(R)EVOLUTION OF PERSPECTIVES ON INTERACTIVITY: FROM A MEDIA-CENTERED TO A JOURNALIST-CENTERED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT *The proliferation of new media since the late 1990s has launched a new period of revitalising the concept of interactivity but from very different angles and with several empirical research perspectives. The article's main aim is to show the variety of ways in which researchers have conceptualised, examined and analysed interactivity within media and journalism studies. The paper provides insights into the various readings of the changes within the field and offers a cautious view of the concept's potential. Based on a selective meta-analysis of different approaches, we propose to distinguish three perspectives on interactivity: communication- and media-centred perspectives, audience- or user-centred perspectives, and production- or journalist-centred perspectives. This distinction enables us to differentiate between what is considered interactive, and who this interaction involves according to several scholars within media and journalism studies.*

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INTRODUCTION

Despite being one of the most important concepts in media and communication studies, interactivity remains also one of the murkiest and most elusive. What is more, the rise of algorithms in online communication and social media challenges the notion of interactivity altogether. Since interactivity was mainly perceived as a notion that enforces *reciprocity* as an attribute closely tied to technological affordances that allow more interactive message exchanges between actors engaged in communicative process, the recently revealed power of algorithms challenged these social aspects of mediated interactions. That produced the platformed sociality, as José Van Dijck calls it, which "at the same time becomes part of society's institutional fabric" (Van Dijck, 2013: 5), changing also the ecosystem of recent connective media.

According to Mark Deuze, interactivity was one of the three most important keywords in the debate about the differences between traditional media and online media (Deuze, 1999: 377-379). Interactivity enables the more direct inclusion of the reader (or Internet user) in the journalistic experience: either through computer-mediated interaction with the journalists and editors in news media online forums or through the posting of personal comments in direct response to published news and media content. These responses of the audience and the interaction with the readers are the crucial elements of the news environment, and they have brought about a cultural transformation in journalism. The implications of this core feature of online or digital journalism reach far and wide: online interactivity is argued to challenge the most rudimentary journalistic practices (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, 2012; Hermida, 2010; Domingo and Paterson, 2011; Singer et al., 2011; Larsson, 2012; Ramirez et al., 2016). The process of news production, the selection of news issues and news sources, and the active response to media contents are increasingly structured around audience behaviour and their personalised preferences. Some very recent studies empirically reaffirm the old thesis that the future of journalism in the eyes of professional journalists remains in constant contacts with the news receivers, namely, in its interactivity (Ramirez et al., 2016: 83). On the other hand, studies like Ester Appelgren's (2017) use the example of data journalism to show how the illusion of interactivity replaces real interactivity.

In this paper, this polysemic nature of interactivity will be acknowledged, and the differentiation between several dimensions – variously called "typologies of interactivity" (Domingo, 2008), "levels of interactivity" (Jensen, 2002), or "dimensions of interactivity" (Förnas, 2002; Chung, 2008) – will be established. All such conceptualisations evolve around the assumption that interactivity is a multidimensional construct.[1]

Many authors (Jensen, 1998; Fortunati et al., 2010; Domingo, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2004) still agree there is a huge confusion in relation to the conceptual specifics of the term interactivity, and also in relation to its (empirical) operationalisation, especially within complementary disciplinary fields like media studies and journalism. The aim

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[1] In addition, it is important to recognise that there are two different but inter-related discourses in which interactivity is conceptualised – there are not only scholarly conceptualisations, but also those of practitioners.

of this study is thus to provide a systematic "cross-disciplinary map" of interactivity by focusing on some of the most paradigmatic scholars and studies within those fields that addressed the changes in communication, media and journalism, accompanied with the rise of new Internet technologies and recent platforms of social media. The article's main objective is to provide a rereading of selected paradigmatic studies on interactivity within media and journalism research, and to compare the vast empirical approaches to their measurements of interactivity.

With this broad aim in mind, this study follows a conceptual comparative approach in a form of meta-analysis that includes a detailed comprehension of the most prominent readings published through a longer period of time and in different contexts, bearing in mind also the changing phases of the Internet development, and the emergence of recent mobile media platforms. Based on their high citation status, the selection of included studies that were popular from early 1990s on was made (see for example Loosen and Schmidt, 2012).

