Users and Producers
Online News as Mediated Participation

Susanne M. Almgren
Acknowledgement

The five years it took to write this book, have been more worthwhile than I can ever express. But five years is also a substantial amount of time, during which a lot of things can happen outside these pages. Children grow, relationships change, and people I thought would be here today have passed away. I owe a number of people for making these years easier. Foremost, of course, I would like to thank my supervisors Tobias Olsson and Dino Viscovi for the time and effort spent discussing this project, articles in-progress, as well as academic life in general. I especially would like to thank Tobias, for communicating a perpetual faith in my capacity to cope with academic challenges, and for his efforts to teach me to improve structure when writing. I will always aspire to be as clear-sighted as you are. I would also like to thank Dino especially for his persevering enthusiasm, and epic knowledge about Swedish newspapers. From a wider perspective, others have also contributed with inspiration to the fact that my life would include the path and completion of a PhD. Although there is no room here for making a long list including all of you, I need to mention Lars-Åke Engblom, Ulrika Olausson, Peter Berglez, Annika Bergström, Staffan Sundin, Mats Ekström and Monika Djerf-Pierre. Just as my supervisors Tobias and Dino, these wise people have encouraged me in various ways, for instance by sharing knowledge and displaying a commitment to support emerging scholars. I will do my best to bring it forward. I would also like to thank my mother, Christina. She is at least as happy as I am today. Thank you for patience, taking care of children, money for car repairs and home-baked cinnamon buns. I also need to thank my children Emma, Christoffer, Sofia and Jennifer. Thank you for enduring your mother’s disconnected gaze, sometimes failing to answer your questions with any sense at all. Wow, are we going to play video games now! And visit all kinds of retro game fairs! And get a golden retriever!
Face book, T witter, c o nte nt a nal ysis
Ke y w ords: o nli n e  n ews,  ci vic  c ult ur es,  s p a c es,  us er  practices,  s ocial  me dia,  c o m me nts,
c o n n e cti o n s b et w e e n us ers a n d n e ws pr o d u cers.

That news sites are embedded within, with its situated audience, shaping the sharing news through Face book and T witter), and the specific contextual and social settings, connections between various forms of electronic communication (i.e., commenting and representations of victims and perpetrators. Overall, the thesis illustrates that there are performances, and how crime news should be presented in terms of what events are published, certain views should be excluded, whether journalists' political views affect media, also concern whether representational principles should guide media representation or if commercial media, regulations and media, including roles, genres, and formats. These ideas primarily concern "elites" versus "commoners", differences between public service and how professional media practices allow various actors salience in the media. These ideas views concerning users' influence over content, users also express distrust when it concerns news paper. And although it is well known from extant research that producers hold hesitant news from a news site affiliated with national tabloid compared to from a local morning newspaper. Sharing news through Face book and commenting on news sites, are not interchangeable practices. Nor is tweetching groups of actors take to each other, under different circumstances. Sharing news through different in circulation) that commenting as a user practice tend to have a more local prominence when it concerns evening tabloids. This means (when controlling for almost only occurs in news sites affiliated with big city national newspapers, and most news sites. When it concerns user practices, users share news on Face book 20 times more restricted, and even more so among big city national newspapers than among local rural area share news through Face book and T witter, whereas commenting news is substantially more permit them to comment news on the news site. Almost all news are made to permit users to produce news. Producers are much more prone to permit users to share news through social media, than to (when given the chance) occur relatively sparse. The results also show that news that users tend to decline to interact with, while the news categories that users tend to interact with, coincide precisely with the news participation adjacent to online news. This is illustrated by the fact that the categories of practice (2 a) on various types of news sites, and (2 b) in connection to various types of news.

The last research question (3) concerns how users express the connection to news producers, participate in through interactive practices within participatory spaces. The thesis includes four papers, the purpose of this thesis is to illuminate principles that guide mediated participation, taking into account the conditions comprising mediated participation – in terms of how spaces for participation are structured (by news producers) and those that exert place through the interplay between users and news producers. Therefore, the study focuses on both how spaces for participation are structured (by news producers) and those that elicit opportunity for users' participatory practices – between (1 a) various types of online opportunities for users' participatory practices – between (1 a) various types of online
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate principles that guide mediated participation, taking place through the interplay between users and news producers. Therefore, the study focuses both how spaces for participation are structured (by news producers) and those that exert participatory practices (news users). The research design thus has an approach that ties together analytical strands that previously have been studied separately. The research questions concern how the conditions comprising mediated participation – in terms of opportunities for users’ participatory practices – differ between (1a) various types of online news sites, and (1b) various types of news, as well as how users exercise participatory practices (2a) on various types of news sites, and (2b) in connection to various types of news.

The last research question (3) concerns how users express the connection to news producers, through participatory practices within participatory spaces. The thesis includes four papers, that together answer the research questions by applying content and text analyses to various types of news sites (big city national, local rural area, morning broadsheets and evening tabloids) and its content: news articles and features for user participation, such as comments and sharing news through social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter).

The results show that users and news producers take diverging approaches to user participation adjacent to online news. This is illustrated by the fact that the categories of news that users are most often permitted to interact with, coincide precisely with the news that users tend to decline to interact with, while the news categories that users tend to interact with (when given the chance) occur comparatively sparse. The results also show that news producers are much more prone to permit users to share news through social media, than to permit them to comment news on the news site. Almost all news are made to permit users to share news through Facebook and Twitter, whereas commenting news is substantially more restricted, and even more so among big city national news sites than among local rural area news sites. When it concerns user practices, users share news on Facebook 20 times more often than they share news through Twitter or comment news on news sites. Tweeting news almost only occurs in news sites affiliated with big city national newspapers, and most prominently so when it concerns evening tabloids. This means (when controlling for differences in circulation) that commenting as a user practice tend to have a more local character than tweeting news, with its more national focus.

The connection between users and news producers is shaped by the approach these groups of actors take to each other, under different circumstances. Sharing news through Facebook and commenting on news sites, are not interchangeable practices. Nor is tweeting news from a news site affiliated with national tabloid compared to from a local morning newspaper. And although it is well known from extant research that producers hold hesitant views concerning users’ influence over content, users also express distrust when it concerns how professional media practices allow various actors salience in the media. These ideas primarily concern “elites” versus “commoners”, differences between public service and commercial media, regulations and media, including roles, genres, and formats. These ideas also concern whether representational principles should guide media representation or if certain views should be excluded, whether journalists’ political views affect media performance, and how crime news should be presented in terms of what events are published and representations of victims and perpetrators. Overall, the thesis illustrates that there are connections between various forms of electronic communication (i.e., commenting and sharing news through Facebook and Twitter), and the specific contextual and social settings that news sites are embedded within, with its specific situated audience, shaping the connections between users and news producers.

Keywords: online news, civic cultures, spaces, user practices, social media, comments, Facebook, Twitter, content analysis
Original papers

Paper 1
‘Let’s Get Them Involved’ . . . to Some Extent: Analyzing Online News Participation
Susanne M. Almgren & Tobias Olsson

Paper 2
Commenting, Sharing and Tweeting News: Measuring Online News Participation
Susanne M. Almgren & Tobias Olsson

Paper 3
Participating Users across News Media Spaces
Susanne M. Almgren

Paper 4
News Users’ (Dis)trust in News Media Performance. Challenges to Sustainable Journalism in Times of Xenophobia
Susanne M. Almgren
1. INTRODUCTION

The story that explains how I came to write this dissertation begins on a Wednesday night a decade ago, when a particular news article caught my attention. It was about the Swedish school system and its, at the time, continuously declining learning outcomes. As I was working as a teacher, one of the comments below the article made me think that a visible line had been crossed, and that certain things could not be left without a response. Soon, I had posted my first user comment, and more were to follow.

Over time, however, my interest in commenting on the news faded, and was replaced with a wider interest into how issues engaging people to feel, think, and talk in private, occasionally turn into user practices that enter a public realm through the news. Are there principles guiding this phenomenon? Moreover, if so, how do they work? After spending time on online news sites, it became clear that while comments were permitted on some news articles, they were not on others. In addition, among the news articles that were open to comments, a few attracted an abundant number of comments, while the comment sections of other news articles remained conspicuously empty. This phenomenon provoked questions that ended up taking quite some time to ponder.

Some years later, now as a media scholar, I can see how “new” forms of news media that host the participatory practices of users have been added to antecedent forms (such as the news paper, with its letters to the editor), but also that the range of user participation has shifted, wavelike, between peaks and declines throughout history. In addition, since technology can be regarded as a prerequisite for user participation, it has often been considered important to study issues of user influence by focusing the dispersion of technology.

In this study, mediated participation is primarily of interest as the result of the interplay between users and producers. Since these actors interact continuously throughout the thesis, there is a need for an approach that can combine multiple analytic and methodological entry points. Some forms of mediated participation (that take place adjacent to news) are characteristic of local newspapers, some of tabloids with national reach. Sometimes participatory practices take the form of comments on an article; other times they take the form of shared news within a social media network—just to mention two alienating examples.

The interplay between users and producers that potentially can result in the creation and sharing of content can be discerned by studying how these actors relate to both the news content and the technical features that are attached to the news. In a way, those who use the news and those who produce it can be said to meet when producers publish news, news that users can respond to, for instance by commenting and sharing on social media. News producers and users perform various practices in these settings that seem to push the user-producer connections in different directions, so it may change over time.

The introduction of new online technology has been perceived as giving users substantial influence (O’Reilly 2005), even if it is difficult to know how user practices will actually be exercised during novel stage of implementation. In the same way, at an early stage, it is also difficult to see how structural conditions will both enable and set limits on what users can do. As time passes, the ways in which people make use of opportunities to participate might take other forms than those foreseen by producers. If so, producers who structure a participatory space can alter how a form of media can be used. Producers and users not only
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have different ways of understanding what they see other actors do, these ways of understanding also emerge from the social connections that users and producers have and exist within.

When people make use of technology, ways of understanding are brought from the past into the future. New technology emerges from particular ideas that producers have about how it should be used, but when technology is utilized by users, its use – at least to some extent – may take other forms than those anticipated. Producers may react to this, both in the form of changing restrictions and by developing new opportunities for user participation. It seems as if the significance of user participation is accentuated during some periods, but abates during others – both in real life as well as in scholarly discussion – a cycle that appears to start up again when another new technology appears on the scene. Such a pattern is not only discernible in recent scholarly discussions (cf. O’Reilly 2005; Anderson 2006; Olsson 2013; van Dijck 2009), but also in works covering longer timespans about the development of the newspaper (Habermas 1989; Lundell 2002).

