Universiteit Utrecht

MA New Media & Digital Culture

Master Thesis

Participatory journalism in mainstream news outlets:
User participation and affordances on GuardianWitness

India Flora MAZZEI

Student number: 5711525

Supervisor: Niels Kerssens

Second reader: Stefan Werning

October 2016

Abstract

In the media landscape a relevant object of study has been the transformation of the audience from passive recipients to active contributors. Concerning digital journalism, different platforms have increasingly involved these increased forms of participation. This has resulted in the rise of participatory journalism. Participatory journalism platforms integrate User-Generated content created independently by users and accommodated on mainstream news outlets. This research investigates this process and examines the extent to which user participation is afforded – or constrained – on GuardianWitness, an example of participatory journalism in mainstream news outlets. An affordance analysis has been carried out. Analyzing affordances let us consider the digital artefact in terms of the actions it makes possible. More concretely, affordance analysis can provide insights to improve the experience of the user on a digital artefact. In order to investigate affordances on GuardianWitness, several steps have been made. First, an overview on the state of research on participatory journalism and on affordance theory has been made. Second, affordances influencing user participation on GuardianWitness have been selected and investigated. It has been found out that no research has been carried out applying affordance theory to participatory journalism platform. This study aims at filling this gap. By understanding how affordances work, it is possible to evaluate the platform and draw a conclusion about the extent of user participation. It has been concluded that the extent of user participation on GuardianWitness is rather limited by its affordances. Therefore, this study draws several suggestions that might increase user participation on the platform. By implementing these suggestions, users might be more willing to actively engage. Moreover, most researches have dealt with the traditional conceptualization of affordance, regarding mostly physical objects, rather than digital. Therefore, this study is innovative as it shows the value of applying affordance theory to a digital artefact in order to answer specific questions concerning its use and features.

Table of contents

1. Introduction and academic relevance

It is sufficient to search for stats about User-Generated content to get a hint about the undeniable impact that User-Generated content (UGC) is increasingly exercing on the Web. Just consider that more than 120 million people have produced UGC so far. The great amount of UGC appears in different areas, such as brand marketing, sales, social media and production of news. These data elucidate the increasing demand from the users to actively participate on the Web. This participation has been enabled by the development and implementation of new technologies that, operating through affordances, are able to provide users with a higher extent of participation. Therefore, it can be affirmed that these technologies - and implicitly their affordances - are one of the most important drivers of change in user participation. Recently, this transformation concerning user participation has often been object of discussion in media studies, mostly in terms of user empowerment (Dahlreen, 2006; Deuze, 2004; Domingo et Al., 2005; Hermida & Thurman, 2008). It has mostly been analyzed how users have been given more space to share their own content and express their opinion. This is surely an innovative aspect of the Web. However, only little attention has been paid to what is actual afforded to users. Forms and extents of user participation differ from platform to platform. This participation ranges from being free from rules and uncontrolled to be highly regulated and restrained due to political and ideological choices. It is therefore interesting to observe not only how user participation is enabled but also how it is constrained. This is the perspective and focus that has been adopted in this research.

This study deals in particular with user participation in participatory journalism. More specifically, it examines the extent to which affordances enable or constrain user participation on GuardianWitness, an example of participatory journalism. On platforms of participatory journalism, born when journalism started to open its door to the participation of non-professional actors (Rutigliano, 2008: 4), users display amateur content. The participation and contribution of those actors is shaped by affordances. The role of affordances on digital artefacts is so important that it has been discussed in the media literature as driver of change. An example is the ongoing debate about how Facebook Live Stream is affecting the way users participate in journalism[1].

These new affordances have been incorporated to an extent by the GuardianWitness platform. GuardianWitness is a platform of interest as it shows various ways in which affordances and user participation are enabled and restrained in a contemporary new media context. This research represents a useful contribution to the existing literature on different levels, concerning the debates around participatory journalism and affordance theory.

---

[1] Bajak, 2016: What Does Facebook Live Mean for journalism? Available at
http://mediashift.org/2016/07/facebook-live-mean-journalism/

First, this study represents a relevant contribution to the research on journalism. Many scholars (Reid, 2014; Sawers, 2013; Davison, 2013; Macmillan, 2013) have researched the various processes of transformation in journalism. However, there has been little academic investigation into the phenomenon of participatory journalism. Most academic research focuses, instead, on citizen journalism which does not necessarily require an interaction between professional new media news outlets and users. This focus is likely to be due to the fact that there are only few examples of participatory journalism, while citizen journalism platforms abound. Moreover, citizen journalism might have been considered to be more innovative and revolutionary as it has given users a high degree of freedom of speech in participating in the news-making process. Those who have studied participatory journalism have mostly focused on the definition and representation of participatory journalism has been studied (Lasica, 2003; Neheli, 2011), its cultural value in the media (Domingo et Al., 2008), or its development in specific geographical areas (Suau & Masip, 2014). However, the approach has always been quite theoretical and speculative, investigating more on the nature, mechanisms and limits of participatory journalism rather than on concrete examples. This research is relevant as it dives into a concrete example of participatory journalism and explores how theories are concretely applied to it. It is interesting to study the extent of user participation in order to raise debates about what it is actually enabled or restrained. In particular in this period of time, during which user empowerment is a topic of major concern in media literature.

Second, this study is academically important concerning the state of research on affordance theory. Contrarily to participatory journalism, affordance theory has been a broadly discussed concept among academics. However, most research has dealt with the traditional conceptualization of affordance. Conceived in the early 80s, it regards physical objects, rather than digital. Pioneers of this theory were Gibson (1979) and Norman (1988). The few times affordances have been analyzed as applied to digital artefacts, it has been done exclusively on a design level, for example regarding mobile applications (Raudaskoski, 2003), embedded interfaces (Istan, 2013), or UX design (Borowska, 2015). None of these authors have investigated affordances applied to a digital artefact from a media studies perspective. Therefore, this study is innovative as it shows the value of examining affordance theory of digital artefacts under the light of the literature and debates around new media studies rather than employing a design studies perspective. However, it is necessary to clarify that the design of the interface has been the first object of study as it functions through affordances, whose analysis has been vital to understand user participation.

The platform GuardianWitness has been chosen because of several reasons. It is an interesting case of participatory journalism as it is part of The Guardian, one of the six most popular newspaper globally and as it has already been created few years ago, therefore it is not a brand new platform. This aspect allows the analysis to focus on the development of The Guardian. Moreover, differently from similar case studies such as Have Your Say, iReport and OhMyNews, no previous academic research

has ever analyzed GuardianWitness. Therefore, my sources of information concerning this platform have been journalistic articles or blog entries. Finally, it is relevant as it presents a peculiar extent of user participation, that will be later explained. However, the structure and method of this study can be applied as well to other similar platforms of participatory journalism.

Even though this study focuses on the interaction between media outlets, affordances and user participation, it does not suggest that other topics discussed within media studies, such as gatekeeping, mainstream media, or affordances used to control message and ideology do not deserve critical considerations. This paper aims at being complementary to these studies.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to structure the research and give basic insights, a theoretical overview has been considered necessary. First, into the origins of participatory journalism and its position within the ongoing debates of media studies about user participation. Second, into the meaning of affordance theory and its application to new media studies. The latter analysis is useful to understand how affordances, originally conceived for physical objects, can be investigated when applied to digital artefacts.

2.1 Debates within media literature: from traditional journalism to participatory journalism

Since the second half of the 20th century, the rise of new technologies has deeply influenced and shaped the media landscape. Most of these technologies have transformed the relationship between the producer and the consumer of content. These transformations have consequently had a relevant impact on the perception and behaviour of the audience, the consumer of this content. Becoming the processes of production, distribution and circulation much easier, the engagement of the audience has been transformed. The audience has turned from being passive consumers to much more active users (Jenkins, 2006: 136). Encouraged by this bottom-up energy, this process has been defined by Jenkins (2006: 136) as participatory culture. The new technologies enable users to create and distribute their content in an easy way and broad scale (Delwiche & Henderson, 2013: 9). Even though they provide non-professional content, they are often considered as reliable – sometimes even more – as professional producers of knowledge and information, as they usually have no strings attached to political or financial interests. Contrarily, users often create and spread content in order to raise the voice against mainstream media (Hallvard, 2009: 2). This has been exemplified by the use of social media during the Arab Spring. These new forms of participation have forced media production agencies to rethink their approach and strategies: they have had to conform to the collective desire of audience participation and to the more complex and decentralized media landscape. However, in order to avoid their power to be eroded, these agencies have had to set limits and barriers to user engagement. They have done so in various way, for example filtering the content published on their platform or limiting, through affordances, the range of possible actions that could have boosted user active participation (Croteau, 2006: 343). Despite these barriers, a participatory culture has been developing, focusing around user agency and the increasing demand from individuals to participate to the shaping of the media culture. This tension around power, freedom and participation between media agencies and the audience has characterized different fields of knowledge, such as e-commerce, social media, mobile media and published media. Among published media, journalism has been the one affected the most. The rise and spread of

new technologies have progressively brought scholars to raise several critiques to traditional journalism. Being often considered as too old, dysfunctional and centralized, journalism has recently witnessed a drop in its value. In the past few years, the total revenues for advertising on newspapers was reported to have dropped 44 percent (Barthel, 2016: 1), and according to The Guardian (2015), national daily newspapers in the UK 'lost half a million in average daily sales' over the past years. The Guardian itself recorded a year-on-year sales fall of 9.5% over one year (Barthel, 2016: 1). These negative data are likely to be due to the mismatch between the status of traditional journalism and the desire of the audience. On one hand, most professional journalists have not considered citizens able to provide the news platforms with vibrant, trustworthy and heterogeneous content (Wall, 2012: 6). On the other hand, users have been feeling an increasing desire of participating with their own content. Over the past 25 years, new mass media technologies have developed this idea (Pantti & Bakker, 2009: 485). Several forms of journalism – grass-root, participatory, citizen, advocacy journalism – have emerged and brought to the increase of audience participation in the creation and dissemination of news content, proposing innovative alternatives (Pantti & Bakker, 2009: 485).