The structure of the paper is thus threefold. First, a short overview of different contexts within selected disciplines is presented, especially with the relevance to the emergence of the Internet as a new communication and media technology, challenging the idea that the interactivity is a multi-dimensional concept. In the next part, the proposal of a new typology of perspectives on interactivity in relation to three separate questions is generated: what interactivity means, how it should be measured and what is its relevance today. Looking at some of the most cited and mostly referred to studies on interactivity within the media and internet studies from early 1990s on, we suggest a typology of three analytical approaches that seem to prevail within this field. The studies on interactivity can be grouped in the communication and media perspectives, the perspectives on 'audience turn' focusing on interactivity as an aspect of audience (re)actions to media platforms, and finally in the production and journalist perspectives that have strongly influenced the most current field of online journalism. This distinction between different definitions and their dimensions enables us to delineate *what* is considered interactive, and *who* this interaction involves or is aimed at, according to prominent scholars within each perspective. In the analysis, seminal studies from different periods with some of the most cited authors in the interactivity research were included (for instance Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997; Chung, 2008; McMillan, 2002a; Domingo, 2008; Deuze, 2007; Heeter, 1989). Such literature overview also shows how different disciplines have proposed and/ or challenged the use of empirical methods for measuring the concept of interactivity and for the different conceptualisations of interactivity that lie beneath them. The article closes with a short synthesis highlighting the similarities and differences among the three main (r)evolutionary perspectives of interactivity, considering in particular the methods that are used in empirical examinations and research approaches used to address the core concept.

Instead of simply celebrating the potential of interactivity, we provide insights into the various readings of the changes in the field of media and journalism, and offer a less optimistic view of the concept's potential. In addition, we argue that the recent

emergence of hybrid digital media platforms and converged communicative practices within a diverse "media ecology" (Jenkins, 2006) imply the rise of a "new conceptual turn" in which interactivity seems to be replaced with a variety of new phenomena, such as "user participation", "audience engagement", "creative co-production", or "produsage". Such change might open up not only new theoretical challenges but also a question of the empirical shift to new research dilemmas that might represent a revival of qualitative or mixed research methods. The paper thus contributes to the ongoing debate in the rapidly changing field, and proposes some useful strands for future research. No matter how conceptually separate different scholars investigating interactivity within the last three decades remained, they seem to share a permanent belief in the power and relevance of interactivity as either social and cultural phenomena, or only as a changeable but sustainable technical affordance.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES, AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF INTERACTIVITY

Interactivity has been considered an important feature of computer-mediated communication from the outset of Internet research. Cees Koolstra and Mark Bos (2009) generated a meta-analysis of several studies on interactivity, and showed how the concept of interactivity is not addressed only in studies on media and communication, but also in disciplines like marketing, information science, computer science, and education sciences (Koolstra and Bos, 2009: 373).[2] While the term was initially primarily understood as a specific characteristic of a communication process between audiences and the media, and mostly examined within media studies (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1998; Jensen, 2002), the expansion of online news, the blogosphere, social media platforms, and of new forms of "citizen journalism" (Domingo, 2008) or "ambient journalism" (Hermida, 2010) has brought a specific attention to its meaning and effects also within journalism (Deuze, 2007). The proliferation of digitalisation and online journalism since the late 1990s has thus revitalised the concept of interactivity, which has become nothing less than a metaphor for online news (Fortunati et al., 2010), and one of the most frequently used *buzzwords* (Jensen, 1998: 185).

Not only in Internet studies, yet strongly related to the fast changes in Internet technologies, interactivity has been a popular research phenomenon within several fields: besides media and communication studies, journalism and social psychology, also in informatics, education, and marketing literature. To provide an insight into the growing popularity of the concept of interactivity, Koolstra and Bos (2009) counted the number of publications in Web of Science mentioning the key words "interactivity" or "interactive" since 1976. The results showed that in the late 1970s about 970 articles were published, in the late 1980s this number already reached 1969, and in the late 1990s the figure grew to over 10,000 articles.