Currently, the connections between those who use the news and those who produce it exist at a time when the expectation is that users will have extensive opportunities to participate online (e.g., O’Reilly 2005; Deuze 2003). Online journalism is no exception. News producers have become the targets of such expectations, and thus cannot avoid relating to them, although their awareness of and views about these expectations about user participation might vary. This study’s primary interest is user participation, in the sense that it is designed to problematize issues related to users’ influence, rather than to present solutions to contemporary problems of news producers (although these are certainly recognized). However, these aspects are irrevocably intertwined, and they work in both diverging and converging directions throughout the various parts of the thesis. Nevertheless, the core focus of the work is on how online spaces where users may participate are structured by news producers, who can both enable and restrict what users can do, and how users within such structured online spaces perform some forms of participatory practices, while declining to perform others.

1.1 Framing the problem

How people participate in the media is of social scientific interest for many reasons, but here primarily because of the significance the news media is ascribed in democratic societies, both in its role as an aid to an informed citizenry and as an arena for public debate. However, the settings in which this is supposed to take place are changing rapidly. In practice, this applies to news sites with technological features for user participation, which takes place in a social and cultural context in which opportunities to participate can be impaired by news producers in various ways, and where users are able to choose how to interact with news – or not – in various ways.

It has been argued that in order to understand how and why people engage, multiple intertwined dimensions must to be taken into consideration. Therefore, this study draws on Peter Dahlgren’s (2009) work on civic cultures. This framework identifies certain focal points of analytical interest, yet manages to be permissive thanks to its open-ended and inclusive form. In this study, the focus of the analysis is the interplay between spaces for participation and the practices that users engage in. The online practices of users of news are embedded into journalism through a variety of technological features found on news
sites, features that are implemented by news' producers. In addition, this interplay takes place on news sites affiliated with different types of professionally produced newspapers.

While a significant amount of existing research in this field has a strong focus on the connection between technology and professional actors, often using the practices of the newsrooms of large national news organizations as objects of study for international comparisons, the ambition of this thesis is to adopt an approach that places the connection between users and producers at the centre. It is argued here that the gaps in existing research primarily concern studies focused on finding methodological and analytical intersections that tie producers and users closer together.

It is also argued here that there has been a lack of contextualization of the variety of circumstances under which users of the news can engage with it. There is a need to go beyond simply mapping the structure of online news media systems, to also focusing on practices within specific news organizations and the conversations that take place among users on these news sites. Thus, the ambition of the thesis is to take a more comprehensive approach to mediated participation and online news. There are, of course, existing studies that share related ideas.

Lewis, Kaufland and Lasorsa (2010) argue that there is a lack of research on news sites with a local focus, as well as too few qualitative analyses of users' participatory practices. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2011, 2013) have shown that there is a divergence between news producers who publish news and the news that users prefer to read. They have also shown that users interact with the news in different ways under different circumstances. A divergence has also been found between users and producers as regards views about the value of participatory practices (e.g., Lewis 2012; Bergström & Wadbring 2015).

In addition, when it comes how a news site can be structured as a participatory space, Holt and Karlsson (2011), Abdul-Mageed (2008), and Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall and Fast (2015) provide examples of how news sites can make content available to users in different ways. Similarly, Lewis and Westlund (2015) have identified multiple aspects that concern the way in which online news is given its form. The salience of content matters (Holt & Karlsson 2011; Abdul-Mageed, 2008), but content does not exist in a vacuum. For example, the comment sections on news sites seem to be in decline in Sweden (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast 2015). In Norway, editors and moderators tightened control and intervened more frequently in users' contributions after Breivik's terrorist attack in 2011 (Ihlebæk, Sundnes Lovlie, & Mainsah 2013).

As regards how users perform certain participatory practices rather than others, it has been shown (Abdul-Mageed 2008; Weber 2013) that there are both differences and similarities in how users comment on different types of news in different contexts.

In summary, although there are many studies that have contributed substantially to this field, they usually have an empirical enquiry that is focused one of the aspects discussed above. In contrast, the focus of this study is to draw certain relational strands together in a new way. It does so by tying together – methodologically, and analytically – a focus on participatory spaces (structured by producers) and participatory practices (exercised by users) in different settings, with the ambition to highlight the connection between the two.
1.2 Purpose, aim, and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate principles that guide a specific type of mediated participation, one that takes place through the interplay between users of the news and news producers, by understanding both how spaces for participation are structured (by producers of the news) and how participatory practices are exercised (by users of the news). Thus, the research design ties together analytical strands about how users perform participatory practices within the structural conditions of spaces for participation.

To do this, we need to analyse the various shapes that restrictions can take, as well as how opportunities for participation are realized. This point of departure also means that even though the research presented here examines the content of users’ contributions to news sites, this is not done primarily because an interest in the content, per se. Rather, the ambition is to contribute to scholarship on mediated participation by developing an approach that focuses on the connection between groups of actors: those that structure spaces for participation and those that exercise practices within these spaces. The hope is that this approach will contribute to a new understanding of mediated participation.

The research questions concern how the conditions comprising mediated participation – in terms of opportunities for users’ participatory practices – differ between (1a) various types of online news sites and (1b) various types of news, as well as how users exercise participatory practices (2a) on various types of news sites, and (2b) in connection to various types of news. The last research question (3) concerns how users express the connection to news producers, through participatory practices within participatory spaces.

1.3 Outline

The next section, and second in order, describes existing research on the participatory practices of users and the news, both from a temporally distant and contemporary perspective. This is followed by theoretical reflections on mediated participation and a discussion of the theoretical framework. The third section describes methodology, operationalization, sampling, collection procedures, data analyses, and issues that relate to validity. The fourth section summarizes the results. The last section, number five, discusses the results, using the theoretical framework as a backdrop for discussing the contribution of the work. Finally, there is a summary in Swedish before the separate articles in the dissertation are presented.
2. EXISTING RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter starts with a retrospective view of antecedent user practices related to news, and then turns to the contemporary setting. The section continues with an overview of theory on mediated participation, and concludes with an elaboration of the theoretical framework used in this study.

2.1 The long story

With the emergence of ICT, and not least in conjunction with the concept of Web 2.0 (cf. O'Reilly 2005), a view that has become widespread is that we are now seeing something fundamentally new in terms of opportunities for media participation by users. However, people have participated in media for a long time and in a range of different ways (Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011). Scholarly views on whether people might be able to exert influence when using (and contributing to) media content have been diverse, from depictions of passive recipients to active subjects. In addition, concepts used to describe participants have also varied: the masses, the audience, the public, users and prod-users. Media research has been described as beginning with a strong initial focus on structures that guide the (passive) masses, and then, over time turning its focus to the agency of an independent (active) user (cf. Scannell 2010; Horkheimer & Adorno 1973; Jenkins 2008; Bruns 2008). In some ways, this might be a sufficient description. However, as will be discussed throughout this work, a number of reservations can also be raised. Just as history includes examples of users who have been given substantial influence, we can point to contemporary examples of structures that set substantial boundaries for what users are permitted to do (cf. Lundell 2002; Olsson & Svensson 2012). In other words, media history shows that stories of participation follow different trajectories (Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011; Lundell 2002). It is argued throughout this thesis that the connections between users and producers of news is of special analytical interest for teasing out this tangle of trajectories, similar to the argument that enquiring into issues of participation without considering the relationship between the media and its users seems rather pointless (cf. Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011, 4).

During various eras, when new forms of media have emerged, they have often been ascribed a democratizing potential, in popular culture as well as in other media forms and genres (Ekström 2011). The intertwined nature of social, spatial and sensory aspects has been recognized as crucial (Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011) as regards physical spaces arranged for participating users, for instance, when “...a particular kind of sociability evolved in these places that, more than anything else, was a result of the ways in which the attractions engaged the audiences...” (Ekström 2011, 22). A similar line of thought is used in this work. In particular, it is applied to digital online spaces arranged for participating users.

Hence, how the audience was permitted to interact throughout history was important for the various types of sociality that evolved. The interaction not only took place between the user and the medium, but also between the users. Various strategies were used to facilitate the social dimensions of participation (Ekström 2011, 29). Letters to the editor from newspaper readers constitute another form of participation in the media that take place in
settings structured by producers (cf. Lundell 2002; Olsson & Viscovi 2013; Viscovi 2011; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). Examples of other forms of participation in structured settings include television talk shows (Livingstone & Lunt 1994) and phone-in radio shows (Nordberg 2006).

Media history shows how ideas and ideals of user participation have fluctuated over time. Newspapers were initially characterized by openness to users contributing content (Lundell 2011). Newspaper editors adopted a humble position vis-a-vis their readers. The editors considered it their duty to enable the public to contribute to the printed newspaper. Thus, any suggestion that the news media has only recently, and in connection with the rise of internet, opened up for user participation must be considered inadequate, although the ways in which users can participate now might be more diverse and accessible. Suggesting that the oldest forms of news media kept their users in a passive position is not correct (Ekström, Jülich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011; Lundell 2011), because the earliest newspapers were, in fact, based on content generated by users. Of course, contributing required resources in terms of education, a fact that gave the contributions an elitist character. However, in practice, the producers of newspapers had a welcoming attitude to contributions from their users.

Ideas about whether users ought to contribute content have changed over time, not least during the first half of the nineteenth century (Lundell 2002). In times of war, both the demand for news and access to it increased. Space in the newspaper became a scarcity, and content created by users was pushed into more obscure positions. Editors became more professional and more involved in the news-production process. As conflicting interests recognised the importance of newspapers (Lundell 2002) a need emerged to negotiate salience and influence in ways that could be accepted widely, thus, impartiality became an explicitly stated aim (Allan 1997). The competitiveness between newspapers increased, and once professionalism had been established, it began to reinforce its own importance. Views among both publishers and users shifted, from viewing user contributions in print as self-evident, to a more sceptical view of users. The new view suggested that an educated elite needed to enlighten the less educated and saw knowledge as a prerequisite to voice. The publicist became the expert, and it was his responsibility to keep the letter-writing users at bay.

The conversation shifted from taking place between and among users to taking place among professional editors. Lundell (2002) points out that the change described here should not be confused with Habermas’ (1989) narrative about the public sphere for bourgeois society, where people could debate events that were depicted in the news in coffee houses. As regards the relationship between editors and users who contribute content, ideals changed and the view of the user became tainted. Later, users were assumed to be motivated primarily by their own interests, which was used to justify rules on users’ engagement and influence. The publicist was seen as the only person capable of developing an appropriate overview of the arguments being made, the only one who could claim to represent public opinion (Lundell 2002). The educated elite was expected to spread their knowledge to everyone else, to help the rest become a “politically conscious public” (Lundell 2011, 15). Thus, the public was given a passive role. Newspapers were not widely read by non-elites until the late 1800s, but they were still seen as having a problematic lack of impartiality.
Lundell describes how the liberal press has often been linked to positive connotations in terms of its participatory potential, but convincingly shows that this was not actually the case as regards the relationship between contributing users and news producers. This historical background is helpful to have in mind when looking into how the connection between users and news producers is taking form in contemporary settings.