Participatory journalism, in particular, has gained a relevant role in the shaping of the news. It is defined as the news content published by non-professional users on mainstream news sites. However, this content does not benefit from complete freedom, but it is often monitored by the editorial team, that still keeps a certain level of gatekeeping, thus supervision on User-Generated content (Rutigliano, 2008: 4).

Having its roots in the public journalism movement in the 90s, participatory journalism has taken time to settle down. Its early adopters were Have Your Say by BBC in 2005 and iReport by CNN in 2006 (Wall, 2012: 6).

Have Your Say by BBC (BBC, 2006) was originally born as a television program broadcasted weekly. In 2008 it left the TV to become a section of the BBC News website (Moretzsohn, 2006: 3). As on GuardianWitness, the editorial team keeps a high level of control, defined as 'gatekeeping', on User-Generated content, that must respect rules and be approved by moderators. However, users have complained that it lacks of specificity and structure, as there is neither focus on the communities nor control on off-topic content. GuardianWitness has, instead, more control on the quality of contributions, as they need to pass through a pre-moderation process before being published. Moreover, Have Your Say is said to lack accountability, as moderators are often anonymous or under pseudonymous (Horrocks, 2008: 1). On GuardianWitness, instead, journalists moderating User-Generated content always display their name and surname and their profile is visible to users. Possibly because of all the critiques that the platform has received, Have Your Say appears unpopular. Every day it gets an average of 10,000 e-mails. As 5 million people visit the BBC News website every day, it means that only 1% of those are really active (Horrocks, 2008: 1).

Another popular mainstream news outlet enabling participation of the audience is iReport by CNN. On this platform, users can vote for the best content about different assignments that vary from entertainment, weather, tech and science to creative and free projects. GuardianWitness has a similar approach, displaying and asking users for contribution about the hot topics on the news agenda. However, iReport differs from GuardianWitness as the content uploaded by the users is unfiltered and does not undergo a process of moderation by the editorial team. The most relevant and qualified content, which is given prominent place by users' reactions, might pass through the gatekeeping process and be incorporated by the editorial team in actual news published on CNN, such as on GuardianWitness (Yildirim et Al., 2013).

However, the most debated case has been OhMyNews, more an example of citizen journalism rather than participatory journalism. Investigated by Moretzsohn (2006), OhMyNews, a Korean newspaper, has been founded with the explicit aim of reforming and challenging traditional Korean new media sites. Even though it states that every citizen can be a reporter, a strict code of norms controls the submissions. Users have the whole legal responsibility of their content, must identify themselves, use only legal methods – no hidden cameras or voice recorders allowed – and inform the people involved about their goals and intentions (Moretzsohn, 2006: 4). These rules, according to Engesser (2014: 576), make OhMyNews not a revolution in media but a marketing strategy. OhMyNews is similar to GuardianWitness as it implies an editorial team monitoring the user participation, but it differs as it endorses a political ideology.

In April 2013, in collaboration with Everything Everywhere, the UK's first 4g mobile network, GuardianWitness was launched as a new independent digital platform. Recently converted into a section of The Guardian, it encourages the audience to actively capture and submit their own content in real time (Indvik, 2013: 1)[2]. The quality of the material uploaded on the platform by users is monitored by the editorial team. GuardianWitness allows anyone – with a registered account – from anywhere, to submit content. Users can upload different types of material – pictures, videos or text. Videos submitted by users also appear on the GuardianWitness YouTube channel. Some contributions are selected by the editorial team to feature on the Guardian site, enabling an ever higher extent of user participation to the news agenda.

---

[2] Guardian.co.uk is the sixth largest newspaper website in the world, after Reddit, CNN, NY times, Huffington Post and Yahoo News (Wpp, 2013). First published in 1821 as Manchester Guardian following the closure of Manchester Observer supported by radical workers, it now includes The Observer and The Guardian Weely. Started as a British national daily newspaper, it has now also Australian and US version (The Guardian, 2015).

2.2 Affordance theory in new media studies

Affordances have been the primary object of study as they allow evaluating the features, mechanisms and limits of a platform. In this case affordances influencing the extent user participation have been selected.

Analyzing affordances is therefore of importance as it helps to understand the range of possibilities offered by the platform (McGrenere & Ho, 2000: 180). In this research, the goal is to understand how affordances enable – or repress – user participation. I have considered the platform, the technologies behind it and the users in terms of actions and possibility of interaction. This strategy has allowed me to consider technologies and users not as separate entities, but as interacting ones.

2.2.1 Origins and development of affordance theory

The word affordance, coined by the perceptual psychologist J.J. Gibson as significant part of his theory on ecological psychology, refers to the 'relations and properties between the world and an actor' (Gibson, 1979: ch8, 1). Affordances exist naturally even though they can also be invisible and they consist in what the environment offers the actor, but also how the actor perceives it. Therefore, environment and actors are complementary subjects. Affordances are useful to the actors because they enable a particular behavior. Gibson (1979: ch8, 1) takes as an example a flat horizontal surface that affords to support an animal. Without this property the animal would not stand. An important aspect about affordances is that they are neither objective nor subjective: they go beyond this dichotomy as they depend both on the environment and on the behavior of the actor, being 'physical and psychical' at the same time. The animal can stand on the surface because it has legs that afford it.

As Norman (1999: 38) first realized, it is possible to apply the concept of affordances not only to physical objects, but also to digital artefacts. However, it was Gaver (1991) who published the first paper about affordances. Affordances work on the interface of a digital artefact. The interface is 'the information that specifies the affordance' (McGrenere & Ho, 2000: 181). When affordance theory was first applied to digital artefacts, it improved the efficiency of the relationship between the user and the object (Kaptelinin, 2016: 1).

Websites and interfaces are complex artefacts that connect different social and cultural practices and afford several actions (Raudaskoski, 2003: 5). However, the possible actions are limited to a two-dimensional computer screen that does not give the user any physical clue on the possible action, relying only on visual clues. This clue, if not understood, fails (Borowska, 2015: 3). This means that every time the user interacts with a computer, he/she becomes interdependent with the artefact and the technologies that regulate it.

2.2.2 Different classifications of affordances

Norman (1999: 40), structures affordances in two categories: *perceived affordances and real affordances*, which play a different role on physical and digital artefacts. While they co-exist in material objects, on digital objects it is possible to control only the perceived affordances. For example, in a non-touch computer, it is a real affordance having a cursor that allows certain action by using it. Changing the shape of the cursor, even though it has also an influence on the understandability of a system, is a perceived affordance. This is due to the fact that, whatever the shape of the cursor, it is more important that the user understands that, clicking on an object with the cursor, it will lead to an expected action. Therefore, even though the cursor is visual information, affordances do not have to be always necessarily visible. These two types of affordances, even though strictly connected, can be managed independently from one another (Norman, 1999: 40). In this research only perceived affordances have been analyzed.

Graver (1991: 83) conceives a similar distinction, labeling affordances as *perceptible, hidden or false* depending on their perceptual information. If the perceptual information is visible and clear to the user, the affordance is defined as perceptible. If the information is not so not so obvious (i.e. a PDF document that can not be underlined as in read-only copy), the affordance is hidden. If the information suggests a nonexistent action, it is false. An example is a button that can not be clicked.
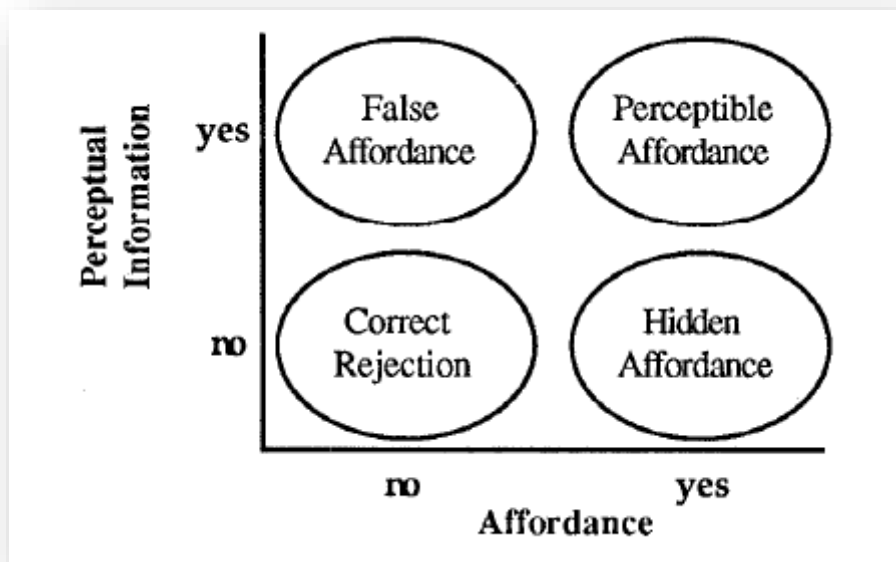

Figure 1 Classification of affordances conceived by Graver.