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[2] They do not explicitly mention journalism, but also in this field, the concept of interactivity is still of very prominent scientific relevance.

However, different disciplines approached interactivity in a specific way, providing multiple variations of its definitions, explanation of its main characteristics, and several visions of its potential social and cultural impacts. In the late 1990s, some authors approached interactivity from the more subjective view of participants, users, or Internet audiences. For instance, John Pavlik (1996) stressed that interactive communication is a process of reciprocal influence or control; later, Louisa Ha and Lincoln James described interactivity as "the extent to which the communicator and the audience respond, or are willing to facilitate each other's communication needs" (Ha and James, 1998: 461). Since then the concept evolved around several meanings, but for Vincent Miller its general definitional strengths remain in "responsiveness" (Miller, 2011: 16). However, not all studies were focused on the audience role; instead, some were more inclined to perceive the interactivity as a matter of technological fact related to a specific media form, what Jeniffer Stromer-Galley nicely pointed out by distinguishing between interactivity as a process and interactivity as a product, reminding that interactivity between persons is a different phenomenon from interactivity between people and computers, or networks (Stromer-Galley, 2004: 391). Such distinctions actually derive not just from definitional specifics but generally refer to two separate perspectives of scholars: one supports a computer-mediated communication approach (CMC), and the other is more consistent with a human-computer interaction (HCI) approach (Stromer-Galley, 2004: 393). The first perspective was popular within the media studies, at least in the early research of the Internet, while the second remained more powerful among social informatics and psychology.

It is obvious that the concept of interactivity has become an established research topic in several disciplines. A clear definition of the concept is nevertheless missing and, as noticed by Deborah Chung (2008), interactivity has been discussed through various definitional models. Or as Eric Bucy critically noted: "we scarcely know what interactivity *is*, let alone what it *does*, and have scant insight into the conditions in which interactive processes are likely to be consequential for members of a social system" (Bucy, 2004: 372). These conceptual multiplicity and empirical broadness of the term make the nature of interactive media, as well as their potential impact on the production and consumption of new media content, and their broader social and cultural contexts, even more difficult to grasp. And when David Domingo argued that the concept is "too elastic" he pointed directly to the "wide range of options referred to under the label of interactivity" (Domingo, 2008: 686).

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON INTERACTIVITY WITHIN MEDIA AND JOURNALISM STUDIES

We see that already in the 1980s the focus was on the characteristics of interactivity as a process within media and/or communication interaction. In the 1990s, this focus was still widely accepted. But we can identify a change at the beginning of the 2000s with the rapid development of new web applications that gave much more power to the individual user for synchronic communication, and for self-publishing (Koolstra and Bos, 2009: 377),

leading to a change in the focus on the interactivity of the user and/or audiences (Chung, 2008), and on the potential of online media as generators of new user-producer relations, arguably prompting the convergence of consumption and production, and inspiring terms signifying these practices such as "produsage" (Bruns, 2008) and "prosumers" (also see Miller, 2011).

Following several theoretical discussions in the early phases (Heeter, 1989; McMillan, 2002b; Kiousis, 2002), and more recent debates on interactivity potentials within online journalism (Chung, 2008; Deuze, 2007; Domingo, 2008; Hermida, 2010) and digital media in particular (Miller, 2011; Jenkins, 2006), we propose a distinction between three perspectives on interactivity: [3]

1) Communication- and media-centred perspectives. This refers to the analysis of technique, and research in these approaches chiefly focuses on the importance of the technical or technological platforms employed for interactivity, asking how interactivity is dependent on the technology used in communication interactions. Or as Vincent Miller argued, here interactivity is a deterministic structure of the technology which enables the affordances of interactivity (2011: 16).
2) Audience- and user-centred perspectives. This focuses on users' perceptions of interactivity as a personal ability to perceive or actualise the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication, asking if (and when) interactivity is a perception in users' minds or its actual realisation of the interactive potential and usage. This approach is more "socially oriented" aiming to evaluate the audience "state of mind" (Miller, 2011).
3) Production- and journalist-centred perspectives mainly consider the relevance of the contexts of communication settings by asking if interactivity is a characteristic of the context in which messages or news, and media contents are generally exchanged, primarily analysing the interactivity on the textual level of exchange. In contrast to the first two approaches, here interactivity is seen more as a result of the content producers' aims and their decisions, and not simply as a technologically determined factor.