2.2 The short story

If the paper edition of the newspaper and its letters to the editor have been crucial for defining the connection between users and producers, one of the major contemporary settings where the connection between them is played out is on online news sites. The value systems that are at work in settings such as these have arisen from the history outlined above, with journalism ascribed tasks such as keeping citizens informed, demanding accountability and offering spaces for public debate. Although such conversations have taken a variety of forms in traditional news media, the contemporary online news-media system raises new avenues of inquiry about the connection between news producers and users.

2.2.1 Spaces for participation and online news

As regards contemporary types of user contributions in connection to online news, the user comment feature emerged early as the most common way for users to contribute content (e.g., Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Manosevitch 2011). Since then, features for sharing news through Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly salient on online news sites. Buttons enabling sharing, or social plugins (cf. Gerlitz & Helmond 2011, 2013), have been widely introduced, and thus also constitute a range of potential analytical entry points. Because this study’s interest in the field of research on mediated participation includes both the conditions that structure the spaces for participation and how users perform participatory practices, the literature review will be organized accordingly.

The scholarly discussion about the impact of user participation in the age of ICT can be related to an overarching interest in the social sciences in the individual’s degree of independence and the conditions that create restrictions on her/him. In this field, the discussion has oscillated between the hope that opportunities for people to exercise voice can be equalled out, and concerns about inequality and exploitation (e.g., O'Reilly 2005; van Dijck 2009; Olsson 2013). Some scholars have interpreted the development of online journalism as becoming more open to allowing users to take on active roles; thus, the influence of gatekeeping will abate somewhat (Deuze 2003; Lewis 2012; Singer 2011) and allow marginalized people to have a louder voice (Papacharissi 2014). However, other scholars focusing on users’ opportunities to participate find that producers are often not too keen to allow users too much independence (e.g., Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008). The existence of technological features for user-generated content on news sites has constituted a salient object of study in theoretical work on users’ influence, as have newssroom culture and the user contributions themselves, the latter of which are analysed based on a variety of different standards (e.g., Domingo et al. 2008; Himelboim & McCreary 2012; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Lewis 2012; Netzer, Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Shifman 2014; Ruiz, Domingo, Lluis Micó, Diaz-Noci, Meso, & Masip 2011). Domingo et al. (2008) use a theoretical model derived from the production stages of news media to map
the level of user independence, and they conclude that users' independence is usually quite limited compared to the potential that the technological features could provide. For instance, while user comments have been described as a common feature (Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Manosevitich 2011; Thurman 2008), user comments also constitute a form of user-generated content that allow users a low level of influence, i.e., it is restricted to responding to previously-produced professional content. Lewis and Westlund (2015) have elaborated a theoretical matrix, calling on scholars to take approaches to the study of online news that are more comprehensive and include a wider range of actors.

Professional producers set conditional boundaries for users' participatory practices today, just as they did previously for letters to the editor (cf. Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). Now, however, the ways in which users are permitted to participate, or restricted from doing so, are more versatile (cf. Enli 2007; Pöyhätäri 2014). While registration procedures and moderation practices are made comparatively manifest through the presentation of guidelines and forms on the news sites, other ways of setting boundaries for user participation are less obvious, for instance, the fact that not all news articles permit comments (Almgren 2012; Pöyhätäri 2014) and a type of professional selection of text messages shown sent in by users in conjunction with a TV-show (Enli 2007). Research suggests that news media organizations select user contributions according to principles of objectivity, balancing opposing views in ways that are reminiscent of the values that guide how news is selected and presented. Such research results are of interest in this dissertation. They can be interpreted as suggesting that the values that are active and salient in a specific context (i.e., that have shaped existent practices), also tend to influence the practices implemented for newer, subsequent technological features, regardless of what these features might actually make possible in a strict technological sense. Hence, it seems risky to focus too strongly on technology, if the result is that we fail to sufficiently address the impact of social and cultural context.

In addition, when technological features on news sites have been mapped, usually one or a few of the largest national news sites are selected, and each is often implicitly viewed as a national point of analysis, representative and appropriate to use for international comparison. However, research suggests that, in fact, case-specific factors matter (cf. Domingo et al. 2008). News sites have been compared in order to map the opportunities for user participation through technological features, while contextual variation in news content is usually not emphasized. The fact that the same technological feature can be put into practice in very different ways is not usually part of the analysis. While the studies mentioned here have been crucial in the field of mediated participation and online news, the argument in this dissertation is that the current state of research would benefit from new perspectives, which is one of the goals of this work.

Existing research focusing on the range of participatory features in online news suggests that professional reluctance towards user-generated content specifically concerns giving users any major influence over the content (e.g., Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Himelboim & McCreary 2012; Lewis 2012; Singer 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams & Wardle 2010). These concerns are intertwined with views about whether the audience can be a resource for important contributions. As discussed, it seems as if the features for user contributions that news outlets prefer usually only permit users to react to professional content, rather than allowing users to produce content of their own. However, if news producers view with distrust user independence in authoring content, they seem to be more favourable towards users sharing news through social media: "Media organizations have embraced social media as a way to distribute news and connect with audiences" (Hermida,

When novelty appears in a research field, scholarly work usually begins with attempts to conceptualize what is new. The phenomenon of users contributing content online has been discussed using a variety of different notions, which have emerged from a range of different perspectives. When this work was initiated 2012, the starting-point was the notion (and at that time the buzzword) user-generated content (=UGC or, alternatively, user-created content, UCC). Its characteristics have been stated by the OECD (2007) as content publicly available, which includes some kind of creativity that is created outside of what we used to refer to as professional practices. However, a multiplicity of alternative notions has emerged alongside this. That said, the notion of user-generated content is a starting point for how this line of reasoning has evolved throughout this text.

A few studies in this field have also examined how the audience perceives user-generated content (Bergström & Wadbring 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams & Wardle 2010). However, most of the studies in the existing field of research on mediated participation and online news focus on views regarding user-generated content, primarily by enquiring about professionals’ views within news organizations using surveys, interviews or approaches inspired by ethnography (e.g., Harrison 2010; Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa 2010; Singer 2010). These studies show the ways in which views on user contributions are connected both to a hope that users will become more loyal, which will benefit the news outlet in terms of increased revenues, and to concerns about financial and legal risks, for example an increased workload and processes related to libel. However, hesitance about the value of user contributions seems to dominate professional views (e.g., Bergström 2008, 2009; Newman & Levy 2013; Olsson & Viscovi 2013; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013).

Other studies focus on the characteristics of the conversations going on between users (e.g., Freund 2011; Dinkopolous & Naaman 2011; Donai & Nofal 2012; Ruiz et al. 2011; McCluskey & Hmieslowski 2012; Nagar 2011; Paskin 2010; Singer 2009), often based on an interest in conversational quality or interactivity. From a methodological standpoint, these studies are often quantitative, describing the presence of various characteristics in user comments. These studies usually conclude that the quality of the conversation is quite low, displaying a high level of conflict and polarization. However, other studies suggest that user comments may serve alternative purposes that also have a value (Aharony 2012; Winsvold 2013), for instance to clarify lines of division in political arguments.

In this dissertation, the results discussed in this section are seen as evidence that many interesting aspects of user participation pertaining to news have been illuminated by existing research. We are indebted to this research for our current state of knowledge. However, going forward, research on user practices would also benefit from new perspectives that complement those emphasizing technology and producers, in particular, perspectives that focus on placing user practices in their contextual spaces, spaces which are – themselves – structured by producers.

2.2.2 Participatory practices and online news

Since users’ ways of interacting with news differ across different types of news (cf. Abdul-Mageed 2008; Almgren 2012), it cannot be taken for granted that the characteristics of user interactions can be generalized from one type of setting to another. This is why it is argued
in this dissertation that the objects of study (news sites) need to be approached with contextual factors in mind. This requires a focus on how users are permitted to participate, with attention to detail as regards various types of news and contextual circumstances, i.e., the newspapers from which the users’ participatory practices have emerged. The conditions of participatory spaces set the boundaries for user practices. In this dissertation, these parts – (1) spaces for participation, and (2) participatory practices – are studied coherently using a design that focuses specifically the analytical connection between the two.

Existing research on user practices and online news usually focuses on the features for participation and the characteristics of the users and their contributions. When it concerns how users interact with different types of news through comments (Abdul-Mageed 2008; Weber 2013), research shows that users tend to comment on news depending on the category of the news in question, but that contextual differences matter as well. In the Swiss context, news factors seem to predict comments, at least in samples with political news (Weber 2013). In the Middle East (Abdul-Mageed 2008), news covering international relations and political and military violence receives the most comments. On a local Swedish news site, news covering politics, health care and local news about change in the area was most frequently commented on (Almgren 2012). On Swedish national news sites, news about politics and health care have been shown to encourage comments on newspapers’ Facebook pages as well (Larsson 2016). News covering the economy seems to engage users to comment differently in different circumstances. In Larson’s national Swedish context, users show an interest in commenting on economic news, whereas users in other settings have shown a disinterest in doing so, as well as on commenting on sports news (Almgren 2012; Bastos 2014; Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel & Olmstead 2010).

In several studies (Almgren 2012; Abdul-Mageed 2008; Weber 2013) users preferred proximity, in the sense that regional and national news were commented on, rather than news that was more distant. The presentation of news on the site also seems to make a difference for how users comment (cf. Abdul-Mageed 2008; Weber 2013). In addition, users interact with news in different ways through different channels (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2012), and it seems as if commenting on a news site is preferred when the news has serious and conflict-ridden characteristics, whereas sharing news in a personal network (i.e., sharing news through email) is preferred for more consensus-oriented news content. Thus, users’ sets of interest impact on how they interact with news. Swart, Peters, and Broersma (2016) find five media repertoires among users (regionally oriented, background oriented, digital, laid-back and nationally oriented news use). Users tend to interact with content that they “fancy” and “care about” by commenting and passing them along (Green & Jenkins 2011; Tenenboim & Cohen 2015). However, this is not necessarily the same thing as the users concurring with content. On the contrary, it seems as if users who comment on news perceive that the news that matters to them is inconclusive in some way, since they feel the need to complement it with their own ways of expanding the issues at hand (cf. Almgren 2012; Morrison 2017).