The research will focus exclusively on perceptible affordances. One example of perceptible affordance on GuardianWitness is the look of an assignment when the mouse passes over it: the title becomes underlined and the icons on the bottom get darker.
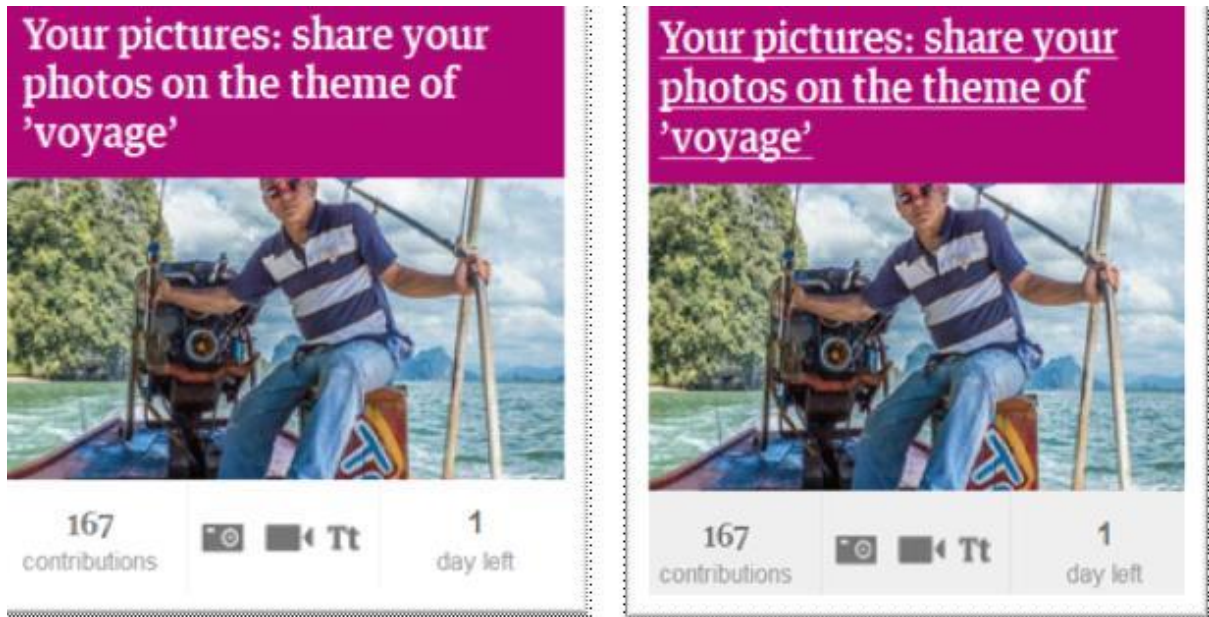
11

Figure 2 Visualization of the assignment with and without hover over.

Following these theories, Norman (1999: 42) conceptualized a model according to which a novel device has three major dimensions, intertwined: *conceptual models, constraints, and affordances*. In his book *The psychology of everyday things*, Norman (1999) applies the idea of affordances to artefacts and their design, and it had so much appeal that it has shaped the way we understand the design of information technology and human computer interaction (Raudaskoski, 2003: 5).

While the conceptual model is simply the hard part of an artefact, constraints can have three different forms: physical, logical and cultural. Constraints enable or disable activities. Constraints alter over time, they are not voluntary and they require agents who practice and adopt them. As it takes time to adopt, it also takes time to get rid of them (Norman, 1999: 42). Physical constraints are, for example, the screen location of a material object that limits the cursor to physically make some actions impossible such as functioning outside the screen (Norman, 1999: 42). Logical constraints select the options by reasoning. For example, every user knows that, in order to see the rest of a page, it is necessary to scroll down. Users deduce these constraints by looking at the design of the artefacts, but they can also ignore them, making navigation still possible but harder. Cultural constraints are based on a cultural learned convention within a group, such as the scroll bar situate on the right hand side of the screen, not required but arbitrary (Norman, 1999: 42). For the perspective adopted in this study, it will mainly focus on logical constraints.

An affordance of an object, such as the *climbability* of stairways, refers to characteristics of not only the object but also of the actor, as the person realizes the affordance by climbing the stairs. In digital artefacts it works the same, as it supposes the interaction between the technology and the user. Therefore, 'the interaction of a digital artefact with a human system determines its affordances' (Graver,

12

1991: 83). Affordances make possible some actions when a user behave in certain ways. Whether an icon can be clicked depends on the capability of the user of understanding that a certain action will follow. If this action matches with the expectation of the user, the artefact is easy to use.

On the contrary, if nothing happens, the user will be disappointed as apparent affordances imply different actions than expected. Even though affordances are properties that are strictly interrelated with the being interacting with them, they are independent of perception. This means that they exist no matter if there is a perceiver. For example, a tablet affords to be touched whether or not the user is there to touch it. However, to work properly, affordances need to be perceived

2.2.3 Selected affordances

In this research, three affordances have been selected: comprehensibility, communicability and accountability, connected to anonymity.

As far as comprehensibility is concerned, it has been analyzed the extent to which the interface is self-explanatory. It depends on how the interface conveys its functionalities to then user. It means that users understand, using only intuition, the meaning, nature and mechanisms of the platform without additional information than the ones already embedded in the interface (Raudaskoski, 2003: 6). Comprehensibility refers to sense-making: the interface must be coherent in order to enable the user to use this coherence for further action (Boje et Al. 2011: 162). Comprehensibility depends on the degree of efficiency of the interface, connected to the degree of learnability. If the platform is easy to learn, then it will be easy to comprehend. Consequently, it will be more likely to attract user participation (Boje et Al. 2011: 162).
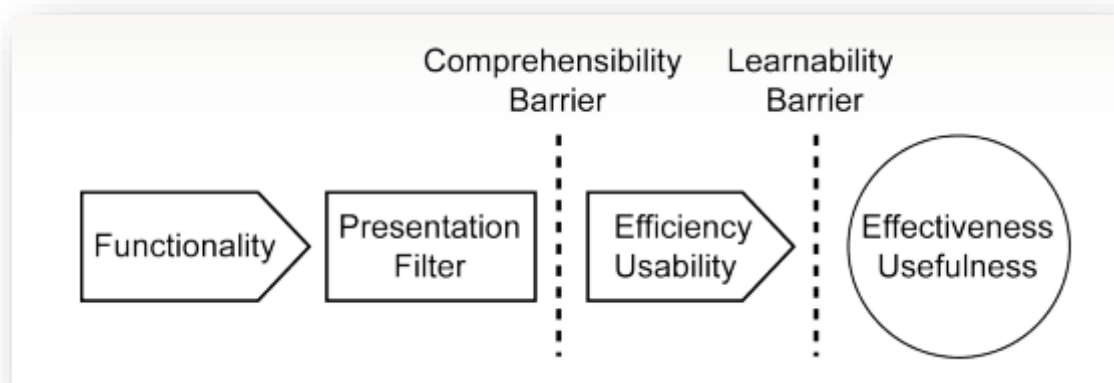

Figure 3 Framework for design principles.

A message is understood by the receiver not only depending on the sign itself but also on the context. Comprehensibility is influenced by the surroundings, personality of the receiver, background. The same symbol can have different meanings for different receiver.

On the degree of comprehensibility, communicability plays an important role. If communication on a platform works well, then it will be easier to comprehend. Communicability is the keystone of every interaction between human beings and technological objects. Communicability is connected to efficiency. User should be able to perform actions easily and quickly. A design should not require more work than necessary (Mashaw, 2006: 116). Moreover, communicability is linked to simplicity: if actions are simple to understand, the user will be more willing to perform them. However, excessively simple interfaces discourage the users to navigate (Heim, 2008). In this research communicability concerns the extent to which users are afforded to communicate not only among each other but also to the editorial staff (Chemero, 2003: 190).

If communicability works well on a platform, it is likely that also its accountability will be successful. Accountability refers to the transparency of the interface. Accountability is a relational concept according to which an actor has to give some account to another actor. It is the obligation of accepting responsibilities. However, it is often difficult to make clear through what processes accountability should be assured and by which criteria (Mashaw, 2006: 116). Accountability does not emerge spontaneously but it encourages users to navigate more through the platform. Accountability depends on transparency and explicitness, achieved by displaying responsibility processes, providing detailed information, avoiding ambiguity and including contextual information (Offenhuber, 2016: 1).