This proposed distinction focuses primarily on the level of different actors – medium/technology, audience, and producers – and the interactive practices within each of the perspectives, instead on the "views of interactivity" as exemplified in Olof Larsson, who distinguished between functional, perceived, and process view of interactivity (Larsson, 2012: 198). Such distinctions differ also from those typologies which limit the focus to observational context and different loci of interactivity, excluding thus the role and influence of producers, for instance Bucy (2004) or Stromer-Galley (2004). Our typology shows how specific focus of interests in scholarly literature has changed over time, and what solutions for empirical research were offered. A careful reading of how the concept has been examined since its early stages within media and journalism studies allows us to distinguish between several conceptual perspectives on interactivity, and also on

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[3] The overview of selected studies and publications of primarily previous research on interactivity is limited only to some of the most prominent authors within media and journalism studies. However, such an overview, which deliberately focuses on the early studies, may provide a starting point for literature review of more recent findings, as well as a resource for new empirical projects about interactive media and digital communication.

different dimensions, that were popular within them over time. In this sense, a descriptive meta-analysis of the most prominent studies from early 1990s on was made, in order to provide a more detailed overview of single perspectives, and of their contribution to the specific understanding of interactivity and its measurement. The relevance for such a descriptive approach lies in the observation made more than a decade ago, namely that interactivity was "often mentioned, but seldom operationalized" (McMillan and Hwang, 2002: 29).

COMMUNICATION- AND MEDIA-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES

Positioning interactivity from communication and/or media perspective implies a rather deterministic role of technology, enforcing interactive exchange, either between data, computer files or Facebook posts, or enabling the interactive network of the composed messages or mediated content. As such, it is mostly understood as a positive affordance that generates the interactive communication, which is primarily limited to technologically mediated spheres, but in practice referring to numerous technological appliances: from hyperlinked web systems or email services, up to the recently more prominent social network sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Viewing from a longer historical perspective, the first conceptual definition of interactivity seems to arise from such a technologically driven approach.

One of the first and perhaps most influential explanations of the concept of interactivity was provided by the communication scholar Sheizaf Rafaeli in the late 1980s, who defined interactivity as "an expression of the extent that, in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions" (Rafaeli, 1988: 111). This early defining statement has led to divergent reactions, with a number of scholars finding the definition too narrow. Rafaeli's point that interactivity as a widely used but not properly defined concept is, however, not contested: "is a highly relevant term, in relation to which there has been made no consensus as to what it actually means" (Rafaeli, 1988: 10). This loose definition opened methodological dilemmas and operational problems: how to measure interactivity, and how to conclude what is an interactive communication (or not). In this early phase, Sheizaf Rafaeli and Fay Sudweeks (1997) investigated the degree of interaction between participants in computer-mediated newsgroups by analysing interactivity as the dependency among sent messages in threads. With this conceptualisation, they established an important shift from an emphasis on the channel – through which messages are distributed – towards the relationships among messages (Kiousis, 2002: 359). Such a focus remained popular in communication research on interactive media (CMC – computer-mediated communication research) for almost a decade (see Kenney et al., 2000; Förnas et al., 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2004; Jenkins, 2006). In addition, with the rise of new devices and interfaces many scholars assumed them to be implicitly interactive.

In a similar period, Carrie Heeter (1989) identified interactivity in a more complex way, and differentiated several dimensions of interactivity that refer to the process of message exchange: the complexity of choice available, the level of effort users have to exert, the responsiveness to users, the monitoring of information use, the ease of adding information, and the facilitation of interpersonal communication (Heeter, 1989; Kenney et al., 2000). From Heeter's standpoint, interactivity is not only viewed as a question of the technical implementation of specific interactive mechanisms (for instance, in an online discussion forum or on one website). The concept implies important effects on more general communication aims, first on the side of the producers of websites, and/or on the communication goals between the users themselves. Different aims and different goals demand different communication platforms and differences on the interactivity level (Höflich, 1996 in Schultz, 1999: 3). These contextual dimensions therefore play an important part in constructing the interactive image of the Web, meaning that communication setting is not only technologically driven, but it is also a result of structural factors that determine the level of interactivity.