Demographics also matters when it concerns how users interact with news (cf. Diakopoulos & Naaman 2011; Freund 2011; Fröhlich, Quiring & Engesser 2012; Levy & Newman 2014; Nagar 2011; Olmstead, Mitchell & Rosenstiel 2011). Users who engage with the news seem to have a lot in common with what is known about early adopters in general (e.g., Klümpel, Karnowski & Keyling 2015). Users who comment on the news are more often male than female and they have higher levels of education, income and interest in politics than the general population. They are identified as middle age (43-46), on average, which might not seem so surprising given the demographic characteristics of news-
users in general (cf. Freund 2011; Nagar 2011). Facebook is used primarily to interact with friends in one’s personal social network, whereas there is a preference for discussing news in settings where the users can more easily maintain anonymity (Costera Meijer & Kornelink 2015). The use of Twitter to communicate more elite-leaning perspectives has been noted repeatedly (cf. Engesser & Humprecht 2014; Berglez 2016). In addition, those who tweet news are often young people (18-29) from urban areas who have an interest in politics (Bastos 2014). Tweeting news also seems to be a practice that prioritizes national rather than local issues (Park, Ko, Lee, Choi & Song 2013).

2.3 Theoretical reflections

The previous sections described the research field relevant to this study, and the subsequent ones (2.3.1 – 2.3.5) outline theoretical reflections on the links between participation and media and between participation and civic cultures, the dimensions of civic cultures, approaches to spaces and practices in existing research and, finally, the approach to spaces and practices used this work.

2.3.1 Participation in research related to media and communication

The research on engagement and participation is wide and spans over several disciplines. Within media and communication research, work with an interest in the connection between people and media has been directed both towards the connection between media and citizenship, focused on participation related to formal politics (cf. Marsh & Kaase 1979, 42), and towards a comparatively inclusive view of what participation is as regards social and cultural aspects (cf. Miegel & Olsson 2013, 6). Existing research illustrates a variety of views concerning whether participation is about rational political choices and hard news content or about a multitude of everyday realms where people engage by becoming active, in the sense that they create something and share it with each other (cf. Calhoun & Sennett 2007; Carpentier 2013; Gauntlett 2011; Green & Jenkins; Marsh & Kaase 1979; Miegel & Olsson 2013). The structure of the places where participation occurs also must be taken into consideration. Spheres for participation are different both regarding the distinctiveness of their borders as well as how they relate to each other, and are probably better described as liquid rather than solid in form (Fornäs 1995; Dahlgren 2009).

Since issues related to user participation have been important throughout the history of news media, the emergence of internet and new technology has raised questions about how user influence will evolve (cf. Lundell 2002; Denze 2003). These questions coexist with a wider discussion about whether internet promotes or hampers participation (cf. O’Reilly 2005; Anderson 2006; Olsson 2013). Arguments claiming that the internet created fundamentally new opportunities for participation tend to focus on the multiplicity of technological functions that now are available to far more people and that this multiplicity should confer an intrinsic power to promote participation. However, when looking at various actual settings where user participation potentially can occur, it seems as if it cannot be taken for granted that a participatory potential is actually realized (cf. Bennet & Segerberg 2013; Buskqvist 2007; Domingo et al. 2008; Olsson 2013).

User participation in connection to news has been associated with concepts such as participation, engagement and spheres offering deliberative opportunities to the public (cf.
Domingo et al. 2008, 326; Levy & Newman 2014, 73; Springer, Engelmann & Pfaffinger 2015, 798-800). In a wider sense, user participation has been identified as important for enabling people to learn to be more effective when performing participatory practices (Livingstone & Lunt 1994). As concerns the link between participation and user comments, the latter have been ascribed a participatory potential they have not yet obtained, which is particularly important given how common they are (cf. Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Manosevitch 2011). User influence can, to some extent, be realized when comments are used by journalists to find stories to pursue (cf. Harrison 2010), but it has also been suggested that political and financial interests have abused and undermined the deliberative aspects of commenting (Manosevitch 2011).

User comments have also been considered important as a hybrid construct since they allow users to interact both with the news and with other users (Abdul-Mageed 2008). Factors such as level of anonymity, moderation and registration procedures (Nagar 2011) can affect the characteristics of comments, as well as how the comments section is presented to the audience (Abdul-Mageed 2008), although contexts vary (Pöyhtäri 2014). It has been argued that since news comments appear next to content with high visibility, it can reflect public sentiment with impact (Nagar 2011). However, it is not self-evident that commenting users can represent the population, since commenting differs across the population, for instance with regard to educational level. In addition, the practice of commenting seems to be uncommon among the Swedish population (cf. Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast 2015; Nygren & Leckner 2016) when compared to, for instance, urban Brazil, Spain and Italy (cf. Levy & Newman 2014). This is true despite the fact that a number of conditions in Sweden would seem to facilitate news practices such as these. In the Swedish media landscape, professionally produced newspapers have played an important role as a space where user participation can take place (e.g., Lundell 2002). There has been both an abundance of various newspapers and a historically high level of readership, now complemented by widespread access to internet (e.g., Findahl & Davidsson 2015) and online news (Hedman 2009). All these factors would seem to create a fruitful setting for comparative analysis.

2.3.2 Participation and civic culture:
Focusing on spaces and practices

Research on participation and civic cultures emphasizes many issues, two of which (spaces and practices) are specifically in focus in this study. Dahlgren (2009) suggests that it might be fruitful to approach how people (as citizens) influence their surroundings through cultural theory, rather than looking at the merely legal implications of citizenship. This wider approach suggests that we should focus on the conditions and circumstances comprising what people do, and, in particular, what they do in relation to media (here, the news media in particular). This approach presupposes in a wide sense that people can see themselves participating, that engaging is perceived to be worthwhile both from a rational argument perspective and for emotional reasons (Dahlgren 2009, 102). Actions do not occur in isolation, but within a kind of framework that can both facilitate and impede participatory practices in various ways.

Various sources influence how people perceive things to be and their views about how things ought to be. Inspiration comes from an array of social structures (i.e., group settings, power relations etc. see Dahlgren, 2009, 105). We may not always be fully aware of what we bring into and take away from our social relationships, even if they are ‘...guiding and
informing action, speech, and understanding, while offering affordances “out there” – concrete possibilities for action, communicating and meaning making” (Dahlgren 2009, 103). From this view, given that culture is something that is continuously changing, it should not be regarded as behaviouristic or deterministic. Since people have agency, culture should be viewed as something that points towards an orientation, one with potential options that may or may not be realized. Hence, civic cultures shape the realm of possibilities within people’s minds, (Dahlgren 2009, 104). Necessary preconditions include the existence of a democratic inclination in people, manifested in structures and processes and shaping a balance between rights and obligations. Media affect civic cultures “…via their form, content, specific logics, and modes of use…” (Dahlgren 2009, 105). Since media use often takes place within the realm of what is private, what happens there prepares people for what they do in public. Civic cultures display both strength and vulnerability, they can manifest themselves in unlikely places, as well as dissolve rapidly if circumstances are not favourable. However, viable civic cultures are needed for democracy to work. Thus, in that sense it is better that they exist than that they do not. In addition, they are empirical, since they can be studied by focusing on how things change and specific contextual settings comprising the people within them.

2.3.3 The dimensions of civic culture

Dahlgren (2009, 108) describes civic culture as a framework where multiple aspects that relate to culture can interplay and affect each other through mutual exchange. It is a kind of circuit that exists in a state of constant transformation, because the included aspects are expected to continuously impact on each other. The six aspects underpinning the framework of civic culture are knowledge, values, trust, identities, spaces and practices. Dahlgren’s aim with the framework is to offer a tool to clarify certain empirical entry points for research on what users do in relation to media – the framework proposes studying engagement and participation in actual settings by looking into how different aspects of culture interact in ways that can illuminate what facilitates or impedes what users are able to do.

A certain amount of knowledge is required in order for people to participate (Dahlgren, 2009, 109). One aspect of this concerns media content about recent and important events and subsequent discussions of them. The knowledge required to participate not only concerns what is already known, but also whether strategies are available for people to get information when they need it. Literacy and knowledge of how to use media are important in this regard. It has also become increasingly important to navigate among the claims of different actors about which knowledge is valid, and whether knowledge can be trusted and subsequently appropriated. New media offers new modalities that relate to ways of knowing, not least as different groups use various communicative forms to express themselves, forms that are related to education, cultural settings and power relations.

People must be willing to follow democratic principles otherwise democracy will not work (Dahlgren 2009, 110-111). In practice, this means people must accept that the systems in use are legitimate, even if views on how values should be applied within them can be subject to substantial disagreement. Contrasting views are natural in settings in which conflicts are expected to be handled, but participants’ willingness to abide by the rules of the game is crucial. Values of relevance in this regard concern equality, justice, solidarity, reciprocity and accountability. However, it is important to recognize that having shared values in some matters is no guarantee that antagonisms can be avoided in others. Situations in which minority cultures meet a majority society is identified as one type of situation in
which different democratic values tend to oppose each other. To ease tension, it is important to have procedures that are perceived as foreseeable and consistent.

Trust is beneficial for a democratic society in many ways, while “...declines in trust signal trouble...” (Dahlgren 2009, 112). Of relevance is both citizens' trust in societal institutions, which includes — among others — the news media, and trust among various groups of citizens. Trust comes in different forms — trust in personal relationships and trust in citizens in general, which concerns expectations of conduct. Conflicting interests and identities that are in opposition to each other can taint social relationships with mistrust. However, blind trust can be destructive because it can conceal power struggles. In general, a substantial measure of trust is needed for people to realize their potential, rather than using their energy to guard against and handle their vulnerability in a society where everyone is interdependent. Thus, in democratic societies, working on trust is always an important task: “...the optimal ratio of trust/mistrust has to be worked out according to specific circumstance...” (Dahlgren 2009, 114).

How people shape their identities matters because it impacts on whether people see themselves as participants (Dahlgren 2009, 119). Functioning as a prerequisite for agency, identities are deeply intertwined in the core of civic cultures, when people shape their sense of belonging (or not) with others. Hence, identity is continuously influenced by knowledge, values, trust, spaces and practices, as people enter various settings where participation can be performed.

One aspect of specific interest in this work concerns spaces where participation can occur. For citizens to be able to perform communicative actions, they need access to spaces — i.e., contexts that can host encounters among citizens who meet to talk (Dahlgren 2009, 115). Citizens need to be able to express themselves in ways that can be made visible to others and potentially reach those who represent them. This means that there must be open and public spaces, not only in a practical sense, but also in the minds of people — i.e., these spaces are actually perceived as spaces available for participation. A multitude of online spaces have emerged, and “…from the standpoint of civic cultures, these are of course attractive attributes...” (Dahlgren 2009, 116). At the same time, aspects of physical space have not lost their significance in terms of how issues and audiences relate to events. Governmental politics still focus on the nation, and people are still anchoring their identities in geographical areas in their everyday life. According to Dahlgren (Dahlgren 2009, 116), “…the growing late modern separation between the limit of territorial space and the potentials of communicative space is one of the key tensions that democracy must creatively deal with...”.