Anonymity plays an important role on accountability. Anonymity is afforded on two levels. The first one concerns anonymity granted to user. Users contribute anonymously, meaning that they hide personal information. In this way, they protect their privacy and are encouraged to give opinions about sensitive topics they do not want to be associated with. However, anonymity puts in risk accountability as these users, not displaying their identity, do not give account to anyone. Other user might not trust the veridicity and autenticity of the anonymous contribution. The other level of anonymity concerns the editorial team. The gatekeeping process and the control on user participation and contribution might be done anonymously. Journalists are not forced to give details about the mechanisms that rule nor motivations that support their decisions. This grants the editorial team more freedom in managing the platform. However, it decreases transparency and accountability I will analyze how anonymity is performed on the platform.

3. Research question

The key issues that will be discussed are formulating as following:

• How do affordances of the GuardianWitness platform enable or repress user participation?

The affordances selected were done so on the basis of their relevance to participatory journalism study. Their implementation will be further discussed in the methodology. The main research question will therefore be followed and structured by several sub-questions regarding the affordances selected.

• How does the affordance of comprehensibility influence the extent of user participation on GuardianWitness?

• How is communicability characterized in relation to user participation on GuardianWitness?

• How do accountability and anonymity affect user participation on GuardianWitness?

4. Methodology

In this research, user participation on GuardianWitness has been analyzed investigating selected affordances. The functions, meaning and limitations of certain affordances have been investigated, such as comprehensibility, communicability, accountability and anonymity. I have chosen these affordances as they are the most concerned with user participation. Their specificity will be explained in the next paragraph. It has been decided to carry out the research employing mainly a design approach as the focus has been on understanding on the interface whether affordances enable – or disable – user participation by stimulating or discouraging certain behaviors on the platform. Therefore, there was no alternative to study affordances but from a design perspective. However, not only the theory about affordances but also the results and discussion following this analysis have been considered within media studies.

4.1 Affordances on digital artefacts

This chapter outlines why determinate affordances have been selected and how they are concerned with user participation. I have extracted the affordances by observing the platform and user activity. The theoretical aspect of these affordances originates from the literature of media and new media studies.

Affordances have not been analyzed in terms of their positivity or negativity. Even though Gibson noted the 'polarity of affordances' (Maier & Fadel, 2009: 21), referring to their positivity or negativity, in my analysis affordances are exclusively investigated on their influence on user participation. No judgment has been given during the analytical process. If a choice tends to limit user participation, the reason for this has been investigated, rather than expressing any personal evaluation.

It is necessary to point out that the presence of two versions of GuardianWitness has shaped the direction of the research, raising some thoughts on the decision taken by the editorial staff concerning user participation. The old version of GuardianWitness, still accessible, is a standalone website with few references to The Guardian. The new Beta version, that will soon replace completely the old one, presents GuardianWitness as a small and quite hard to find section within the main website of The Guardian. Mostly the new Beta version has been considered by this research.

A long engagement with the platform has been necessary in order to understand the mechanisms and features that might not be visible on the first analysis. First, I have navigated the website as first-time visitor. The goal was to check what I was afforded to do without being registered. Afterwards, I have registered a personal account and, as user, I have navigated through the platform. Therefore, this analysis has required not only a passive observation on other users' participation, but my own active engagement as well. This has allowed me to understand the feeling that the navigation conveys. I have

accessed the platform throughout the time span that this research has taken me, in order to gain a precise overview on the peculiarities of the platform. This long engagement has been useful as I have discovered new interesting aspects the more and more I participated. I have considered every aspect in light of the affordances selected. The affordances I have investigated are comprehensibility, communicability, accountability and anonymity.

In this research, the comprehensibility of the interface is analysed in terms of the homepage of the website, its direct presentation to the visitors and the self-definition. I have analyzed whether the platform is easy to use. First, I have adopted the point of view of a first-time visitor that is not aware of the nature of the website. The questions that I have asked myself are the following: is the nature and goal of GuardianWitness clear to users? Do I easily understand that it is aimed at user participation and contribution? In order to answer these questions, I have analyzed how GuardianWitness explicitly presents itself. Later, I have searched for tooltips and tutorials that may guide the navigation. Finally, I have examined how users are addressed and how they understand that they are invited to participate. I have done so as a high extent of comprehensibility encourages users to engage to the platform.

Connected to comprehensibility is communicability. In order to realize how communicability allows user participation I have first analyzed how users are enabled to present themselves, such as the information on their personal profile and the display of username and other data within contribution. Then, the focus has shift to the communication among users. I have analyzed the presence of functionalities such as commenting and sharing and the lack of recommending and chatting functions. Finally, I have analyzed the communication between users and the editorial staff. I have examined how the editorial staff allows to be contacted by the users and which tools they use to communicate to the users. This analysis has helped me to understand how communication is shaped within the platform and how users are afforded to interact with each other and with the editorial team.

The analysis on the editorial staff has been useful to analyze accountability. One of the factors influencing accountability is anonymity. I have examined the extent of visibility and responsibility of the editorial staff. This refers to the concept of gatekeeping. How does the editorial team present itself? Do they display personal information or are they anonymous? Do they act transparently, justifying their decisions? In order to answer, I have checked their personal profile and the participation of the editorial team on the platform, in particular concerning the integration of User-Generated content. I have focused on users and the requirements imposed to verify their authenticity. Which data do they have to provide? Do they have to be real?? Can they hide their identities and contribute anonymously? The answer has been given analyzing user profiles, the registration process and the contributions. Analysing accountability and anonymity has been useful to understand how the role and presence of the editorial team shape and regulate user participation.

5. Results of affordance analysis on GuardianWitness

The affordances of comprehensibility, communicability, accountability and anonymity have been investigated. By conducting this analysis on GuardianWitness, the extent to which users can actively participate on the platform has become clear.

5.1 Comprehensibility

GuardianWitness looks like a platforms rather easy to understand even to first-time visitors. Its goal – making user share their content – has been made clear through different tools.

The first aspect worth noticing about comprehensibility is the different self-presentation between the old and the new Beta version. In the old version, a standalone website, there is no explicit explanation of the goal of the platform. Only assignments, tasks and the other categories are visible. The new Beta version, instead, displays on the top of the page a brief explanation. 'GuardianWitness is the home of readers' content on the Guardian. Contribute your video, pictures and stories, and browse news, reviews and creations submitted by others. Posts will be reviewed prior to publication' (GuardianWitness, 2016). This self-definition clarifies the nature of the platform and encourages user to participate with their own material. It is likely that the decision of providing a brief presentation is due to the fact that GuardianWitness is now just a section of The Guardian. Therefore, the explanation is mainly addressed to users accessing it through The Guardian.
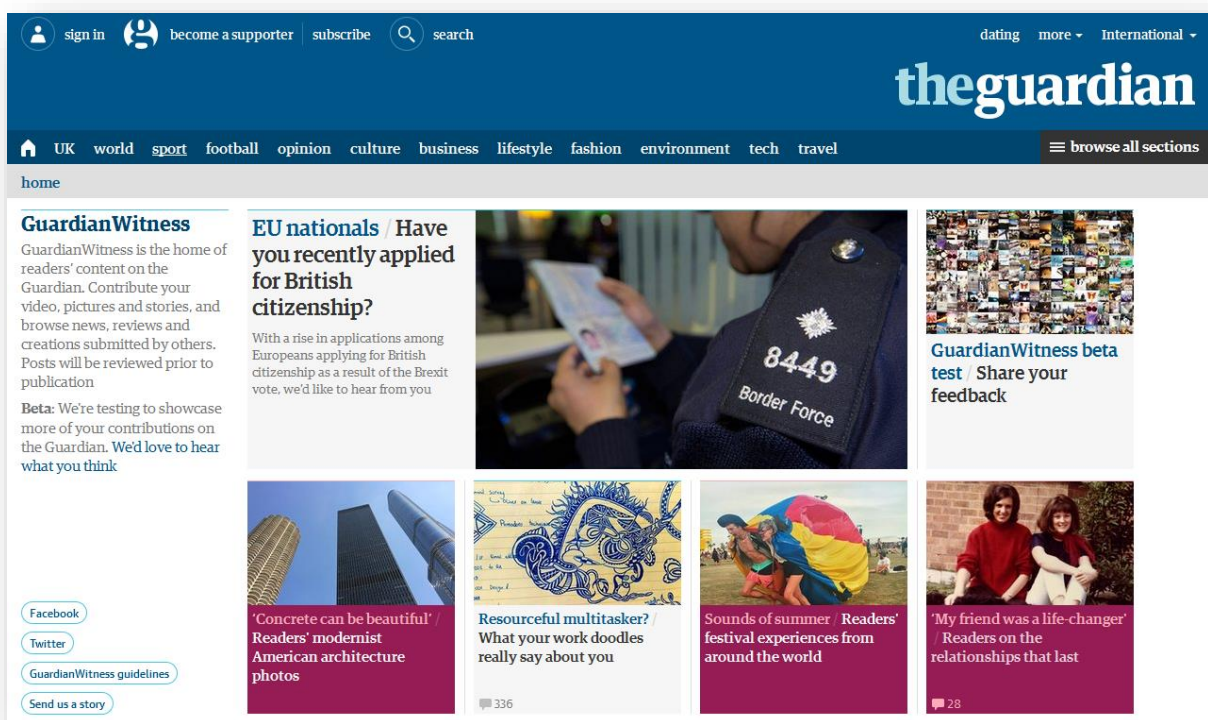

Figure 4 The homepage of the Beta version of GuardianWitness.

