided to develop participatory journalism offerings, but user participation was often described as a method to attract readers to stay longer on the site, as well as to attract new visitors who might stay longer and become loyal customers.

The high traffic volume on U.S. sites was highlighted in interviews from the U.K., Germany, and Croatia, in particular. At the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, managing editors focused on traffic and particularly on the accepted understanding that traffic defines the success of the online news site. They saw increasing traffic as

an contributing to the larger goal of building loyalty, not only with the public in general but also with smaller groups with whom they can engage on a deeper level. The desire, they suggested, is to get them involved with journalism so journalism can get involved with their lives, which would ultimately result in greater loyalty and guarantee future readers for the newspapers. One U.S. editor said:

The extent to which we can involve them and let them involve themselves in our news report, our journalism, is the way that we will become more a part of their lives and ultimately will help guarantee our success in the future.

The business argument also was strong in Canada, related both to maintaining viewers and increasing traffic. Online news sites were seen as a way to show the bright future of journalism. For example, the idea of building communities was not expressed as a need to reach out to people to help facilitate the exchange of information and news but rather as a business strategy. “You build a community because you are a business and you don’t want to lose readers,” explained a *Globe and Mail* editor. “The more people you can persuade to look at your pages, the more money you can make.” At the Canadian *National Post*, many of the UGC strategies were seen as ways of getting people to the site and persuading them to stay there. As one editor said:

The bottom line is to improve the traffic...Why don’t newspapers just use YouTube? I’ll tell you the answer right now. It is because from a business perspective, we need to keep people on our site.

But the real insight into the value of numbers comes from the *National Post* editor who said:

There is a real business case here to be made. You know what, people are spending 5, 6,, 7 minutes in our website, engaging with the material...That becomes a business thing. It becomes a very tangible number that you can go back to the core business of the web and go to advertisers and say, "You can actually capitalize on that."

Bandwagon effect – media competition "Everyone is doing it so we should do it better"

The previous quote from the Canadian *National Post* also highlights the theme of media competition, which was recurrent in our interviews. Media competition was seen in two ways: as competition with other equally strong newspapers in the country, and as competition with news sites that generally only aggregate news rather than producing it. The second kind of competitiveness seemed to irk interviewees, who expressed concern about which type of business would eventually win the war for consumers. Interestingly, many interviewees seemed to have difficulties expressing exactly why they started providing participatory journalism options and what the main purpose was in implementing them. An excellent example of what we've termed a bandwagon effect of media competition comes from the head of editorial development of guardian.co.uk:

Speaking generally about the newspaper industry in Britain, there's been a big thing with "Me Too." There's been no [thought] in this country why are we doing it....Some of our efforts, and many of our competition efforts have been about "Me-Tooism." What are we doing? Why are we doing this? Why do we have that?...Why should it exist?...There's been a great deal of fear about missing out, there's a scramble to get this stuff up and running.

However, one competitive drive among media outlets that was clearly identified across interviews in different countries was related to building communities and understanding users as "our principal stakeholders." In Belgium, for example, a dominant theme was that of "experimenting" with participatory journalism because

it is a general trend everywhere. But the competition was expressed in terms of generating richer content or allowing users to generate richer content that eventually would be competitive not only with other online news sites but also with social networking sites such as *Facebook*. A good example comes from an editor of the Finnish newspaper *Kaleva*:

Newspapers are searching [for a] means to be part of their readers' everyday life and doings. They see that people use social media anyway, and in a worst case, we just stay put and observe. Often these materials would work also with us. Is the newspaper able to offer this, in a way, 'social media platform'? Is it in our brand, can we renew like this?

In Germany, the issue of competition was addressed in conjunction with the need to find a business model that would work for online newspapers and the need to maintain quality journalism, seen as a way of creating competition with media that have little or nothing to do with traditional journalism models:

These are completely new media, communities, that have nothing to do with news journalism. I think you can only underestimate the principle of user-generated content regarding quality, but you have to look carefully where it reaches the quality that you want to have. Not every type of medium is suitable here. (...) There is no business model of news journalism. The business model is to obtain a certain reach or circulation, to play out some banners, to reach some type of community. There is no reason why we should be the only ones that profit here, and not some other aggregators of reach. I think that this is the ongoing, non-trivial transformation.

