Working Group 2
"Audience Interactivity
and Participation"

**Transforming
Audiences,
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Action ISO906

Audience Interactivity and Participation

Media Company Representatives
Interviews and Essays

EDITORS

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Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies

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(FH des BFI, 2011). A focus of Kaltenbrunners research and consulting in the last decade is integration-processes in European and US newsrooms. For a list of projects and publications see www.mhw.at/

"THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A 'CONVERGENCE CONTINUUM' AIMING TOWARDS THE PERFECT SOLUTION."

Media convergence is reshaping news production. Could you briefly describe the development?

Newsrooms are very different from what they were only a decade ago. Convergence is a fast on-going change process redefining news production in all its details: finding new digital ways of gathering and sharing information, organising integration processes within the newsrooms and of course tailoring news production differently for different channels. Throughout Europe and the USA we can see different models of newsroom organisation. This is due to national traditions in journalism and different media legislation. The type of legislation will determine whether integration processes and media-cross ownership including TV, radio, print media and all kind of digital operation will speed up, slow down or be otherwise restricted. Another key factor defining speed

and speed limits for convergence processes in the newsroom is, of course, the level of internet penetration in the markets. In Europe, the fastest convergence and integration processes are to be found in the Northern countries. In contrast, in central European countries such as Germany and Austria the discussion is still at a very early stage with many media-companies currently starting their newsroom-integration and rethinking their business models. In southern Europe there is less limitation to media cross ownership allowing some early convergence-processes in national and regional markets also integrating local radio and TV. We could define many convergence descriptors in a matrix model to understand the different status of newsroom-developments. (See: GARCIA, MEIER, KALTENBRUNNER) But roughly speaking we come across 3 models:

One is the "Coordination of different platforms" model which means that there are almost no integration processes in the newsrooms yet. However, on companies' business level, strategies for different media channels are being discussed and measures such as commercial cooperation, content sharing or cross marketing have been implemented. It is interesting to see then that in central Europe some of the most economically successful online-operations are not integrated at all into their companies' traditional newsrooms: Like Spiegel online in Germany or der Standard.at in Austria. One might assert that that they could grow at eye level with print especially because they could develop far away from traditionalist worry lines. Their next steps of convergence versus splendid isolation will be interesting.

Another model is "Cross media". It involves pushing processes on a company level, in newsroom organisation and also journalistic processes to integrate parts of all media-platforms. A high percentage of managers and leading editors have to be multi-skilled and well prepared in order to steer cross-media production. A steadily growing percentage of the journalistic staff are working bi-media, be it print/online or radio/TV (as many did already before the digital age) or TV/online, etc. Many big and small news operations might be assigned to this model, among them the big BBC with its attempts to inspire the Radio/TV/Online newsroom in London with real integrated life in news production. It's a mission that will not be completed for many years. Another good example is Unidad Editorials media house in Madrid with its flagship El Mundo. Three years ago it merged its online staff - managing the biggest news website for the Spanish speaking world - with its many hundreds of journalist and producers of Spain's second largest newspaper. The processes of integration are accepted as a permanent struggle for more cross-media understanding and production. In the tradition of Spain's great author Antonio Machado: Paths are made by walking.

The last model is of "Full integration" in the newsroom, which does of course not exist in its pure form. Some role models have that high pretension, such as the Daily Telegraph's newsroom with its 800 journalists behind Victoria Station which is a demo-object developed by the world association IFRA. Others, on smaller regional level, radio and local TV can come closer to the ideal model like the Danish Nordjyske Stiftstidene with almost all journalists working at least bi-media for about ten years after the introduction of an integrated newsroom including daily print, weeklies, online.

The Swiss Ringier newsroom for "Blick" opened in 2010 might also be considered as a good result of a well structured convergence process of print and online. An important finding is the following: There is no such thing as a "convergence continuum" (DAILEY et al.) aiming towards the perfect solution. There is permanent change, faster than ever, driven by digitisation as one key factor - but newsroom processes depend on different national and cultural limiting factors under specific company framework and do not necessarily all lead towards fully converged media organisation with fully integrated newsrooms.

What is the influence of convergent newsroom structures on interactive and participatory communication strategies? What role can organizational structure play in supporting audience participation?