Another aspect of specific interest in the work presented here relates to how people actually exercise participatory practices in various constellations, as a way of giving democracy meaning (Dahlgren 2009, 116-118). For this to happen, these practices must become a natural part of what people do. At the same time, since they require certain communicative abilities, they must be learned. Practice can lead to empowerment, not just in terms of voting, but also in terms of people talking about issues that are of concern to them in various types of networks that encompass different types of spatiality and institutions. Stances that comprise issues of concern become the “connecting tissues” for networks and engagement (Dahlgren 2009, 117). Emerging forms of media (technology) then become interesting topics of study, as they give discernible shape to the places where participatory practices occur. In other words, they become objects of study as places where people can talk about issues of concern to them. These practices relate to events that take place in a context in which conditions for participation and the history behind it can be
different. That is also why it makes sense to pay attention to the history of the context of interest when looking into contemporary phenomena. To summarize, using Dahlgren’s framework for civil cultures to study participatory practices, with a specific focus on the interplay between spaces and practices, can help generate a new understanding of mediated participation.

**2.3.4 Spaces and practices in existing research**

This section further elaborates Dahlgren’s focus (2009) related to spaces and practices. It concerns the entanglement of issues related to whether people have access and how electronic communication relates to spatial and social boundaries. Since this line of thought relates to the work presented here as well, the following sections are devoted to discussing it. People need access to places where they can talk and act in conjunction with each other (Dahlgren 2009, 114) in ways that their representatives are not shielded from, so that representatives can (at least potentially) follow what is taking place. Such places for public communication are now, at least potentially, widely available online, related to both the practice of journalism as well as other domains. Regarding the notion of spaces, Dahlgren (2009, 115) discusses the work of several authors, e.g., Thompson (1995), who has written about how public space has changed as regards aspects of spatiality and time in connection to electronic communication. This concerns, for instance, the claim that people are now able to not only transcend the boundaries of time and space, but also that people can use this capacity to reorder social organization. New technology is assumed to extend people’s sense of what exists beyond their personal experiences and to affect their sense of belonging and distance. However, when it concerns the practices users perform within an organizational structure established by producers, what technological changes imply in terms of a shrinking world due to extensive electronic communication is open for discussion.

It has been proposed (Coul dry & McCarthy 2004) that electronic media, social relations, and people’s understanding of space are irrevocably intertwined. Media structures spatial order in various ways, which is also intertwined in processes of the accumulation of capital. This affects the conditions under which media narratives flow and take form in the everyday life of audiences. This suggests that there are connections between materiality, spatiality and corporate organizations that can cover “a range of issues from racism in city planning to the oil-fuelled violent crises that destabilize regions” (Coul dry & McCarthy 2004, 2). Space is dialectical in the sense that we need it both to create a distance between people and to reach out and share experiences rooted in spatial circumstances. Coul dry and McCarthy (2004, 4) argue that spatial sensitivity can help illuminate crucial aspects that are hidden from other analytical techniques.

Barnett and Low (2004), focus on the troublesome connection between the spatial and historical circumstances comprising democracy, and the more recent phenomenon of globalization, and propose that research needs to be inspired by both. It has been argued that it is problematic that the assumptions of democratic theory have relied on political rule within clear-cut national boundaries, while Geography’s stance on space is that it is relational and stratified, constructed and preferably approached on other levels of analysis than the national. Low (2004) suggests that although cities can be regarded as spaces for democracy, it may be hazardous to do so due to complexities that exist. The relationship between cities and other regions is important. Nevertheless, urban areas have been prioritized in research when, in fact, the negotiation involves people with various interests and identities.
People need spaces where encounters can take place, spaces where they can discuss how their lives together should be lived (Hénaff & Strong 2001). Three aspects of spaces are emphasized. First, these spaces do not have fixed characteristics, i.e., they can take various forms. Secondly, these spaces exist because someone has created them. Finally, the one who speaks must be given the opportunity to speak to others within these spaces by someone else, which suggests that the ability to speak publicly is something that is transferred, something worthy of being valued. Spaces can also be private (where someone has the right to control how rules of access should be applied), spaces can be common (without any rules for access), and spaces can be sacred (not intended for people at all).

Public spaces are contestable, since the criteria for access and their legitimacy are usually in dispute (Hénaff & Strong 2001). A public space must be open; it must be visible as a place where people can meet, to those who can potentially enter it. At the same time, space is given its structure through the characteristics that human interactions take. The space is constructed through human attempts to "shape the place and thus the nature of their interactions" (Hénaff & Strong 2001, 5). This space resembles a theatre, since what happens there can be observed, and thereby perceived and shared by an audience. However, the audience can both acknowledge and overlook what takes place on the stage. The actors who communicate expect responses. However, certain types of responses will be considered more appropriate than others. Power holders, in particular, have no choice but to enter the realm of vision, and are thereby expected to take a public stance and to be evaluated by their performance.

Dahlgren's discussion on practices (2009) is inspired by Agre (2004). They argue that there is a need to look more thoroughly into people's practices when they engage in issues that concern them. There are differences in social networks, skills and trust, and these affect how people navigate social relations. These differences have been related to various geographical regions, for instance when Agre discusses Putnam's work on Northern and Southern Italy (cf. Putnam 1992). Conditions that can hinder people from developing skills include the need to use all one's energy to survive, having a skillset from a different context that is not well suited to the context at hand, or the belief that one's actions lack significant meaning (Agre 2004, 203). People need an understanding of the significance of association in various settings in order to exercise practices, but this is often tacit knowledge among those who possess it.

Agre (2004) argues that the image of people gathering peacefully to discuss and decide is a myth that does not have much in common with reality. Agre discusses Habermas' (1989) view on deliberative democracy as a set of guidelines, but argues that the main analytical problem with the ideas of deliberative democracy is a lack of focus on how people are embedded into social structures, "in which any skilled citizen or politician engages before bringing an issue to a public forum. It neglects struggles over the constitutional framework that is supposed to organize deliberation" (Agre 2004, 204). Agre argues that one of the neglected dimensions is scale – that is, the difference between a mass audience and small-group constellations. In the past, venues for people's interactions could be described with such labels. Today, however, venues have become more complicated and diverse, and such distinctions are increasingly blurry and hard to grasp. People cannot always live up to the ideal of placing the interest of the many above one's own, but that does not mean that what people do is not an interesting topic of study. What people perceive to be just or unjust is important to understand, because it relates to people's willingness to participate in working for change.
The skills needed to participate are used in a space where actors with various interests and powers can negotiate their relationship (Agre 2004, 209 discusses Figstein’s work). This takes place in a space where changes are possible primarily in times of disruption, when actors can push their positions forward by communicating in ways that appeal to the identities and beliefs of the specific audience. There is always the risk of being manipulated. It is important that people think that their voice matters, which is something that might be easier to accomplish in settings that are more modest than high-profiled. Creating and sharing arguments is crucial, and it is made possible when people relate to issues of various types and talk to others about these issues within various social constellations. In the research presented here, access to a multiplicity of spaces where issues can be discussed is considered fundamental in order to get people to engage. In this way, internet can be beneficial in other capacities than its ability to enable deliberation, namely, in its capacity to facilitate a multiplicity of opportunities for people to engage in various issues.

2.3.5 Spaces and practices in these studies

In this study, mediated participation is not primarily about technology, but about relational aspects among various actors of particular interest and the practices they perform. Here, mediated participation is considered to be the outcome of the negotiation between (1) actors structuring spaces for participation and the (2) actors exercising participatory practices within these spaces. The outcome of this negotiation can be analysed through the manifest form it is given in the content that is created and shared by users for others to see.

From this perspective, technology becomes a mere carrier (albeit a compulsory one) of the negotiations between actors. How technology is allocated and interacted with – by the actors – illustrates what can and cannot exist. The ways in which technology is put into practice in a setting says crucial things about how users and producers evaluate their encounter. Practices such as users commenting on news and sharing news through social media, can thus work as analytical layers that illustrate the connections between users (through their practices) and producers (through the spaces they structure).

When news content is selected by news producers and presented to users, this selection shapes a producer-structured space that determines what types of events users are able to interact with. This is true because in the contemporary news media system, features for user interactions are allocated in conjunction with news content. In other words, certain boundaries for user participation have already been set when users enter a specific online space for participation in order to perform participatory practices by interacting with content in various ways, through different interactive features. Within such a structure, users also contribute to the structure when they exercise certain practices and decline to perform others, within the conditions already set by the producers of participatory space.

The perspective outlined here emphasizes an analytical focus on actions rather than internal processes such as what users think, feel or express in private. However, this should not be understood to mean that these things are of no interest. On the contrary, what people think and feel is a prerequisite for action. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that people may take an interest in a number of news events, without it necessarily leading them to create or share content for others to see.

This study focuses on the circumstances comprising the moment when users’ engagement is turned into public action, in terms of various types of contemporary user practices within the spaces constituted by online news sites. Mediated participation is approached from a perspective that binds together the analysis of spaces (which are
structured by producers) and practices (that are exercised by users). From this perspective, technology does not conjure up things that do not already exist in actors, but rather illustrates what actors ascribe to technology by their use. The next chapter will therefore outline the research design and elaborate issues related to methodology, methods and material used in the study.
3. METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND MATERIAL

In this thesis, which focuses on multiple entry points, four studies are used to answer the research questions. This chapter begins by describing how the research design ties the studies together. It goes on to discuss the connection between theory and the empirical material and the entry points of the analyses. A list of the four papers in the thesis (two published peer-reviewed articles, one published book chapter and one manuscript) is then provided. Following this, there is a discussion of sampling procedures and methods used to collect material and analyse the data. The chapter concludes with methodological reflections on validity and reliability.

3.1 Methodological approach

Each of the four papers in this thesis contains an analysis based on material gathered from news sites - either a content analysis (papers 1, 2 and 3) or a text analysis (paper 4) (cf. Esaïasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, & Wågnerud 2012; Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf 2002). The analyses are done on the news articles selected for inclusion in the empirical material, the accompanying comments on the news sites and online interfaces (counting functions connected to comment sections and social plugins for sharing news through Facebook and Twitter). The methodology requires objects of study that can capture the connection between users and news producers. How users are granted influence relates to how spaces for participation are structured by producers (with their specific set of values). The approach also includes an interest in audience appropriation of news content, i.e., how people use news.

Since mediated participation is understood here as a manifestation of the connection that practices between actors constitute, it is studied most efficiently by focusing on material that has come into existence without interference from the researcher. This suggests that it is preferable to study what actors do in actual settings, rather than study what they say they do (at least what they say when interviewed by a researcher). What users do and what they say they do is, of course, related. However, it is not necessarily the same thing. The use of and an appreciation for interactive features in the media can be different things (Larsson 2016; Swart, Peters, & Broersma 2016). This has also been recognized in methodological discussions of the pros and cons of using self-reported versus observed user behaviours (cf. Carlsson, Nord, Strömbäck, Wadbring & Weibull 2015; Snickars 2015).