Following this structure developed by Heeter (1989), most empirically-driven studies in that period tried to explore differences in the degree of interactivity, what Stromer-Galley (2004) labels as a trend to "ordinalisation of interactivity". Viewing interactivity as an ordinal variable was a logical result of definitional constrains, which on the one hand "enabled precise measures, but tend to rarify the concept" (Bucy, 2004: 376) on the other. In a more practical sense, the focus of such research was mostly given to the analyses of news websites by showing the trends, limitations, and availability of their interactive potential. Already in the late 1990s, when Internet websites were quite rarely used as relevant side-products of news production, for instance, Keith Kenney and his research group (2000) aimed to explain in what sense the degree of media interactivity depends on three factors: financial motives (i.e. commercial vs non-profit media), the type of media (i.e. online only or also an offline platform), and the national location (from the USA or elsewhere).[4] The work of Kenney et al. was instructive also as an attempt for measuring diverse levels of interactivity in their analysis of 100 online newspapers: "Complexity of choice", for instance, was constructed as an index measure of the choice of language, the choice of frames on the websites, search engines, news stories placed on the home page, links within news stories and hyperlinks. "Responsiveness to the user" was a result of available email addresses of reporters and webmasters' e-mails. "Facilitation of interpersonal communication" was composed of available chat rooms, discussion groups, feedback mechanisms and at least one e-mail address on the news media home page.

Having all these different points in mind, it seems that the communication and media perspectives to interactivity still maintained some common grounds: the interactivity in this early stage was largely analysed as a *quantity*, either as a degree of interactive communication between participants or message exchangers, on one hand, or as a quantitative measure of the medium's or websites' potential through which interaction might occur. Consequently, in a methodological sense the prominent empirical studies

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[4] The study for instance revealed that commercial media are not more interactive than non-profit ones, that online media are more interactive than those online media which also have offline editions and, lastly, that American online media offer more interactivity than those published outside the USA (Kenney et al., 2000).

in this perspective have primarily focused on quantitative research methods that were mostly based on content analysis. But as Bucy noticed, such studies were generally biased with the problematic assumption that "two way communication is uniformly desirable and predominantly associated with positive outcomes" (2004: 377), mistakenly thinking that more is necessarily also the better.

AUDIENCE- AND USER-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES

The focus in interactivity research changed significantly from 2000 onwards - as the users' perception of interactivity in different communication settings became the central interest of most studies (Stromer-Galley, 2000; McMillan, 2002a; Bucy, 2004; Chung, 2008). In these approaches, the effects of interactivity on the users were questioned, and the circumstances in which users have a feeling of control over the information exchange were identified. Such a turn from a medium to "human interactivity" (Chung, 2008) meant that the focus changed from technical patterns within certain news sites to the facilitation of communication between the users.

Sally McMillan (2002a) is probably one of the most prominent representatives of this audience-centred perspective. She offered a typology of the multidimensional nature of interactivity that can be useful for explaining the shift of focus from media to the users.[5] McMillan developed her own model of interactivity with two main dimensions: users/ receivers' control over communication, and the direction of communication stating that the "directionality of communication and level of control over communication environments are central to interactivity in CMC environments" (McMillan, 2002a: 10).