Second, user participation is enhanced by the use of language. In particular, the abundant use of the personal and possessive pronoun 'you' and us: 'Share your photos of what the hours after dark mean to you', 'have you moved to London from abroad' and so on (GuardianWitness, 2016). This abundance makes clear that it is up to the user to participate with his/her own content. There is a section called 'your stories' that makes it ever clearer. Even though the user was not aware of the nature of the platform, it would be quite easy to understand it.

Figure 5 The abundant use of personal pronouns to address the user.

Finally, user participation is made comprehensible within the assignments. First, an introductory paragraph provides the user with valuable information about the assignment explaining its characteristics and requirements. Then, it is possible to click on the button 'contribute with GuardianWitness', that guides the user in the filling of a form that requires personal information, further comments as the description of a story, and the possibility to add visual content such as a picture or a video. Sometimes the form is immediately available after the introductory paragraph. Questions presented in forms are usually easy to understand and not mandatory. Neither participation is mandatory, therefore the user feels free to participate and shape the contribution.

Figure 6 Form to fill in by user to make a contribution.

If participation mechanism is not clear enough, users can be led by guidelines. However, they are not immediately available and finding them requires several steps by the user. In order to better guide the navigation of first-time visitors, guidelines should be more visible and immediately available to those who have difficulties in understanding the goal of the platform. In this way, the easiness of navigation would be improved and users would feel more willing to participate. Further suggestions will be later illustrated.

5.2 Communicability

Communicability has been investigated on different aspects. First, communicability among users. Second, communicability between users and the editorial team.

Users are enabled a low level of communication among each other. They have no way to do so apart from using the comment sections publicly readable. In order to comment, users need to be

registered on the website. However, the affordance of commenting is not available in every assignment. GuardianWitness encourages commenting: 'Commenters will no doubt have questions and opinions of their own about what you have written and they really appreciate it when writers enter threads to respond to them' (GuardianWitness, 2016). After several complaints, it has been made possible to directly reply to other user comments and to structure threaded conversations in order to make communication easier and more efficient. Users depend exclusively on assignments to open a space of dialogue. Any model of private messaging system is absent. Therefore, the tools that support internal communication are scarce.

Dialogues and debates among users are surprisingly encouraged on external social networks that take away users from the platform: 'join in conversations on social networks' (GuardianWitness, 2016). Apart from commenting, users are also motivated to police on the content and report those that do not follow the guidelines: 'You can also report any comments you think contravene our Talk Policy so that our moderators are alerted as soon as possible' (GuardianWitness, 2016).

Affordances are important, but also lack of affordances must be taken in consideration. The most visible difference between the old version and the Beta version is the affordance of recommending[3]. The old version users had the possibility to express their preference and give a recommendation to an article, video or picture that they find worthy to be positively voted. In the Beta version this function is not possible anymore. User-Generated Content cannot be recommended nor commented, but only shared and reported if inappropriate (Davison, 2013: 1). This lack of facilities helps the platform as it allows to focus on the quality of the content rather than on the user's wish to receive visibility: 'the aim is for the staff to be able to discover the best user-generated content, not to provide a forum for users' (Davison, 2013: 1).

Guardian.co.uk is the sixth largest newspaper website in the world, after Reddit, CNN, NY times, Huffington Post and Yahoo News (Wpp, 2013). First published in 1821 as Manchester Guardian following the closure of Manchester Observer supported by radical workers, it now includes The Observer and The Guardian Weekly.
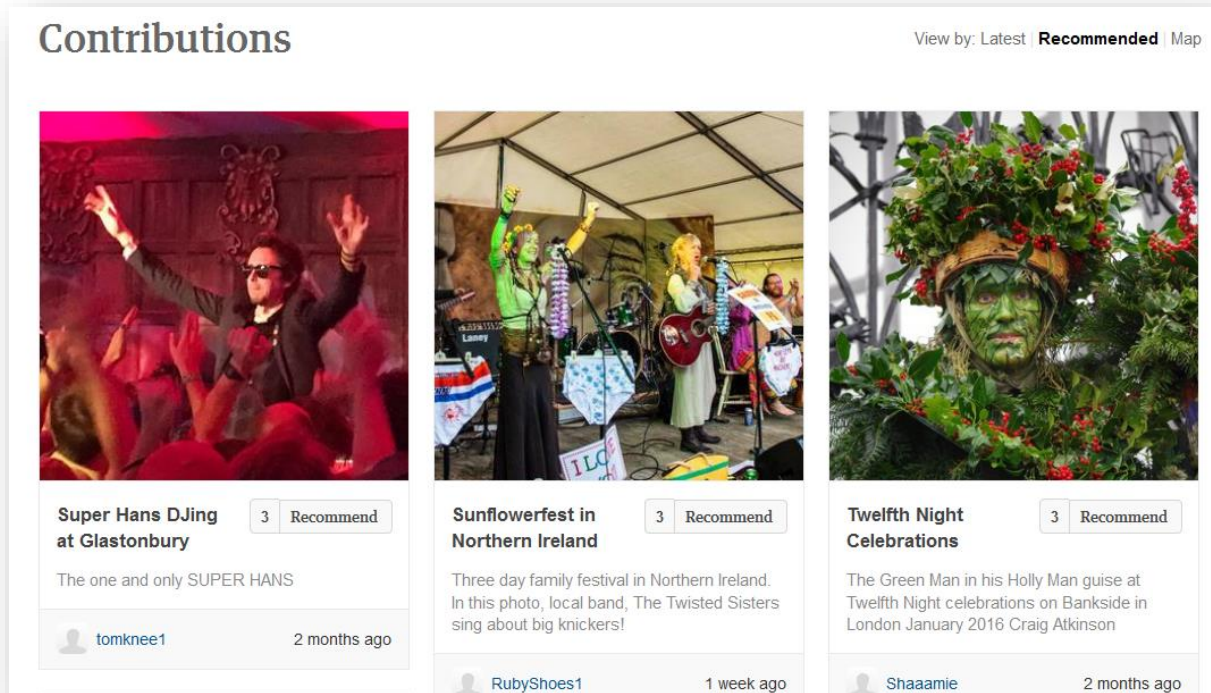
Figure 7 Recommending function in the old version.

Concerning the communicability between users and editorial staff, some features are worth to be highlighted. First, the display of the username. In the old version, users had more visibility as their name featured in the preview of the item they submitted. The result was a major prominence to the presence of the user. In the Beta version, this does not happen. The username is not displayed in the preview. It is necessary to open the assignment to know who the author of the contribution is. Visibility is also decreased by the fact that, when submitting content, the contributions of users are published and visible to the readers only if they are selected by the editorial team. Otherwise, they do not appear anywhere.

Secondly, I consider the integration of user contributions into articles written by the editorial team. These articles usually display a short introduction on the topic written by the editorial staff; the contributions of the users follow. The authors, therefore, are both the editorial team and the users. However, the authors displayed are the journalist together with a generic label 'Guardian Readers'. This label is defined as 'The Guardian readers contributor tag is applied to any content that is solely or partly created by you, our readers' (GuardianWitness, 2016). The authors of the contributions that have been chosen to be integrated, therefore, do not receive visibility. This is likely to be due to the fact that the editorial team still wants to keep a high degree of gatekeeping and editorial control. As a matter of fact, it is the editorial team who picks the topic of the assignments, the type of content and set the deadline. Finally, it selects the most interesting stories that are integrated in an article. The editorial team works as moderator between the users and the readers.

Figure 8 Authors labelled as Guardian readers.

By analyzing communicability, the results are that the choices implemented on the platform shift focus away from the personal visibility of the user, but rather focus on the content of their contribution. Moreover, it seems that an individual use of the platform is encouraged, rather than enhancing sociability and a community feeling among the users. Users are not enabled to set private communication nor create group chats. The lack of a recommending function expresses the decision taken by the editorial team to avoid converting GuardianWitness into a social network where users fight for visibility. However, not encouraging sociability of the user might be risky as a good community feeling within the platform can be a key element of success. Most users look for self-gratification and for being valued by other users. This explains the success of the Like economy in the past few years.

5.3 Accountability and anonymity

Accountability refers to the transparency of the interface. First, the signing up process is taken into consideration, verifying what data is required by the user. Then, the focus of this research shifts to the editorial team and their visibility.

When opening a new account on GuardianWitness, not much personal information is required, apart from the basics such as name, email, and location. If logging in through Facebook, only the name and surname of the user are taken, but can be always customized in order to protect the privacy of the user. The picture is not imported from Facebook and it does not have to be a real picture. Users are not afforded to express much about themselves. This is likely to be due to the willingness of the editorial team of focusing more on the content rather than the individual customization and presentation of the user.