This study benefits from both of these lines of thought, and it should be emphasized that they both contribute important insights as well as raise some issues of concern. This study examines how users actually post comments and share news through social media (or decline the opportunity to do so) under various circumstances. However, it must do so by relying on existing knowledge of different types of newspapers. It also needs to rely on knowledge of interactive features online, what these mean to users, as well as users’ approaches to news. For instance, if users on similar news sites behave substantially differently in the sense that those who are on one of the sites interact with the news to a much higher degree than those on the other, then this is assumed to indicate something important.
In addition, if political news is commented on extensively on one news site, but does not generate much commenting on another, then this can illuminate important contextual aspects of users’ participatory practices.

Classic methods in media and communication research, such as content analyses, text analyses, surveys and interviews, have led to important insights (and will continue to do so). The more recent use of - and methodology surrounding – big data has also raised hopes that it will lead to new insights in this field, although it can be debated if such hopes have been realized (cf. Boyd & Crawford 2012). In this thesis, attention will be paid to aspects relating to this discussion. All methods have specific strengths and weaknesses. The case-specific nature of text analyses can be criticized because of its limited ability to offer generalizations. Content analyses can be criticized because of the intrinsic limitations of predefined categories and the demand for rigor in coding procedures. Interviews can be criticized for creating situations in which the researcher can influence what respondents say – for example, when the respondent is overly keen to please the interviewer – and surveys because they require that respondents actually answer the questions as intended and because of the discrepancy between what people say and do. Big data and the use of user metrics generated and collected online also have weaknesses (Boyd & Crawford 2012). Access provided by commercial entities limit research validity by hindering archiving of data and search procedures that are needed to provide the rigor to which researchers aspire. The study of big data also creates an illusion of data as objective, when, in fact, it has been “cleaned” in ways that can impede distinctions about whether the material was skewed to begin with (Boyd & Crawford 2012, 669). It has also been argued that the study of big data tends to lightly discard existing theory and that it leads researchers to miss the richness acquired by studying individual cases, which increases the risk that they will misunderstand the impact of users’ practices in context (cf. Jungherr 2015).

A news site, with its content, gathers users into a kind of collective – not by being cohesive, imprinted by concordant views, but as an overarching form of analytical unit constituting the venue where participants meet. The spaces for participation that news producers structure permit users to contribute content in various ways that pertain to the meanings that content carries, as presented by the producers. The users can both contest and concur with the shape of this permissive space. From this perspective, the content is the core that ties users and producers together. This also means that user interactions should not be treated as if they exist independently from the news content from which they originated, nor should user practices be analytically torn apart from the news site structuring the space for participation where the participatory practices occur.

3.2 The connection between theory and the empirical material

The spaces for participation that producers’ structure, and the participatory practices that users exercise, shape a venue that, in this study, is illuminated by material from ten Swedish news sites. These are venues where electronic communication has been implemented as features for user participation in various spatial settings (cf. Agre 2004; Barnett & Low 2004; Dalgren 2009; Couldry & McCarthy 2004; Hénaff & Strong 2001; Thompson 1995). User interactions on news sites illustrate the connection between users and producers in ways that would otherwise be quite difficult to capture. User comments in particular have been associated with the more problematic aspects of the connection between news
produced and users (e.g., Diakopolous & Naaman 2011; Ihlebek, Sundnes Lovlie & Mainsah 2013; Paskin 2010; Pöyhtäri 2014). In this work, user practices on news sites constitute an analytical layer between the actors of interest. Table 1 illustrates how the operationalization will be done.

**Table 1 Design and operationalization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions and operationalization</th>
<th>Content analysis</th>
<th>Text analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do the conditions enabling participation,</strong>&lt;br&gt;– i.e., opportunities for users’ participatory practices – differ between</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1a) Various types of online news sites?</td>
<td>This question is answered by comparing whether and how news articles permit comments and sharing news through Facebook and Twitter on news sites affiliated with professionally produced newspapers (national broadsheets, national tabloids, and local rural area newspapers). Article II</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1b) Various types of news (categories and place of the news event)</td>
<td>This question is answered by comparing whether and how different types of news articles permit comments. Article I, Article III</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do users exercise participatory practices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2a) In connection to various types of news sites? (within the conditional space specified by RQ 1a):</td>
<td>This question is answered by comparing how user comments and news shared through Facebook and Twitter are distributed across news sites, for news articles that permit the feature in question. Article II</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2b) In connection to various types of news categories and the location where the news event took place (within the conditional space specified by RQ 1b):</td>
<td>This question is answered by comparing how user comments are distributed across news categories and across news that occurs in different locations, using different news sources. Article I, Article III</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 3) When they express their connection to news producers through participatory practices within participatory spaces?</td>
<td>This question is answered by analysing users’ comments that relate to expressions of (dis)trust towards news media performance. Article IV</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Three entry points

One of the ambitions of this thesis is to approach mediated participation in connection with the news from multiple analytical entry points. One of approaches takes a broad focus in the sense that it maps different news sites (local as well as national) and explains how their users connect to them through features such as commenting and sharing news through the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter (see paper 2, Almgren & Olsson 2016a). Another approach focuses how users and news producers mutually connect to each other through various categories of news content (see paper 1, Almgren & Olsson 2015), within different spaces where participation can take place (see paper 3, the manuscript). Since the user comment feature has been identified as an area of specific contestation between users and news producers, it has been examined in order to illustrate whether and – if so – how it is permitted and appropriated by users across different types of news. Another of the approaches used here focuses on the actual conversations taking place between commenting users (see paper 4 (Almgren 2017)). For this study, a specific news article was chosen due to its extensive user engagement. A text analysis was performed on the comments posted adjacent to a news article chosen from a corpus of 3444 news articles, where the mean number of comments on an article was three (3). The article chosen for analysis received approximately 300 comments, which made it the most commented-on news article. The news article in question (Haimi 2014) describes how a celebrity declined to participate in a public service radio show as an act of support for a radio host well known for publicly stating his anti-racist engagement. The news media performances comprising this event became highly disputed, and values in journalism became the main theme in a heated debate.

3.4 The four publications in the thesis


3.5 Sampling

The sample includes news sites affiliated with broadsheets as well as national tabloids, big city newspapers and small rural newspapers, thus ensuring variation in circulation and visit statistics. The material was collected on separate occasions: a smaller sample in 2012 (from the news site *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, which was used in the research presented in article 1) and a larger sample in 2014 that was used for articles 2, 3, and 4). One goal was to do an initial mapping using newspapers which offered users a range of different ways of interacting with news. In line with existing research, the analysis showed that – at the time (i.e., 2014) – comment sections were common, as were social plugins for sharing news on Facebook. Other features for user-generated content existed, but were too rare to be of interest in this research. This is because the analysis requires a substantial amount of material in which the venues between users and news producers can be studied comparatively.

The big city national newspapers *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* were chosen because they are Sweden’s leading broadsheet (morning) newspapers, and because they are big-city presses in terms of the circulation size of their paper editions (Sundin 2011). *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* were chosen as leading national tabloids. Most news sites in Sweden are affiliated with rural newspapers (cf. Hedman 2009; Sundin 2011), and there are few national news sites. It should be noted that exact circulation figures for *Aftonbladet* have not been publicly available since 2012, and, therefore, data reported for that newspaper are based on Professor Staffan Sundin’s longitudinal calculations and estimations (cf. Sundin 2011, 2013). Since the sample is intended to offer points of comparison, circulation figures and news-site visit statistics are of interest. There are some differences between the news sites that should be mentioned. At the time when the data was collected, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Aftonbladet* had a small share of content behind a pay wall, as part of their so-called *plus service*. *Svenska Dagbladet* applied a frequency-based pay wall that was activated when the visitor had accessed 25 articles during a single month.

Local and regional newspapers play an important role in how the public sphere is constituted in Sweden, although rapid change is underway. Several of the sites/newspapers that Hedman (2009) and Sundin (2011, 2013) listed separately around 2010 have since been brought together under fewer labels (i.e., news sites). The larger sample is described in detail in paper 2 (Almgren & Olsson 2016a). In a global perspective, the Swedish news media market is small in terms of circulation and audience. However, in addition to the fact that newspaper readership in Sweden is high, the Swedish news media landscape is of particular interest because the level of internet access and use of ICT in Sweden is very high (cf. Findahl & Davidsson 2015; Weibull & Wadbring 2014). News sites affiliated with professionally produced newspapers are still (comparatively) abundant (Hedman 2009) in Sweden. Thus, they have a strong impact on the Swedish media system, where newspapers have been an important source of information for a large share of the population for a long time. Sweden also has a high level of language literacy (Grotiuschen, Buddeberg, Koch et al. 2016). In addition, it is an old democracy where both men and women have had the vote since 1921 (Riksdagen 1916), and where voter participation in elections is high (SCB 2014). Membership in voluntary associations is also high in Sweden (Curtis, Grabb & Baer 1992). Thus, in sum, there are a number of factors suggesting that Sweden has many traits that are conducive to active participation on news sites (cf. Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, & Wagnerud 2012), which makes it a good case for studying user participation and online
news. Given the beneficial conditions found in Sweden, it seems reasonable to assume that if user practices do not occur here, they are unlikely to occur in less propitious settings.

### 3.6 Method for collecting the material

The following process was used to collect the material. First, the time required to collect the material was estimated by recording the screen while scrolling through the content of the news sites and saving it as video files with appropriate software (i.e., Camtasia, see https://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html). The technological requirements needed to perform this procedure efficiently were: (1) fast broadband connections, (2) computers at the high-end of the consumer range in order to quickly record video files, and (3) extensive and reliable external storage capacity. A 3-week time plan was drawn up, with dates and time slots for each news site's material randomized in advance in order to control for time-related factors. The age of the material was controlled for (no material older than three days was included in the analyses), as was duplicate versions of news articles. The material was also filtered in terms of content (i.e., sponsored material, blogs and editorial columns were distinguished from regular news articles). Thereafter, the material was systematized by separating video clips into units of analysis comprised of single news articles and adjacent user-generated content visible through the interface. This was done using software commonly used for qualitative analysis of video and sound (i.e., Transana, see transana.org).

The coding of the main sample resulted in almost 3,500 news articles across nine news sites, all of which were subsequently analysed using IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel. For the analysis performed in paper 4, additional software (i.e., Adobe Photoshop) was used to transform the news article and all its subsequent user comments from the originally collected video into a bitmap file. After that, the image was turned into a pdf-file (using Adobe Acrobat) for easy viewing, and then turned into editable text to facilitate thematic analysis with an OCR-scanning software (i.e., Microsoft OneNote).

### 3.7 Methods for data analysis

In this thesis, close readings were performed on news texts and accompanying elements in the interfaces of the news sites: comment sections and features for sharing news through Facebook and Twitter. Studies 1, 2 and 3 work analytically with predefined categories to identify the content characteristics of the news articles, while the analysis performed in study 4 adopts a slightly more grounded approach to search for themes in the users’ comments.