McMillan wanted to provide "a media-neutral" analysis of interactivity but her ideas remained mostly on the level of conceptualisation, giving little further guidance on how to approach them empirically (2002a). Some contributions made by McMillan in the field of empirical research of interactivity should nevertheless be addressed. In her exploratory study (McMillan, 2002a: 279-280) designed to evaluate a four-part model of cyber-interactivity, she examined more than 100 websites related to health through two separate research methods: in the first part, undergraduate students reviewed the selected websites and rated them based on their perceptions of their interactivity. At the end, these same students were asked to complete the scales measuring their attitude to the site – the relevance of the site topic, and their behavioural intentions related to the website. In addition, separate coders rated each website on selected dimensions of interactivity. The second part of the analysis entailed trained coders identifying the interactive features of websites. The aim was therefore to compare the perception of the websites' interactivity from a user perspective with the presence of interactive features in the same sample of websites, what Bucy (2004) labelled as a pattern of "interactivity paradox". McMillan and Hwang (2002) developed also a scale for measuring perceived

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[5] Her contribution is also relevant in a broader sense, as she distinguishes three main traditions of interactivity: a) user-to-user; b) user-to-documents; and c) user-to-systems. These three traditions have been evolving for decades, McMillan argues, but in many ways the distinctions between them are arbitrary: "despite the relatively arbitrary nature of the distinctions, these three research traditions do provide a basic framework for investigation of the past, present and future of interactivity" (McMillan, 2002a: 6).

interactivity by letting participants review websites that were designed to induce low or high interactivity.

In a similar way, Koolstra and Bos (2009) tried to develop a multi-dimensional model for measuring interactivity. They conceived an instrument based on several criteria for observing interactivity (Koolstra and Bos, 2009: 380-383): synchronicity, time flexibility, control over content, the number of additional participants, the physical presence of additional participants, use of sights, use of hearing, and use of other senses. For each of these elements their instruments include three possible levels of interactivity: the highest score is assigned when the element is present for at least two parties; the middle score is assigned if an element is present for one of the parties, while the lowest level is assigned when an element is missing (Koolstra and Bos, 2009: 380).

The model presupposes that the users are active and wish to be interactive. However, due to the exclusion of the direction of communication as an element of the investigation, the model seems more appropriate for analysing interactivity in specific communication settings, such as in discussion forums, and less in online news media where the direction and power of communication is determined by the media itself. In addition, on an analytical level their model is directed to users who are equal. But in the case of online news media the journalist is not necessarily in an equal position to the reader, for the readers can react to the article or statements through their comments.

However, according to Bucy (2004: 379), such approaches missed the orientation towards the *consequences* of varying degrees and types of interactivity in society. His call to address the societal relevance of interactivity implies three concrete propositions (Bucy, 2004: 380): first, that interactivity is desirable only up to a point, after which has negative consequences; second, its effects may occur at an individual and social level and third, effects at the individual can influence outcomes at the social level. Such "curvilinear model of interactivity" (Bucy, 2004: 376) locates the potential in users experiences with technology, but imply interactivity as primarily a perceptual variable that resides within individuals.

Despite the methodological limitations of the above mentioned models, which all were generously more in favour of quantitative research designs, since they all agree that interactivity "in the hands of users" is a variable that can be measured, the turn to audience perspective seems to be given much credit for the latest developments within the field. Nevertheless, it remains very limited when it ignores the important social factors between the users, either in relation to their age, status, gender, education, ethnicity, etc. Users are not a unified mass, and their perception of interactivity varies according to their needs, expectations, tastes and ambitions, especially in relation to new media and recently popular social platforms. Users as audiences seem to gain a new "powerful" position, since much media content is now consumed not directly from the media, but via social platforms and search engines, at least among the digital newcomers who drastically changed previously stable media habits, challenging also the way media content is produced and distributed.

PRODUCTION- AND JOURNALIST-CENTRED PERSPECTIVES

If journalists spent the first decade online realising that the Internet is digital, as Jane Singer eloquently puts it (2012: 277), in the 2000s the fact that the Web is also a network became central. And this connectedness of all communicators and all communication holds profound professional and cultural consequences also for journalism (*Ibid.*). Soon after the early stage of interactivity analysis, empirical studies of interactive features of online news developed extensively in a dynamic field of research. The main difference between traditional journalism and journalism in an online or digital environment can be characterised by the loss of a clear demarcation between journalists and their audiences, as the interactive nature of online media blurs the distinction between producers and consumers (Karlsson and Strömbäck, 2010: 2). One of the core questions is thus to what extent news websites provide interactive features for audiences, and how these features are articulated in the production of websites' respective online news.