In the guidelines it is clearly stated that The Guardian collects any information the user enters on the platform such as name, email, phone number, social media accounts, location, IP address and cookies. The storage of such information is used for customization of advertising and content. This data, under the user agreement, may be shared with third agents who provide products and services to the
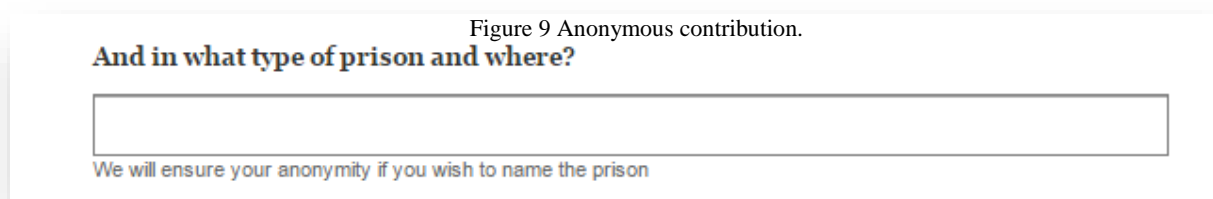
23

users (The Guardian, 2013). This use of data might discourage the participation of those who want to protect their data. Moreover, the user gives GuardianWitness the permission to use the content submitted.

Accountability of the content is guaranteed by the guidelines and terms of services. Users are not allowed to submit content that is for commercial use, false, inappropriate, defamatory, providing sensitive personal information, produced using hidden tools and without the permission (GuardianWitness, 2016). However, it is up to user to report content or comments not respecting the rules. The editorial team does not have the obligation to check, review or edit the content. The responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the content is only of the user (GuardianWitness, 2016). There seems to be no encouragement to sign up as the users do not have to be subscribed to contribute to assignments. They can also fill a form with a little personal information and send the contribution as a non-registered user.

Moreover, users can decide to remain anonymous when contributing, especially regarding sensitive topics. For example, when asking for material about the personal experience as a prison officer, GuardianWitness makes sure that the user thinks about security first when uploading content. As the account will be used as part of the coverage, they state that they 'are happy for you to submit your experience anonymously and any information about where you work will not be published without your consent' in order to protect the privacy of the user.

Second, accountability refers to the visibility of moderators. Information about identity of moderators is mostly available. The name of the journalist who integrates user contribution into an article is often displayed. Their profile is visible and displays the articles they have previously published. However, no personal information is added, such as interests, fields of expertise or location.

Figure 9 Anonymous contribution.

There is no way to contact them, apart from their social network profiles, if shown. In many websites, such as Have Your Say by BBC, the moderators are anonymous in order to protect them from discussion. However, this may lead to a lack of transparency and, consequently, to a lower degree of accountability. When the team makes a decision with which users do not agree it creates a feeling of resentment, as users are not enabled to directly address a specific and known entity.

Figure 10 Profile of a member of the editorial team.

Regarding accountability, it is important that the editorial team can always be identified in order to make them feel that there is a transparent relationship between journalists and users. However, it is also important that moderators convey the feeling that it is easy to interact with them. On GuardianWitness this feeling is missing, as it seems that moderators are just interested in the content of contributions rather than conversations with users. Anonymity on GuardianWitness seems to be well protected, as users can contribute under pseudonymous or anonymously. It is important that users feel comfortable with protecting their identities, as they feel more willing to participate and share their personal stories, even though containing sensitive information, to the public.

Discussion

The participation of new and alternative actors in the public sphere through the empowering nature of technologies is not a new concept. Already in the 30s, Brecht considered the role of the audience of the radio not only as receiver, but also broadcaster (Moretzsohn, 2006: 3). What is changing is the extent of the involvement of the audience (Dahlgren, 2013: 160). This research is concerned with those actors – ordinary people – who have challenged the mainstream editorial teams and set up an alternative way of making news (Rutigliano, 2008: 5). Despite some reluctant reactions, the inclusion of user participation in news media outlets is becoming an increasingly common and accepted practice around the world, intertwined with the work of mainstream media (Wall, 2012: 7). That is the reason why it is important to study the extent of this user participation and understand its characteristics, limits and strengths. In this research, an example of participatory journalism has been investigated in order to define the extent of user participation through the analysis of the affordances of its interface. The selected affordances have shown how users can participate with their own content on the platform, how their presence is regulated and how the editorial team intervenes and integrates their contributions.

In this research I started by identifying the concept of user participation in participatory journalism. In order to analyze it, I have chosen to investigate it through the affordances. I have shown how affordances influence the extent and direction of user participation on GuardianWitness.

The analysis has brought me to draw several conclusions. On the basis of this analysis, I claim that the extent of user participation on GuardianWitness is quite limited. This is surprising, as GuardianWitness' nature is entirely dedicated to user participation. Users can register to the platform and upload their contribution, but their freedom to express their opinion, navigate the website, intervene and communicate with other users and with the editorial team is restricted. This is likely to be due to political and ideological choices and to the fact that the editorial team wants to keep a high degree of control on user participation. Probably, it thinks that, by giving users more freedom, there might be the risk of losing credibility, trustworthiness, and the high quality of content that now characterizes the platform. Therefore, there is a tension between the decisions taken by the editorial team in order to control and restrict user participation and the desire of users to participate at the maximum extent. This tension might bring to a lower degree of participation as users could not appreciate that their range of actions is limited by certain affordances.

The decision of turning GuardianWitness from standing alone website into section of The Guardian is likely to indicate that the editorial team plans to decrease the visibility of the platform. This is probably a consequence of the decreased engagement of users – with an average of 50 contributions per assignment in the last 15 assignments. There may be several reasons for the low engagement. In this research, the reason that has been taken in consideration is that the platform, even though dedicated to user contribution and participation, does not actually fully encourage it. This result has brought me

to provide suggestions that would make the navigation easier for the user. In this way, the user would be more willing to participate (Graver, 1991: 83).

Regarding comprehensibility, it might be useful to describe more visibly and in more detail the goal of the platform, in particular to help the navigation of first time visitors. This could be implemented by adding different tools. Examples are a growl notification on the homepage at the first access, an infographic, and tooltips highlighting functionalities or a short video that presents the nature of the platform. If the user still needs some help, the guidelines, which are now rather difficult to find, should be more accessible.

Concerning communicability, as it has been concluded that the possibilities of internal communication among users and between users and journalists are quite low. The focus of the platform is placed more on the content of the material rather than on creating a feeling of community among users. It is clear that this is built in through design choices. However, improving communication, still without turning the platform into a social network, would be positive. As a matter of fact, users often look for a place that grants them visibility and interactions with other users. On GuardianWitness, users do not have many possibilities to boost their visibility. When submitting content, their contributions are published and visible on the platform only if they are selected by editorial team. This high level of gatekeeping might discourage users to participate, as they are not sure whether their contribution will be selected and displayed in the article. The solution might be giving visibility to the material selected, but leaving visible those contributions that have not passed the gates. Interesting and positive is the decision of GuardianWitness to call experts in the field of the assignment, for example artists or curators, to select user contributions and explain why. This collaboration seems to be successful among users who are encouraged to participate and let their material be chosen by an actor that has expertise in the field.

Moreover, users are not enabled to start private conversations nor group chats. This is probably due to the fact that the platform wants all interactions to be visible. Currently, users seem to look at themselves as independent participants rather than members of the same community. However, implementing a messaging system among users would let them being able to talk with each other about interests, passions or debates. GuardianWitness is a place that groups people together around topics. It means that users who contribute have usually a lot to share.

Another solution for boosting user participation regarding communicability would be giving more relevance to the personal identity of the user, thus connecting the account to social media platforms, providing more space to self-expression. In this way, users would know each other better and would be more eager to be active, instead of passively commenting to strangers' contributions. Users would also be more eager to participate also by expressing their personal preference, thus recommending contributions. The content on GuardianWitness is now displayed by chronological

order. This disposition does not highlight the contributions that are appreciated the most among users, who are not afforded to rank content. This would be favorable also to the author of the contribution, who would see it publicly appreciated. Re-introducing a system of recommendations would give the users satisfaction and motivation.

Scarce visibility influences accountability as well. As authors of contributions are labeled 'Guardian Users', there is a lack of transparency and users do not receive much gratification. Putting, instead, the names of the users as authors would enhance their gratification. As registration is not mandatory, users can contribute whilst not being signed up. Therefore, there is neither accountability nor proof of validity of their contribution. Everyone can provide information or tell stories without being obliged to provide any credible validation nor take any responsibility for the assignment. This lack of accountability discourages users. However, it is also true that anonymity protects user's privacy. Therefore, I suggest that, except for sensitive topics for which it is better to grant anonymity, only registered users can contribute and submit their content. This might also be positive to the editorial team, who would surely receive fewer contributions but likely of better quality. Moreover, in order to boost accountability, the editorial staff should establish a closer relation with users, increasing transparency. For example, providing more personal and contact information on the journalists, or setting a messaging system, private or public, that allows user to communicate with them, asking feedback or questions.