The complete codebook for the content analyses can be found in the appendices to this work, and the variables are described in greater detail in the articles. One set of variables specified whether features for user participation were allocated to each news article. Another set of variables specified the number of user interactions for each feature. The variable used to code the news articles into news categories initially required its own analytical work. The categories that news organizations themselves use to group their news articles are not appropriate, because different news organizations categorize their news content differently (which effectively undermines any attempt to conduct comparative research without first resolving the issue of how to categorize the news). The individual category pertaining to a news article was determined by looking hierarchically for the
dominant theme in the news text. Thus, if no news theme could be identified in the headline, a search was made through the introduction, and if the news theme was still unclear, the search continued in the running text. If several themes were identified in a section, the most prominent was coded. If no suitable category was found, the article was coded as “Other.”

During the first pilot coding process, it became clear that users engaged strongly in issues related to the school system and health care. During this period (2012-2014), privatization in the welfare sector was a salient issue in the news. Several of the other news categories that emerged during test coding were probably made visible because the procedure included local news sites, in contrast to the major focus of research in this field, which is big national newspapers. The inclusion of local sites was intentional, and, in a way, can be seen as a response to calls for such research (see for instance Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa 2010). The construction of the variables was done by going back and forth between existing research and grounded coding procedures. The variable for coding news categories is used in papers 1 and 3. The news categories identified were: Politics; Economy; Crime; Accidents; Sports and club activities; Entertainment and the arts; Working life; Science/technology; Health care; Education and child care; Environment, climate and outdoor life; Family and the home; Infrastructure; Issues of change and safety in local public spaces; Migration, ethnic minorities and integration; Human and legal rights, freedom of speech, democracy and media performance; and Other. Several initially distinct categories turned out to be relatively similar to each other, and were thus merged in the articles (cf. the codebook and the articles).

In the study that maps features for user participation (paper 2), news producers from various types of news sites and users’ practices like commenting and sharing news through Facebook and Twitter are examined. This implies, on the producer side, an exploration of the similarities and differences across various news sites, and, on the user side, an exploration of how users exercise different practices in conjunction with different features for user participation on different news sites (i.e., Aftonbladet, Arbetarbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Laholms Tidning, Nerikes Allehanda, Norrköpings Tidningar, Svenska Dagbladet, Västerbottens-Kuriren).

One of the studies (paper 3) focuses on the local contextualization of producers and users of the news. How news producers and users relate to local issues, events and various groups of actors is important here, which is why one of the variables measures the distance between the place where the news event occurred and the place of publication of the specific news site where user participation takes place. Google Maps was used to distinguish between some of the proximity values of the variable (i.e., Global, Western world, European, Scandinavian, National, Regional, and Local).

The text analysis (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wägnerud 2012) focuses on users’ comments posted adjacent to the news article with the most comments (paper 4). A trial-and-error process was required to arrive at an appropriate way to analyse this material. The method needed to work as a selection tool to choose relevant dictums from a large and contentious material. This cannot be done without ethical considerations about how actors’ arguments relate to polarization and xenophobic views. The analysis had to be capable of capturing and separating out the antagonism relevant for this particular study from the material as a whole, while being open-ended enough to capture themes that emerge from the material. The analysis has elements of what is usually in focus in discourse analysis (e.g., identities, claims of legitimacy, etc.). It also includes elements that are primary concerns in the analysis of arguments (e.g., premises and the ways in which arguments are phrased), and elements of interest in social network analysis (e.g., thematic relationships between nodes.
for instance, polarization). The study uses the notion of objectivity for operationalization (Westerståhl 1972), and its components of truth, relevance, impartiality and neutral presentation for selecting and categorizing dictums for the thematic analysis. The material is divided into separate expressions of trust and distrust towards professional media practices, exemplified by users’ expressions of approval or disapproval. An analysis of the thematic structure of similarities and differences is performed in order to develop a summary of the various themes present in the material, and the relation between the results and the notion of objectivity is discussed. The approach is elaborated in greater detail in paper 4, see specifically Figure 1 “Contextualizing users’ trust in news media performance: A three-step analysis.”

3.8 Discussion of methodology

This study’s focus on analysing content from multiple news sites requires devoting attention to how news sites organize their content, in order to prepare the material for analysis and to ensure that it is carried out consistently. The most prominent challenges are discussed in this section. Archiving online material requires a degree of both technological craftsmanship and genre awareness. News sites host a lot of content other than regular news (e.g., sponsored material, editorial columns, chronicles and blogs written by journalists, politicians and private citizens), and not all of it is relevant to include in the analyses. This is not to say that the variety of content is of no interest, but the diversity of the material requires the development of selection criteria that work consistently on all the news sites in the comparative analysis. Some distinctions were particularly time consuming (i.e., the distinction between, on the one hand, journalistic material covering travel and product reviews within home technology and lifestyle, and, on the other, sponsored or other commercial material about these topics presented to resemble news). Content itself does not necessarily clearly indicate which is which. On the contrary, the coder must be vigilant in order to properly identify the sender and analysis units correctly, so that material that is actually advertising is not mistaken for news.

Issues related to time became an important feature of the criteria used to select material. For instance, if data from multiple sites are to be collected, dates and times of data collection must be randomized to ensure that data from one news site is not always collected in the morning, and data from another always in the afternoon. This is important because when data is collected influences the amount of time users have had to interact with the news. In addition, many news sites apply a time limit of three days for posting user comments, while features for sharing news through social media lack equivalent restrictions. This needs to be controlled for, so that the user features for sharing news through social media do not inaccurately exaggerate the differences between shared news and commented news. Moreover, the length of time that content remains prominently located on the news sites varies. Some sites keep material for several months or even years, while others retain it for only a few days. If the research being conducted includes using comparative approaches to study levels of user interactions on various news sites, then variation in how long different sites keep material visible must be controlled for. Otherwise, news sites that keep more old material would misleadingly be accredited with higher levels of user engagement than news sites that replace material more frequently. Two variables were used to solve this problem. One identified the date the material was collected, while the other identified the date of publication. If necessary, the analysis units with the appropriate age – if they were
collected during the same month – can then be quickly identified using a command in SPSS (e.g., VariableCollectionDate - VariablePublicationDate), assuming that the dates are formatted appropriately – for instance as 20140217 and 20140214 (the first four numbers representing the year can be excluded). The criteria for including analysis units were set so that material more than three days old was excluded from the analysis. If the same article appeared several days during the three-day limit (which it usually did), then the latest version within the limit was used in order to ensure consistency.

Another methodological problem was multiple versions of the same article. This might, of course, be a strategy of news producers, but it also seemed as if the news sites’ Content Management Systems (CMS) were malfunctioning, in the sense that identical material could appear multiple times even within a single list, for instance, Most read articles. Duplicate versions require strategies to avoid having the same material included in the analysis multiple times. This was resolved by making the headlines of news articles a searchable string variable. Microsoft Excel has a function that auto-fills entries as text, and the researcher can use it to be alerted if a specific headline already exists in the material. Without such strategies, reliability would be at risk, because news content that is already prominent due to the interface of the news site would have an exaggerated influence in the analysis of both what types of content news producers publish and what types of news users interact with.

How to construct variables requires substantial attention. News producers’ own categorizations cannot be used in comparative research, because producers differ both in what they publish and how they categorize different types of content. For example, one news site might have an abundance of opinion pieces, while another news site has very little. This must be addressed by the criteria applied to analysis units and variables, if not, results about user practices will be skewed. Test coding a small number of items (approximately 100) from each news site usually reveals such issues, but if similar unforeseen problems are uncovered later in the coding procedure, it is crucial that the material has been archived in such a way that adjustments in the coding scheme can be made relatively easily. Without the test coding procedures and the visual archives showing how the news sites appeared to the users at the time, the problems of duplicated, outdated and genre-violating material would not have been recognized, and thus, not possible to control for.

Reflexivity is important, because the construction of categories must be strongly anchored in the original material. Some news categories that turned out to be prominent have been emphasized in existing research (cf. politics and the economy, see, for instance, Hadenius and Weibull (1978)). However, the test coding procedure revealed that there are news categories that generate substantial user engagement that previous research does not usually emphasize. The focus of existing research has often been related to news value or the political domain of news coverage preceding elections. Such categorizations are not sufficient for the research presented here, because several of the categories are too broad to use on the empirical material. One example is that in existing research, welfare issues are often incorporated into very wide categories. Issues related to health care and the educational system are grouped in ways that do not offer sufficient precision to capture the distinctions that users make when interacting with news. This is why the construction of categories had to emerge from a combination of knowledge about existing news categories and test coding procedures. This process made it possible to identify consistencies and discrepancies of interest.
Tests of reliability (Hayes & Krippendorff 2007) were performed on all content analyses (Krippendorff 2004), by recoding at least >100 analysis units and checking for consistency. All measures exceeded critical values. The variables with the highest measures of reliability were those gauging the presence/absence of features for participation and the number of user interactions (1.0 or very close to it), which is to be expected, since these variables involve simply recording numbers visually acquired from news articles in the database. Variables identifying the news category and place where the news event occurred had slightly lower measures of reliability, which is also to be expected, since texts require more interpretation to determine what is salient. The variable distinguishing the place where the news event occurred from the newspapers’ place of publication had a measure of reliability close to the news category variable, even though these measures were collected using Google Maps. The slight discrepancy between the two coding procedures might be due to the time that passed between the first and second date. Roadwork carried out between the two dates might have shortened or prolonged driving time. Google might also have changed the algorithm between coding dates. Although all measures were well above critical values, it is worth noting that using externally-generated measures of data does not necessarily mean that measures lack discrepancies.

The approach used in this study requires large samples and a multiple case study design, as well as an awareness that online user data tends to display power law distributions (cf. Singer 2009). This means that the material tends to contain a substantial number of analysis units without—or with few—user interactions, while a smaller number of analysis units contains an abundance of user interactions. This means both (a) that the number of analysis units needs to be at the upper end of statistical conventions, and (b) that the results should be interpreted with some caution, in the sense that it is primarily the prominent or reoccurring patterns that should be emphasized when discussing the results. Another thing to consider is that there might be intertwining restrictive practices that affect the measurement of user practices. For example, when measuring user participation, is it problematic that comments are moderated out, thus leaving the impression that there was lower interest among users to participate than was actually the case? Diakopoulous and Naaman (2011, 3) examined a data extraction from a commenting system and found that most comments are permitted (approximately 83%), and approximately 4% are deleted. An additional 13% of comments were hidden because they were posted from blocked users. In another study (Singer 2009), 1.5% of the comments were deleted because they were judged to be abusive. Four news themes have been identified as particularly controversial: immigration, gay marriage, crime and welfare (Diakopoulous & Naaman 2011), which makes it reasonable to assume that comments that are deleted primarily cluster around these themes. These results suggest that even if news producers, in their roles as moderators, remove some comments, it would be misleading to suggest that this applies to a major share of the comments.