Revealing the MP expenses scandal was the Daily Telegraph's most important scoop in 2009 shortly after moving into the new newsroom. Leading journalists liked to emphasise back then that the converged newsroom with its many digital channels to communicate with readers and users made the success even bigger. Reactions of journalist had become faster than ever and helped to encourage readers and users to comment on their regional MP's performance. Commenters discussed questions of corruption in democracy which were fundamentally raised by the Telegraphs story which revealed how politicians exploited the system of parliamentary allowances. Interaction with the users made it much easier to sell the daily newspaper and even books summarising the scandal.

The Telegraph's competitor, The Guardian, reacted quickly and demonstrated how to improve and intelligently use the new interactive possibilities. It put all the thousands of MPs expenses papers, bills, receipts online and asked its users to help to analyse them. It can be considered the first case of crowd sourcing for the support of a newspaper's journalistic investigation in such dimensions: Many thousands of the Guardian's readers commented these documents online, revealing more "fiddled" expenses and doubtful receipts. This fitted into the Guardian's "digital first" strategy of being on the cutting edge of participatory communication with its readers.

In 2009, the Guardian and its Sunday paper The Observer had moved into a completely new, integrated, somehow stylish newsroom. Its editor, Alan Rusbridger, later presented himself as one of the prophets of the digital age - motivating his staff to follow and his readers to join in. Today so called SMOs - social media optimisers - work as specialists, training the staff in communicating with the audience and attracting it. Such processes are still relatively new - but obviously the companies and their management policy is the most important factor to define whether responsive audiences and interactivity are encouraged and new interactive projects will be supported.

In your opinion, is there a change in journalists' attitudes towards interactivity? (Connecting with the audience as a benefit of online journalism)

What we see is a transition process. For many journalists, the integration of audiences, communication on eye level with the formerly passive reader or viewer is still more irritating than motivating. Making one's way into social media platforms is even more complicated. Also media law makers do not know yet how to regulate the new phenomena. One more example: For Austria's public national broadcaster ORF it is forbidden by law to launch or officially participate in social media platforms and channels like Facebook or Twitter.

We know and take into account that since 2 or 3 years ago, a fast growing percentage of traditional media content is only found because of recommending links and "Likes" of friends in social media. For some media platforms, users' comments in social media and weblogs already provoke more traffic than Google or smaller search engines. In the case of the Austrian parliament's social media ban for the ORF this means that the national public broadcaster is officially cut off from important parts of its audience, especially the younger users, listeners and viewers.

Of course the individual journalist's attitude towards interactivity in the professional process has been changing. It has increasingly been welcomed and even seen as an enormous chance for new ways of journalism with specifically trained staff and digital interactivity as a permanent part of life. These are new chances for both the fresh generation coming from universities and journalism schools as well as the open minded experienced journalists with curiosity and mid-career training. This is not only a question of age: Journalists with

many years in the newsroom and experience in mass communication may be more deliberative when analysing latest fashion. But companies and societies interested in quality journalism have to offer them programs for further training in order to see such new developments as early as possible. Once again as a superficial short analysis: societies with a high quality level of educational systems in general do also offer better training opportunities for professional communicators. When we look into Scandinavian newsrooms we will find many well-prepared journalists who understand new digital developments, convergence processes and new forms of interactivity. Those journalists see mid-career training as a permanent part of their professional development.

In Austria, for many decades there have not been any attempts to train journalists. This has only changed as a result of new initiatives during the last few years. There still is almost no kind of journalism training in eastern European countries. There is no financial aid for that. In southern Europe we can often find divided worlds of journalism: offering very good programs, research results and training for the elite of media and people – while leaving many others far behind. It is like the educational system in general. This might produce an army of low skilled labourers in media industries who will not catch up with the needs, neither of their profession nor of their users. But all of them can see and feel the paradigm shift towards interactivity with a high valuation of user participation. With our team of "Medienhaus Wien" we are participating in an EU-funded international study, comparing

"Media Accountability" in 13 European and Arabic countries, from Britain to Tunisia. One outcome of our empirical survey - which is still on-going: Journalists in most of the selected countries consider audiences online-commentaries on ethical and quality standards as increasingly important. One can also find more and more innovative instruments complementing traditional media accountability instruments (see: EBERWEIN; FENGLER; LAUK; LEPPIK-BORK).

If you compare newspapers in different countries, are there differences in content production by the user?