Conclusion

The research has highlighted how user participation takes form on GuardianWitness. Analyzing affordances encourages us to consider the digital artefact in terms of the actions it makes possible. Moreover, it allows us to consider technologies and users not as separate entities, but as interconnected elements that influence one another (Graver, 1991: 83). By doing it, affordance analysis can provide insights to improve the match between user's needs and expectations and designer's choices (Graver, 1991: 83). Suggestions have been conceived in order to increase the extent of user participation on the platform. Giving users more space and freedom on their participation, the result might be a higher personal engagement to the platform.

This study could serve as an initial guide for research on affordance theory and, in particular, for boosting user participation. Even though every platform is uniquely characterized, the analysis of the affordances and the suggestions that have been given can also be implemented on other similar platforms but also on other areas involving user participation.

However, different ways and methods of carrying out this research would have been possible. An alternative method would have been a textual analysis that engages not only with the text created by users but also with the textual presentation of the platform. However, the focus would be not on the analysis of a corpus of texts through semiotics or narrative analysis.

This research focuses on an example of participatory journalism, where user participation is still restricted. Differently, on platforms of citizen journalism, users are often more free to intervene and less controlled by the editorial team. Therefore, a comparative analysis could focus on how user participation differs on platforms of participatory and citizen journalism. However, within the spectrum of participatory journalism, platforms may present significant difference. A relevant study could carry out an in-depth comparative analysis between examples of participatory journalism. This would have been useful to understand the peculiarities of these platforms.

Finally, suggestions have been made exclusively on a theoretical level. This research has focused more on the visible choices of the platform concerning user participation. There has been no research on the actual choices taken by the editorial staff nor the behavior and reactions of the users participating to the platform. Indeed, two paths would be relevant to investigate. First, it would be interesting to understand the reasons behind the implementation of certain affordances. The focus would be on why the editorial team has decided in a certain why and what are the factors that have influenced this decision. For example, understanding why the affordance of commenting is restricted or absent. Second, analyzing the user behavior. An interesting follow-up study could provide interviews of users in order to grasp their behavior and their expectations on the platform. In this way, more detailed information about desired affordances could be provided. Those users could be selected from different groups, according to their background, age, gender or culture. This research would highlight the extent to which

desired affordances and user behavior differ according to several criteria. This research would be helpful to match the desires of the editorial team to the ones of the users.

Concluding, thanks to the number of interesting findings that this paper uncovered, it is possible to affirm that user participation, being an object of debate within current media literature, needs to be further addressed as it seems to lack of attention about not much user empowerment but rather user regulation. There seems to be the urgency of filling this lacuna by examining concretely what users are afforded to do or what they are restrained from. This research opens the door to a range of debates about user participation and it can be complemented by relevant studies.

Bibliography

Bakker, Piet. & Pantti, Mervi. (2009). "Misfortunes, memories, and sunsets Nonprofessional images in Dutch news media". International Journal of Cultural Studies 12: 471-489.

Banjak, Aleszu. (2016). "What Does Facebook Live Mean for Journalism". Mediashift. http://mediashift.org/2016/07/facebook-live-mean-journalism/

Barthel, Michael. (2016). "Newspapers: fact sheet". State of the news media. Pew Research Center.

BBC. (November 2006). "User generated content". Editorial Policy Newsletter nº 2. http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/newsletter/

Benkler, Yochai. (2006). "The Wealth of Networks How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom". Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Boje D., Burnes B., Hassard J. (2011). "The Routledge Companion to Organizational Change". Rouledge.

Borger M., Van Hoof A., Costera Meijer I., Sanders J. (2013). "Constructing Participatory Journalism As A Scholarly Object". Digital Journalism, 1:1, 117-134, Doi: 10.1080/21670811.2012.740267.

Borger M., Van Hoof A., Costera Meijer I., Sanders J. (2014). "Expecting Reciprocity: Towards A Model Of The Participants. Perspective On Participatory Journalism". New Media & Society 2016, Vol. 18(5) 708– 725.Nav Doi: 10.1177/1461444814545842.

Borowska, Paula. (2015). "6 types of digital affordance that impact your UX". Webdesigner Depot.

Bowman S., Willis C. (July 2003). "We Media". The Media Center, The American Press Institute.

Bruns, Axel. (2003). "Gatewatching, Not Gatekeeping: Collaborative Online News ". Media & Communication, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Campbell, Vincent. (2015). "Theorizing Citizenship In Citizen Journalism". Digital Journalism, 3:5, 704-719, Doi: 10.1080/21670811.2014.937150.

Chan, A. (2002). "Collaborative news networks: Distributed editing, collective action, and the construction of online news on Slashdot.org". Unpublished PhD thesis, MIT, http://web.mit.edu/anita1/www/thesis/Index.html.

Chemero, Anthony. (2003). "An Outline of a Theory of Affordances". Ecological Psychology, 15(2), 181–195, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Childress, Eric. (2004). "Weblogs: Low Sparks Swiftly Moving Journal of Internet Cataloging". The Haworth Press Vol. 7(2). doi:10.1300/J141v07n02_02

Croteau, David. (2006). "The Growth of Self-Produced Media Content and the Challenge to Media Studies". Critical Studies in Media Communication, 23:4, 340-344, DOI:10.1080/07393180600933170.

Dahlgren, Peter. (2009). "Media And Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, And Democracy". New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dahlgren, Peter. (2013). "Online Journalism And Civic Cosmopolitanism". Journalism Studies, 14:2, 156-171, Doi: 10.1080/1461670x.2012.718544.

Davison, Pete. (April 23, 2013). "Help Make The News With GuardianWitness". Times.

Delwiche A. & Henderson J. (2013). "The Participatory Cultures Handbook". Routledge, 1st Edition.

Deuze, Mark. (2004). "What Is Multimedia Journalism?", Journalism Studies, 5(2), Pp. 139-52.

Deuze, Mark. (2005). "What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered". Journalism 6: 442-64.

Domingo D., Quandt T., Heinonen A., Paulussen S., Singer J., Vujnovic M. (2008). "Participatory Journalism Practices In The Media And Beyond". Journalism Practice 2(3), Pp. 326-42.

Drucker, Johanna. (2011). "Humanities approaches to interface theory". Culture Machine, Vol. 21.

Engesser, Sven. (2014). "Towards A Classification Of Participatory News Websites". Digital Journalism, 2:4, 575-595, Doi: 10.1080/21670811.2013.841367.

Franklin, Ursula. (1990). "The Real World Of Technology". Cbc Massey Lectures Series. Toronto.

Gal-Or E., Geylani T., Yildirim P. (2012). "The Impact Of Advertising On Media Bias". J. Marketing Res. 49(1):92–99.

Gal-Or E., Geylani T., Yildirim P. (2013). "User-Generated Content In News Media". University Of Pittsburgh.

Gentzkow M., Shapiro J. (2006). "Media Bias And Reputation". J. Political Econ. 114(2):280–316.

George D. H. Pearson & Gerald M. Kosicki. (2016). "How Way Finding is Challenging Gatekeeping in the Digital Age, Journalism Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2015.1123112

Gibson, James J. (1979). "The theory of affordances. From: The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception". Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

Graver, William. (1991). "Technology affordances". Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human factors in computing systems. ACM, 79-84.

Guardian Witness "Terms Of Service", Guardian Witness Site. Accessed On April 22, 2016.

Guardian Witness (January 17, 2013) – "Guidelines". The Guardian. Last Accessed On July 13, 2016.

Guardian Witness. "What It Is And What It Does". The Guardian. Last Accessed On July 13, 2016.

GuardianWitness assignments. Last accessed on July 25, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/community/series/guardianwitness-assignments

GuardianWitness Homepage. Last accessed on July 25, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/community/series/guardianwitness

Haas Tanni & Steiner Linda. (2006). "Public journalism. A reply to critics". Journalism, SAGE. Vol. 7(2): 238–254 DOI: 10.1177/1464884906062607

Hallvard, Moe. (October, 7-10. 2009). "Online Media Participation and the Transformation of the Public Sphere: Moving Beyond the Fragmentation". Debate Paper for the AoIR conference. Internet Research 10.0 – Internet: Critical, Milwaukee, WI, USA.

HänskaAhy, Maximillian. (2016). "Communication And The Arab Spring: Linking Broadcast And Social Media". New Media & Society, Vol. 18(1) 99– 116. Doi: 10.1177/1461444814538634.

Heim,Steven. (2008). "The Resonant Interface HCI Foundations for Interaction Design First Edition". Chapter 6: Design Principlesy. Pearson Education.

Heinderyckx, Francois. 2015. "Gatekeeping Theory Redux ". In Gatekeeping in Transition, edited by Tim P. Vos & Francois Heinderyckx, 253–267. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hermida A. And Thurman N. (2008)."A Clash Of Cultures: The Integration Of User-Generated Content Within Professional Journalistic Frameworks At British Newspaper Websites". Media Business Studies 6(1): 37–59.

Holton A.E., Coddington M., Gil de Zuniga H. (2013). "Whose News? Whose Values? Citizen journalism and journalistic values through the lens of content creators and consumers". Journalism Practice, Vol. 7, No. 6, 720-737, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.76606

Horrocks, Peter. (2008). "Value of citizen journalism". BBC News, The Editors.