"Inevitability," one of our motivation options, also was stressed in connection with competition. Israeli interviewees, for example, emphasized competition with other in-country media outlets; they saw fostering user participation as a way of creating more competition and improving quality. In Croatia and Belgium, editors (more than other journalists) said the small size of the market made competition for

readers especially important. In Croatia, *24Hours* and *Vecernji list* compete with the two other daily newspapers for a market of little more than 4 million; UGC and other participation strategies were seen as offering competitive advantages by increasing the attractiveness of the websites.

Finally, news aggregation sites that “tap into our market,” as one editor from Croatia put it, was a concern expressed across interviews in the countries we studied. Journalists saw the future of online newspapers as depending on the success of the news aggregation sites as well as search engines such as *Google* or *Yahoo!*, which not only aggregate their own news but also use indexing to draw attention to some websites and away from others.

Interestingly, one other theme emerged in our analysis in two smaller countries, Croatia and Belgium, but not in other countries. We termed that theme UGC as a cost saving strategy. It is possible that this theme emerged in these two countries because of the constraints of the small markets.

Although some journalists and editors talked about participatory journalism being a cost-saving strategy for the media industry, many expressed skepticism about using it that way. In Belgium, the general editor-in-chief of *De Standaard* and *Net Hieuwasblad* remarked:

Well in the eyes of our management committee, UGC is considered something fantastic. They hope that they will be able to provide more content with less journalists...I still try to convince the management to invest in UGC gathering and get rid of the idea that UGC is cost saving. We need to invest in it.

Similarly, in Croatia, editors of both newspapers said they personally saw UGC in terms of saving time rather than money, but management saw it as a money-saving

opportunity – one that already had resulted in layoffs in traditional newsrooms, as well as workforce outsourcing from traditional to online newsrooms.

It was surprising that this theme was particularly strong in the small markets of Belgium and Croatia but much less likely to come up in other countries. That does not necessarily mean this strategy is not employed by media managers in those countries. Other themes, such as increasing traffic or creating competitive advantages – in other words, the role of participatory journalism in saving the newspaper industry -- may have been more dominant at the time the interviews were conducted elsewhere, or different interviewers may have focused on different issues.

CONCLUSION

This study, as we expected, raised more questions than answers about the economic motivations behind UGC. The results were fascinating for several reasons. First, similarities in how editors and journalists in different countries understood and talked about UGC were striking. Second was the fact that economic discourses were often coupled with other motivations, such as technological, political and ideological ones, and even with the idea that the phenomenon was inevitable. However, we have sought here to remain focused primarily on the economic discourses in order to identify different themes surrounding them. We identified three universal themes: branding strategies for increasing website traffic, a bandwagon effect, and a cost-saving strategy, as country specific theme related to Belgium and Croatia. In doing so, we tapped into what Jenkins (2006) identified as a convergence culture,

finding much support for his proposition that convergence is driven by a need to develop consumer loyalty amid market fragmentation that threatens old ways of doing business. In fact, editors in Germany stressed exactly that incapability of the classic business model to function successfully in the new media environment.

Journalists and editors we interviewed in Europe, Israel, Canada and United States all seem to be grappling with the vision and the future of the media they work for. They see participatory journalism as a way to increase competitiveness but at the same time most admit to the lack of clear vision for why and how to adopt it, either for democratic or competitive purposes. As the *Guardian's* communities' editor remarked, "(E)very month, it is another fight to see how far we can push our traffic and see how far we can go beyond our competitors." This quote and many of the others provided above suggest a strong economic drive and market logic behind participatory journalism. But it is also true that editors were unwilling to submit completely to an economic discourse. "Our audiences and our customers and our users who enjoyed consuming our content also wanted a place to be heard," the *Telegraph* communities editor said. The editor of *USA Today* argued for the centrality of fostering democratic rights to debate and discuss: "Beginning to create that social network around the news was a very *USA Today* thing to do – the nation's newspaper with the nation's conversation." Such statements foster the idea that editors and journalists haven't gave up on the benefits of traditional journalism despite pressures created by technological and economic change.

Finally, the discourses of participation suggested the inevitability of constant compromises with the economic models in which industry operates. In Dean's

(2008) understanding of communicative capitalism, it is possible in a networked society to provide a sense of participation -- a sense of engagement, democratic activity and contribution -- without real democratic action. Interviewee statements such as "people feel more involved" or "you can hit submit, see your comment there....you feel you've engaged," support the premise that participation may be a fallacy. Even so, professional journalists seem eager to hold on to the traditional value of journalism by helping develop ways of participation that move beyond counting numbers of hits to creation of a more meaningful dialogic communicative exchange.

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