There are as many as the different cultural traditions and political meanings of communication. One more example: We all found it most interesting and fascinating how mobile content helped to organise the Arab Spring. Talking with social media managers of leading independent Arab media such as Al Masry in Egypt today we find them not too convinced that this important protest channels in the uprising against the old regime will also help very much to build a new, more democratic, more open society. Germans at the same time might see of course the remarkable differences in tone and analysis of user content criticizing the German president in FAZ.net compared to BILD.de. So differences in user content production are also a mirror of the state of democracy, of media landscapes and different interaction strategies in societies: Austria's biggest news media website derstandard.at allowed user comments from the very beginning, in the mid 1990s, below every journalistic article. Today several ten

thousands of user-comments come in every day - an enormous user community producing interesting information but also foolish and even rude abuse or simply a terribly stupid bashing of politicians. This is difficult, yes almost impossible to moderate.

This is less common in Scandinavia - one might assume because bad behaviour and personal insult is also less common offline there. But even with that possibly more educated and less abusive tradition of political discussion, the Internet pioneers in northern Europe , e.g. from the Bonnier group, never liked the idea of having user comments posted on the same platform right underneath the professionals article. You will find that in Spain. Another country, another tradition: There always was the concept of "Tertulia", which a century ago was the intellectual public discussion in the coffee house. During the last decades people were overfed with "Tertulias" on the radio, many of them far from intellectual or even quite the contrary. The user discussion online - sometimes loud, rude and childish - adds just one more channel to many other forms of hot-tempered public debate which already existed.

Maybe here is one of the keys for the future of journalism: combining a maximum of interactivity, integrating user's knowledge and content ideas with an honest desire to understand the audience - but at the same time combining it with the highest possible standards in journalistic investigation and storytelling. That needs a newsroom organisation open to permanent change and development. Some media like the Guardian are working on that. But in the end it again is

about the differentiation of professional work from user content. Let me add a personal comment after visiting dozens of European newsrooms. I am very much in favour of seeing Brecht's theory of the radio (see BRECHT) becoming partly true. Everybody should be enabled to be a sender. But as soon as we think that amateur weblogs and user contents in general are more interesting, amusing and - worst case - more accurate than the information provided by traditional news organisations - then journalism as we knew it is in real trouble.

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"SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT A THREAT BUT A REWARD FOR COMPANIES!"

The Cost Action investigates the topic of media change from an audience perspective - why should companies care about these developments?

Media change always affects all participating communicators - of course that includes businesses. Shying away from new media will only work during the short initial period of transformation. But this initial period has long since passed in the current media change. Corporations that today, in the year 2012, still believe they can wait out this change towards more interaction and participation should reconsider their position. Following Paul Watzlawick's axiom „One cannot not communicate", absence from the Web 2.0 is a message of its own: If a corporation doesn't talk to customers directly via social media, they wonder what it has to hide.

You've already mentioned the keywords interaction and participation, both of which are really unraveled in the Web 2.0. Does that mean that businesses should create a Facebook page as soon as possible?

No. For a simple reason: The phase of experimentation in the Web 2.0 is over. In the beginning, clumsy but charming social media presences were smilingly accepted because the good intentions were all that counted. By now, that attitude has changed: Web 2.0 with all its channels and possibilities should be a part of the communication strategy and should be used professionally just like any other means of communication. A poster campaign isn't designed overnight - social media engagement should be planned just as carefully. And I should add: Web 2.0 isn't only Facebook and Twitter. A business needs to find a fitting combination from all the nearly endless number of services - and this is a task for which a business should by all means use external experts in order to build its own know-how.

Many corporations fear that new opportunities for participation empower customers who can voice negative, even unwarranted criticism. How do you address such concerns?

First up, we need to be frank: Of course the worries are not without merit. But the threat is equally real whether or not social media are involved. Corporations have planned particular crisis scenarios and trained their employees to handle critical inquiries. Companies need to be equally prepared for incidents in the social web. They need to know the specific channel logic of communication in the Web 2.0. On the whole, I still see the Web 2.0 as a net benefit, not a threat to corporations.

Please explain.