Hutchby, Ian (2001). "Technologies, Texts and Affordances". Sociology Vol.35, NO. 2, PP. 441-456.

Indvik, Lauren. (April 16, 2013). "The Guardian Calls For Citizen Journalists Via App". Mashable.

Intergage. "The New Face Of News Broadcasting?". Guardian Witness News. Accessed On April 22, 2016.

Istan, Gabriela M. (2013). "Designing Affordances On Embedded Interfaces". The Faculty of Human Factors and Ergonomics Program, San José State University.

Jenkins, Henry. (2006). "Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture. London: New York University Press.

Johnson, Kirsten. (October 2007). "The Impact Of Hyperlinks And Writer Information On The Perceived Credibility Of Stories On A Participatory Journalism Web Site". A Thesis Submitted To The Faculty Of Drexel University.

Kaptelinin, Victor. (2016). "Affordances". The encyclopedia of Human-computer interaction, Ed. 2.

Karlsson M., Bergström A., Clerwall C. (2015). "Fast Participatory Journalism – The (R)Evolution That Wasn't. Content And User Behavior In Sweden 2007–2013". Journal Of Computer-Mediated Communication, International Communication Association. 295–311.

Karlsson, M. (2010). "Participatory Journalism And Crisis Communications: A Swedish Case Study Of Swine Flu Coverage". Karlstad University, Observatorio Journal, Vol.4 - N°1, 201-220 1646-5954/Erc123483/2010 201.

Knowledge Wharton. (May 06, 2014). "How User-Generated Content Affects The Media's Bottom Line". North America.

Lasica, J.D. (2003). "What is participatory journalism?" Jdlasica, Online Journalism Review.

Lehmann, A.S., Van den Boomen, M. and De Rijk, B. (2016)."New Media Studies Method Reader". NewMediaStudies.

Macmillan, Gordon. (April 04, 2013). "Guardian Launches Citizen Journalism Platform GuardianWitness". Media Week.

Marsh S., Walsh J. and Guardian readers. "EU referendum: are you in or out? Our readers discuss". Politics, Opinion. Published on June 22, 2016.

Mashaw, Jerry Louis. (2006). "Accountability and Institutional Design: Some Thoughts on the Grammar of Governance". Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper No. 116; Chapter 5, pp. 115-156.

McGrenere, Joanna and Ho, Wayne. (2000). "Affordances: Clarifying and Evolving a Concept". University of Toronto, Proceedings of Graphics Interface 2000: Montréal, Québec, Canada, 179-186.

MediaGuardian. "Record numbers visit Guardian Unlimited". Accessed on August 7, 2005.

Moretzsohn, Sylvia. (2006). "Citizen Journalism And The Myth Of Redemptive Technology". Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil 1-18.

Morozov, Evgeny. (2011). "The Net Delusion: The Dark Side Of Internet Freedom". New York: Public Affairs Books.

Neheli, Nicole Blanchett. (2011). "Participatory Journalism: What do you think that means? ". Redefining journalism.

Niblock, Sarah. (2015). "From the high ground to the swamp: A model for immersive journalism research" Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies, Vol.4(2), pp.223-237.

Norman, Donald A. (1999). "Affordance, Conventions, And Design". Interactions, The Nielsen Norman Group.

Nuernbergk, Christian. (2014). "Follow-Up Communication In The Blogosphere", Digital Journalism, 2:3, 434-445, Doi: 10.1080/21670811.2014.895520.

Offenhuber, Dietmar. (2016). "A Case for Accountability-Oriented Design". The Design and the City symposium, 19–22 April 2016, Amsterdam.

Örnebring H. (2008). "The Consumer As Producer – Of What? User-Generated Tabloid Content In The Sun (Uk) And Aftonbladet (Sweden) ". Journalism Studies 9(5): 771–785.

Paulussen S. And Ugille P. (2008)."User Generated Content In The Newsroom: Professional And Organizational Constraints On Participatory Journalism". Westminster Papers. Communication And Culture 5(2): 24–41.

Peña et Al. (2010). "Immersive journalism: immersive virtual reality for the first-person experience of news". Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments, Universitat de Barcelona. Vol. 19, num. 4, p. 291-301.

Pettit, Nick. (2014). "What are affordances in Web Design? ". Treehouse Blog.

Pew Research Center's Project For Excellence In Journalism. (2010). "Understanding The Participatory News Consumer: News Gets Personal, Social, And Participatory". Journalism.Org. Available At: Www.Journalism.Org/Analysis_Report/News_Gets_Personal_Social_And_Participatory

Preece J., Sharp H.,Rogers Y. (2015). "Using Communicability Evaluation to Compare Interaction Design of Two HTML Tag Editors". Interaction Design: beyond human-computer interaction (4th edition)

Raudaskoski, Sanna. (2003). "The Affordances Of Mobile Applications". University of Tampere, Finland.

Reichardt, Randy & Harder, Geoffrey. (2005). "Weblogs, Science & Technology Libraries". 25:3, 105-116, DOI: 10.1300/J122v25n03_07 Rouse, Margaret. (2016). "Collaborative citizen journalism (CCJ) ". Tech target.

Reid, Alastair. (16 January 2014). "GuardianWitness To Hold First UGC Awards". Media News.

Robinson, Sue. (2007). "Someone's Gotta Be In Control Here". Journalism Practice, 1:3, 305 – 321. Doi: 10.1080/17512780701504856

Rutigliano, Louis W. (2008). "Covering the Unknown City: Citizen journalism and Marginalized Communities". Phd diss. The University of Texas.

Sawers, Paul. (2013). "The Guardian's New Guardianwitness App Opens Up Reporting To The Masses" 2001–2016.The Next Web, Inc.

Schrock, Andrew Richard. (2015). "Communicative Affordances of Mobile Media: Portability, Availability, Locatability, and Multimediality". International Journal of Communication 9(2015), 1229–1246.

Shoemaker, P., Vos T. (2009). "Gatekeeping Theory". Routledge, New York. ISBN 0-203-93165-3

Singer Jb. And Ashman I. (2009)."Comment Is Free, But Facts Are Sacred: User-Generated Content And Ethical Constructs At The Guardian". Journal Of Mass Media Ethics 24(1): 3–21.

Singer, Jane B. (1997). "Changes And Consistencies: Newspaper Journalists Contemplate Online Future". Newspaper Research Journal 18(1/2), Pp. 2-18.

Singer, Jane B. (2013). "User-Generated Visibility: Secondary Gatekeeping In A Shared Media Space". New Media & Society 2014, Vol. 16(1) 55– 73.Nav Doi: 10.1177/1461444813477833.

Spolsky, Joel. (2000). "Affordances and Metaphors". Joel on Software.

Steensen, Steen. (2011). "Cozy Journalism". Journalism Practice, 5:6, 687-703, Doi:10.1080/17512786.2011.604243.

Steensen, Steen. (2011). "Online Journalism And The Promises Of New Technology". A Critical Review And Look Ahead". Journalism Studies 12(3), Pp. 311-27.

Steensen, Steen. (2013). "Conversing The Audience: A Methodological Exploration Of How Conversation Analysis Can Contribute To The Analysis Of Interactive Journalism". Vol. 16(8) 1197–1213 ©).

Stephen D. Reese and Jane Ballinger. (2001) "The roots of a sociology of news: Remembering Mr. Gates and social control in the newsroom". Journalism & Mass Comunication Quarlerly. 78: 658-641.

Suau J. & Masip P. (2014). "Exploring Participatory Journalism In Mediterranean Countries". Journalism Practice, 8:6, 670-687, Doi:10.1080/17512786.2013.865964.

The Guardian. "Guardian appoints Katharine Viner as editor-in-chief, Media". Accessed on March, 20, 2015.

Thurman N. (2008). "Forums For Citizen Journalists? Adoption Of User Generated Content Initiatives By Online News Media". New Media & Society 10(1): 139–157.

Turvill, William. (April 24, 2013). "Unions Claim GuardianWitness Project Is A Threat To Freelance Journalists".

Vujnovic M., Singer J., Paulussen S., Heinonen A., Reich Z., Quandt T., Hermida A., Domingo D. (2010). "Exploring The Political Economic Factors Of Participatory Journalism". Journalism Practice, 4:3, 285-296, Doi:10.1080/17512781003640588.

Wall, Melissa. (2012). "Citizen Journalism: Valuable, Useless or Dangerous?". Intl Debate Education Assn.

Williams Ba And Carpini Delli. (2000). "Unchained Reaction: The Collapse Of Media Gatekeeping And The Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal". Journalism 1(1): 61–85.

Witschge T. And Nygren G. (2009)."Journalistic Work: A Profession Under Pressure?". Journal Of Practice 2(3): 343–356.

Wpp. (16 April, 2013). "Ee Partners With The Guardian To Launch GuardianWitness". Press Releases 1999-2016.

Xiang Y., Sarvary M. (2007). "News Consumption And Media Bias". Marketing Sci. 26(5):611–628.

Yildirim P., Gal-Or E., Geylani T. (2013). "User-Generated Content And Bias In News Media". Management Science 59(12):2655-2666. Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1287/Mnsc.2013.1746.

List of figures