Leopoldina Fortunati et al. (2010) examined a sample of online publication from four European countries, in order to establish the implementation of interactive features in practice. When discussing the structure of the interactivity of online editions, their result showed that e-mail as a form of general contact with the newspapers is the only element present in all the analysed cases, while only one analysed example offered a full range of interactive elements on its website (Fortunati et al., 2010: 53). Similarly, only in half of the examples, the technical possibilities offered by the Web were exploited in the case of forums. The study concluded that the analysed newspapers are still in a stage of pre-interactivity (Fortunati et al., 2010: 58), showing again a major gap between interactivity as a potential and its spread in practice. Another more recent study (Larsson, 2012) – although limited only to Swedish newspaper venue – provides a deeper insight in the structural factors that either limit or stimulate the interactive features of online news websites. His findings suggest that the most interactive newspaper websites within Swedish context belong to large, national companies with younger staff (Larsson, 2012: 206).

Michael Karlsson and Jesper Strömbäck (2010) are nevertheless critical of such approaches, highlighting the lack of research on the level of a news story. According to them, most studies on interactivity and immediacy focus on the producers or users of online news, employing methods such as ethnographic studies and surveys, and have, consequently, produced less knowledge about how interactivity and immediacy shape the content of online news stories:

Avoiding analyses of the content of online news stories or disregarding the special characteristics of online news on the news story-level of analysis, instead extrapolating how online news ought to unfold on the basis of the medium's characteristic or journalists' and citizens' attitudes, can never be a viable strategy in a situation where more and more people turn their attention to the Internet in pursuit of information on societal matters. (Karlsson and Strömbäck, 2010: 15)

They proposed three "strategies for freezing the flow of online news" and thus enabling content analysis on a story level (Karlsson and Strömbäck, 2010). This would

enable systematic analyses, either of the special characteristics of online news themselves, or in general.

One of the rare studies to combine the general question of the change brought to journalism by interactivity with a detailed analysis on the level of news stories can be found in Fenton (2010), and especially in Redden and Witschge (2010). Their results show that new media technologies have changed how the news is presented on traditional news sites, but not dramatically. As Redden and Witschge (2010: 183) emphasised, for the most part the public is only able to participate in the last phase of the 'traditional' news production process by interpreting texts and commenting upon them. In their research of five different types of stories, they found "no evidence of individuals involved in any of the decision-making stages in news production" (*Ibid*.:183). They only found a blurring of the content producer and reader/viewer on YouTube and alternative news sites. There is an emphasis on images, but the recycling of images between mainstream news sites contributes to content homogeneity, and, more importantly, mainstream sites offer little opportunity for the public to participate beyond interpreting and responding to stories (*Ibid*.: 185).

But as some of the empirical studies have indicated, forms of interactivity in news are merely a 'quasi-phenomenon', where the one-way communication culture is continued alongside fragmented voices of anonymous masses, instead of suggesting a communicative dialogue, and a creative content within the critical publics (for instance, Nip, 2010), although some other suggestions imply that social media technologies, like Facebook or Twitter, and more recently Instagram or Snapchat, facilitate the immediate dissemination of digital fragments of news, creating new kinds of interactions around the news giving rise to so called "ambient journalism" (Hermida, 2010: 298).

CONCLUSION: A TURN FROM SINGULAR PERSPECTIVES TO A GROUNDED CROSS-LEVEL APPROACH

What lesson can be learned from this overview of three main perspectives on interactivity? The early studies on interactivity seem to largely depend on quantitative analysis that was either conducted for specific websites, or special communicative settings, such as discussion forums, chat-rooms, etc. At the same time, the websites became an important starting point for journalism studies, which tried to combine the realisation of interactive potential within online news within specific production, and cultural or economic contexts; thereby, the large popularisation of the qualitative interview came to the fore, which also led to a turn to ethnography and other qualitative methods (such as observation) in journalism. Combined with the quantitative knowledge on 'how interactive the medium is', with the qualitative understanding of the circumstances, main obstacles and advantages in relation to the question of 'why the medium is interactive (or not)', the field of journalism was probably the most important for generating a new, multi-method, empirical approach to interactivity.