Companies that were honest before, took their customers seriously and pursued a sustainable long-term strategy can be thoroughly happy about the Web 2.0. Negative criticism isn't the only thing that spreads fast in the web of opinions - positive examples get a lot of attention as well. In the social networks, everyone can see how a business deals with its customers. Critical inquiries are always opportunities to prove that one can do better - that is, to persevere in front of the world and also potential future customers. In the past, consumers mainly interacted with sales personal and the company at a POS (Point of Sale). If anything bothered her, she needed to complain to the sales person via letter or phone. Today, the threshold for direct contact is so low that I can give instant feedback. Companies can profit from this by pivoting equally quickly and aligning their products or services with consumer demands. Even so, the preparation and external consultancy mentioned earlier is a necessary preparation in order not to be overrun by customer feedback.

Well, there should be few corporations that can maintain never to have hand any lapse in judgment and therefore to be impervious to criticism.

That's true. That's why it's all the more important to build relationships with customers based on true interactivity and participation rather than merely sending a coupon at every birthday. Companies need to realize that misconducts carry a vastly enlarged risk of going public when compared to pre-Web 2.0 times. The more transparently a company acts and the stronger the relationship with customers, the more they will stay loyal and even defend „their" brand against critics.

How could social media contribute to a stronger relationship with customers?

Being able to interact with corporations at all is the first and inherent step to a stronger relationship through social media. The reason is the same as in human relationships - how long can they last without communication? Social media help with keeping in touch. As an example: small stories from the company's factory offer unfamiliar insights into the business - for example on Facebook. Customers can react with a low-threshold like or a comment which the business can in turn extend thanks for. Both sides keep in touch, get to know each other and the connection gets stronger. The community wants to be taken seriously.

Could you name any positive examples?

Our agency did an animated film for DaWanda, an online marketplace. It consists of over 1,600 pictures that the DaWanda community painted, stitched or even baked. The feedback was fantastic! The movie made from user generated content won several awards for successful online communication.

Most importantly: stay authentic! Don't let your head of PR manage your Facebook profile. Hire experts who identify with your company and know how to talk to the community, but who are at the same time reputable enough not to leak company secrets. In the future, an ever-increasing number of companies will have such community or social media managers who are able to establish much stronger and much more direct relations with customers.

Speaking of staying authentic: So far, companies have mainly tried to polish their public perception through CSR. What do they need to watch out for going forward?

As I said: Any misconduct within a company carries a much higher risk of being uncovered quickly through the Web 2.0. If any CSR programs only serve as a greenwashing, then that strategy should definitely be reconsidered. If there's anything the community can't stand, it's a lack of credibility.

This doesn't mean that CSR should be challenged in every case. Quite to the contrary: An integrated CSR project that's initiated and realized via social media in collaboration with consumers can strengthen the relationship and bolster customer loyalty. That entails pro-actively establishing topics instead of trying to catch up to the agenda of one's stakeholders. CSR in the social web can be a suitable mechanism for this.

What will 2012 bring for companies regarding social media?

Social media will continue to evolve into an everyday communication channel. Companies will notice customers' bewilderment if they lack a link to their social media profile right next to their phone number.

Another issue will be privacy in the context of ever more permissive sharing of personal data. What kinds of data protection laws do we need? And how can and may corporations profit from voluntarily submitted data without risking to lose the consumers' trust?

In addition, inspiring social media presences that work towards sustainable communication concepts instead of the highest possible number of fans will move into the limelight. Deutsche Bahn recently illustrated that with their Facebook presence - I think their page there is really good. Their launch time was very brave: just after the increase in fares and before winter with its precarious promise of snow chaos and dissatisfied passengers. Especially nicely done and innovative for a business of their size is the idea of using the Facebook page as a customer service channel, not as a sales instrument. This way, negative criticism from customers can be handled by customer service and other customers (who refute claims and clarify issues) alike. That's exactly how social media involvement becomes really valuable for the company and its customers.

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NEW TOOLS AND SCENES FOR THE MEDIA PLAY

Every revolution claims to create a new world. The past drops into the darkness of an uncivilized time. The same happens in the actual debates about social media. The fascination of the technological innovations is clouding the view for the basics of content and communications that are the drivers of media marketing. Media have always been social media. Communication is socializing. Every generation uses the tools and platforms of their time. The intentions are part of human condition. Technology extends the reach of our communication space to satisfy the curiosity and need to shape through storytelling our identities and communities.

But in the end it has always been about power, love, money, and happiness...the dramas of the human media play.

Swiss Newspapers care from their very beginning about the activation and integration of readers' wisdom and opinions: The Tages-Anzeiger launched the first issue with the slogan: From everybody for everybody. The Landbote presented himself a «wanderer who wants to make lots of friends and share stories with them». The Beobachter started with organizing a consumer community who shared critical observation of products and services. Potential buyers asked in the Schweizer Familie if it was worth to buy a specific petrol oven. Radio organized life events, call ins, music chosen by the listeners. Television organized a voting by asking the audience to switch off and on electric devices. Creativity in finding way to communicate with the audience has been impressive. Not to forget classic tool as letters to the editor and call services for the public. Today in the newsroom editors check the comments on the websites and social media, yesterday they discussed the phone calls and the letter from the public,

From their beginning newspapers, magazines, television and radio motivated the audience to become part of a media brand community. This happened on all levels: content, comment, recommendation, discussions, services, events and conventions. To achieve success in media marketing you must build a strong relationship with communication partners. The audience are not just users, but part of a virtual space of a community. That is and has been the only way to monetize the media industry. The media business model consists in the conversion of community members into costumers who are ready to pay for editorial services and in selling an attentive public to advertisement. For the analyses of the shifts in media relation to its audience or readers we must distinguish between the technical impacts and the stories the media brands share with the audience and last but not least, the business models.

The digital media offer new tools and scenes for the media theater. The pace of technical innovation profoundly does shake media decision makers. Technological change comes with structural and cultural change. The ongoing financial crises and the uncertain economic outlook force the media industry to invest carefully. Therefore most of the Swiss editors who work in small markets with limited resources do not jump into the new social media world. They cannot afford to invest in editorial staff playing with digital tools just for fun. The return on investments must bee guaranteed in a rather short time. Swiss media engage therefore with caution in social and digital media.

Step by step Swiss media establish communication platforms on digital media. Legacy medias should carefully build on their traditional strengths in orchestrating community and respectfully integrate new communication platforms. It's worth sticking to a brand identity and not compromise it for short-term actions as fashion victims do. Audience interactivity and participation are part of the success of print, television and radio in the analogical century. And will be for the wise brands in the digital century.

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Swiss Media are very strong in community building. In the industry it is crucial keeping an eye on every touch point with the audience: first reader/listener/viewer, then target group for commercials, client for a single copy or subscriber, buyer of specific services and products. Community building crosses the borders of editorial content. Engagement means always an investment that requires a pay back sooner or later.

2012 started in Switzerland with a scandal. Philipp Hildebrand, chairman of the Swiss National Bank, quit. His wife invested in 500 000 US-Dollars and sold them almost two months later with a profit of SFr. 60 000. The SNB a few days before fixed a higher exchange rate. Right wing politicians and journalists have revealed the transaction. The judgment of Hildebrand's acts has been therefore strongly politicized. The Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich's renowned newspaper, asked the readers on the online-platform, if Hildebrand had no other choice than to step down. 17082 voted yes, 6416 no.
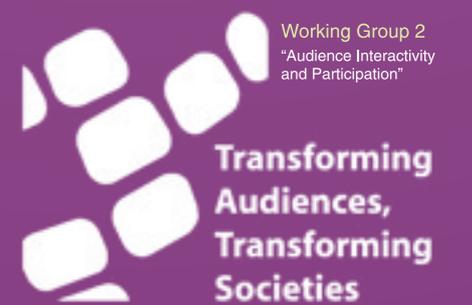
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schweiz/dossier2.html?dossier_id=1217

This is a very high participation rate on a journalistic survey in Switzerland. (It's not a scientific research). And the opinion expressed takes not the line of most commentators and decision makers. In this case, interactivity with the audience pointed out a different attitude to the scandal from the media and politics. Comments varied a lot. The NZZ, the second Zurich based newspaper, added a twitter-stream to live reporting on their online-site. But they didn't keep it long, because the quality of the comments was very low.

Switzerland has a strong tradition as a direct democracy. Recent surveys show that most of Swiss citizens do not engage on political debates on social platforms. Not everybody wants to communicate in public. Most people prefer sharing information, opinions and feelings in a private context. Digital media substitute former communication tolls like phones, letters and meetings. Editorial media are only a small part of the consumption in the digital world. From strong media brands most of the people expect the same as from a successful theater: A gripping play, convincing actors, astonishing scenes and sensitive sounds. Sitting in the chair the audience wants to be seduced, served, and respected. They comment by applauding and discuss the presentation elsewhere.

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