However, we strongly agree with those scholars who critically stress the lack of a coherent theory of interactivity (e.g. Bucy, 2004; McMillan, 2002b) but without limiting to its psychological aspects, where interactivity is defined only as "perceptual variable that involves communication mediated by technology" (Bucy, 2004: 377). Instead, we are more inclined to those calls who argue for the need of a cross-level and multivalent research approach to interactivity. A point made by McMillan seems equally relevant: "Now it is time for researchers to examine how cyber-interactivity can be understood within the context of existing theory, and within new theories, that help to explain why some cyber-places seem to be more interactive than the others" (2002b: 272). This call for theory reflects a new and difficult challenge that might also importantly rejuvenate the field as such.

Such theoretically grounded approach inevitably needs a historical positioning as well. When studying the interactivity of recent new media and social or cultural aspects of online contexts some other aspects have to be taken into account. Technologically speaking, the online context is a changing variable. Early work on interactivity conducted by pioneers like Rafaeli (1988) and Heeter (1989) came well before the widespread adoption of personal computers and the Internet, and well before the expansion of today's popular social media and mobile smartphones. These technological changes are still very relevant and should not be ignored, especially in relation to mediatised interactions and the presupposed interactivity of new media. However, greater attention should be paid to analysis on the news story level, as virtually no studies have simultaneously investigated how interactivity and immediacy affect the content of online news (Karlsson and Strömbäck, 2010: 6).

Such transformations are expressed in a new conceptual turn, especially within the new media and journalism studies, which seem to substitute once popular phenomena of interactive media and interactivity with challenging concepts such as "spreadable" (Jenkins et al., 2013), "converged" (Miller, 2011), or even "personal media" (Rasmussen, 2014). A more detailed analysis would be needed to reveal to what extent such conceptual turn brings new meanings, and is not just a period of additional popular buzzwords.

Together with reconceptualization of digital media as socially widely shared platforms, which are seen as a form of participatory or citizen journalism, also the understandings of audiences is redefined. New social media are changing not only the technological platforms of services and news distribution, but are vulnerable also for ever-changing social and cultural habits of the audiences (Hermida, 2010). The digital experiences of such heterogenic and widely spread digital audiences exceed once popular multidimensional aspects of interactivity, as the users evolve as important content providers, in some occasions even as powerful content gatekeepers, if they know how to actively respond to "noisy environments" of new social media. Consequently, journalists also need to acknowledge additional responsibility in their changeable profession: as Hermida puts it, "a future direction of journalism may be to develop approaches and systems that help the public negotiate and regulate the flow of awareness information, providing tools that take account of this new mode for the circulation of news" (Hermida, 2010: 304). Or

as some other studies suggest, the journalist will acquire additional editorial functions, highlighting that also participation of users in social media will serve to give added value to journalistic work (Ramirez et al., 2016: 74).

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(R)EVOLUCIJA PERSPEKTIVA O INTERAKTIVNOSTI: OD PRISTUPA ORIJENTIRANOG NA MEDIJE DO PRISTUPA ORIJENTIRANOG NA NOVINARE

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SAŽETAK *Proliferacija novih medija od kasnih 90-ih pokrenula je novi period revitaliziranja koncepta interaktivnosti, ali iz prilično različitih kutova i iz nekoliko perspektiva u empirijskom istraživanju. Glavni je cilj ovog rada pokazati različite pristupe kojima istraživači konceptualiziraju, ispituju i analiziraju interaktivnost u području medijskih studija i novinarstva. Rad pruža uvid u različita tumačenja promjena unutar polja i kritički gleda na potencijal toga koncepta. Mi predlažemo razlikovanje triju perspektiva o interaktivnosti na temelju selektivne metaanalize različitih pristupa: perspektive orijentirane na komunikaciju i medije, perspektive orijentirane na publiku ili korisnike i perspektive orijentirane na produkciju ili novinare. Ta distinkcija, prema nekoliko autora iz područja medijskih studija i novinarstva, omogućuje nam da razlikujemo ono što se smatra interaktivnim od onoga koga ta interakcija uključuje.*

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