Throughout the research process, it has been noted that producers remove material on news sites (for instance, from comment sections) without leaving any information about the fact that something has been taken off. This is yet another reason why researchers need to keep their own copies of the material. This ensures that they avoid the risk that the material will be permanently lost or that its continued existence (and control over it) is wholly in the hands of commercial entities. Overall, the study has required paying considerable attention to the advantages and disadvantages of various methodological procedures. One concerns the (labour-intensive) process of collecting the material as described in this section, compared to methods where webpages are crawled for collecting metadata. This issue was particularly salient in light of the fact that a vast amount of material on the news sites did
not meet the criteria for an analysis unit. Although collecting metadata might have produced interesting results, it seems as if the concerns that Boyd and Crawford (2012) express regarding big data is particularly valid when researching user practices pertaining to online news.
4. USERS AND PRODUCERS: ONLINE NEWS AS MEDIATED PARTICIPATION

This chapter focuses on the results of the research. First, in section 4.1, we look at how the conditions for mediated participation – in terms of opportunities for users to engage in participatory practices – differ across various types of online news sites (RQ 1a) and various types of news (RQ 1b). Section 4.2 looks at how users exercise participatory practices on various types of news sites (RQ 2a) and, in connection to various types of news (RQ 2b). Section 4.3 discusses how users express their connection to news producers (RQ 3).

4.1 Enquiring about the conditions comprising spaces for mediated participation

How do the conditions comprising participation – in terms of opportunities for users to engage in participatory practices – differ across various types of news sites and various types of news?

4.1.1 Online news sites as spaces for participation

In the article, Almgren and Olsson (2016a), show that although features for user participation might be technologically present on news sites, the ways in which producers make them available for user interactions differ across various types of technological features, as well as across various types of news sites. Producers allow users to interact with news on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but users’ opportunities to comment on news articles on the news site’s own interface are much more restricted. Thus, the comment feature, which, for so long, has been identified as the most common way for users to interact with news, now seems to have been overtaken by the news-sharing features of social media. The conflicting views that producers have about the value of user contributions seem to guide producer practices in a direction that leads to the decline of the user comment feature, as if news producers now want to distance themselves from user comments, whereas there seems to be growing acceptance of the benefits of social media news sharing instead.

4.1.2 News content as spaces for participation

This section first looks at research question (1b), enquiring about how the conditions comprising participation – in terms of opportunities for users to engage in participatory practices – differs across different types of news categories.

Various types of news articles are published on news sites. Some permit users to participate through features for user-generated content, while others do not. As shown in Almgren and Olsson (2016a), such differences are most pronounced as regards the user comment feature. Thus, this feature is a particularly interesting object of study to analyse the connections between the participatory spaces that producers structure and the participatory practices that users exercise.
The study by Almgren and Olsson (2015) addresses these research questions, and the subsequent study, Almgren (manuscript), studies these research questions using a larger body of empirical material, and also pays more attention to issues of spatiality. About the latter, the study explores the significance of the place where the news event occurs relative to the place where the newspaper is published.

The Almgren and Olsson (2015) article identifies two types of restrictions related to categories of news. The first is the general selection of news (gatekeeping), which makes certain categories of news articles more common than others are. Second, the extent to which news categories are open for users to comment on varies. As regards the first type of restriction, the presence of different news categories on the sites, the empirical analysis shows that the most common news categories relate to crime, sports and club activities and entertainment and the arts. Regarding the second type of restriction (spacekeeping), certain news categories are more often closed to user comments, in the sense that individual news articles lack the user comment feature. This is primarily the case for news about crime and accidents. Several news categories are comparatively rare. Thus, users’ opportunities to comment on the news is restricted both in the sense that many news categories are scarce, but also in the sense that the user comment feature is disabled more frequently on certain news categories than on others.

News producers primarily offer users the opportunity to comment on light news, for instance news articles about sports and entertainment, which are not the categories of news that users choose to extensively comment on. The poor alignment between producers and users is illustrated both in how various news stories are selected (i.e., gatekeeping) but also by the fact that certain types of news are accompanied by a comment section more often than other types (i.e., spacekeeping, see Almgren & Olsson 2015, 5-6). News covering crime and accidents is usually not open for user comments, which might be related to ethical guidelines relevant to journalism, which states that caution should be exercised when the news concerns victims or perpetrators (cf. Almgren (2017) with Almgren & Olsson (2015)).

Existing research suggests that journalists perceive user comments as a risk. In this particular case, it seems reasonable to assume that the recognized risk is that users’ comments might reveal more information about victims and perpetrators than is permitted under the ethical guidelines governing journalists. This suggests that existing value systems flow from the old practices of producers, and that they influence how innovations are implemented (e.g., the comment feature), although this is not necessarily made explicit. It might also explain why producers primarily permit users to comment on light news rather than other types of news, since light news pieces seem less likely to invite clashes between professional ethical guidelines and users’ preferences. It has been suggested that professionals find certain types of news more difficult to handle than others (Diakopolous & Naaman 2011). When reviewing the results in this study, this seems to have very practical consequences for how spaces for participation are structured. However, it is important to recognize that the withdrawal of certain issues from public debate, or the failure to accede to users’ preferences regarding participation, can be understood as a problematic side effect compared to ideals about what news producers ought to provide their users in terms of opportunities for public debate.

In the study by Almgren (the manuscript of the third paper), the results described above recur in two other news sites. However, one of the sites actually did allow users to comment on all news during the period when the data was being collected (early spring 2014). Interestingly, however, the site eliminated all opportunities for users to post comments shortly afterwards. It seems as if the timing of the data collection process made it possible to
capture a context just before a discursive break occurred, one that altered the practices of producers of the news. This study also shows that two of the news sites have aligned their news selection online with the historical and spatial context of their paper edition, emphasizing local and regional news for the users to comment on, the other primarily featuring a national selection of news. How this relates to the ways that users comment on news will be illustrated in the forthcoming sections.

### 4.2 Users exercising participatory practices

How do users exercise participatory practices on various types of news sites and in connection to various types of news?

#### 4.2.1 Online news sites and participatory practices

The article Almgren and Olsson (2016a), shows that sharing news through Facebook is by far the most popular way to interact with news. This finding applies to all types of news sites in the sample, which means that sharing news this way is a user practice that crosses various types of spatiality, local as well as national. It seems as if it is the specific social setting that is appealing—i.e., that people can share news with others who they have chosen to befriend (i.e., Facebook). It is substantially more common (20 times more, to be specific) to share news through Facebook than to comment or tweet news. Tweeting and commenting are more public practices, because users cannot control who sees what they do on Twitter or what they say in comments on news sites, as they can when they chose which friends and acquaintances to be in contact with on Facebook. The use of Facebook is widespread in the population, and users’ activities there are integrated in personal networks, which link people who have similar characteristics. Thus, the sociality of networks of friends and acquaintances is likely to offer a participatory space with a comparatively consensual character. By contrast, anyone can follow anyone on Twitter, and opinions written in the comments section of a news site can, potentially, be read by all other users. Thus, these participatory spaces are likely to be much more heterogeneous and potentially conflict-ridden than a personal network in Facebook.

As regards commenting, the three news sites with the most active users are all local (when differences in the newspapers’ circulation sizes are controlled for). Thus, it seems as though the news content that generates comments tends to have proximal rather than distant characteristics. When it comes to sociality, news discussed in comments sections reaches larger audiences (e.g., the news site’s users, cf. to the Facebook flow of a user), and it is known that the mode of communication in comments’ fields on news sites tends to create opportunities for contrasting views to meet, i.e., a certain level of conflict. Hence, based on the frequency with which users interact with news in this way, it seems as if few of them regard this format as the correct one for saying whatever they want (Almgren & Olsson 2016a, 74). Thus, it can be argued that certain resources and characteristics are prerequisites for users to make use of this public arena: they must trust that their ability to cope and their knowledge suffice in an environment that can be anything but friendly. Research shows that certain factors related to identity formation are associated with commenting practices. For example, several studies have shown that commenting users are more often male than female and that they often have a higher than average level of education and are usually in their 40s (Freund 2011; Nagar 2011). Comparing commenting with older forms of user
participation reveals that it shares a number of similarities with an antecedent form of mediated participation – letters to the editor.

Furthermore, the connection between news producers and users who share using Twitter is different from the connection between producers and users who share news through Facebook. Although Twitter-sharing is widely permitted, the extent to which Twitter is used for this purpose is comparatively modest. When it does happen, it is done in connection with news from big national newspapers. Twitter use in Sweden has been shown to be popular among politicians and journalists, while its use among the general population is quite modest (cf. Findahl & Davidsson 2015; Berglez 2016; Olausson 2016), and it can be argued that Twitter displays a number of elite characteristics. Thus, it is worth noting that the results in this study depict the connection between news producers and users who share via Twitter in a conceptually similar fashion, but in this case linked to the places that are given prominence in tweets (i.e., news from national newspapers rather than local news from more rural ones). This suggests that the relation between users and producers that is enabled by sharing news through Twitter, is actually only realized for events depicted in big city newspapers with a national focus on the news, whereas the relation between users and producers is practically dormant for events depicted in rural area newspapers. This paints a rather expressive image of how the existence of a technological feature, cannot be equated to that of opportunities for participation being brought into actual use.

The results suggest that certain professional roles (e.g., journalists) have internalized the view that Twitter is an appropriate way to communicate. Twitter is quite public, not primarily because of its audience size, but rather in the sense that what is posted is public. The sociality of Twitter is structured so that anyone can follow anyone they choose. Thus, a Twitter user does not have to be allowed into the network by an insider – since it is open and public – although the exchange of communication that take place there can, of course, be exclusive. The user posting messages on Twitter must be prepared for the fact that anyone can choose to follow them, and thus see all activity. In several ways, this resembles the comment section on a news site, and thus similarly requires that participants have a certain level of self-confidence and knowledge. This mode of communication presupposes a measure of fearlessness about diverging values and a capacity to handle potentially conflict-ridden issues.

### 4.2.2 News content and participatory practices

How do users exercise participatory practices in connection to various types of news? The study by Almgren and Olsson (2015) addresses the research question about how users exercise participatory practices in connection to various types of news categories, as does the study by Almgren (manuscript). The latter also examines how the place where a news event occurred in relation to the place of publication impacts on how users exercise participatory practices (i.e., research question 2b).

The research in Almgren and Olsson (2015) shows that users comment extensively on news about local changes in public space, politics and health care. Users are very engaged in issues that they can personally see in their local community and when stories describe aspects of the welfare system (i.e., hospitals, homes care and schooling) that do not measure up to their expectations. Users refrain from commenting on news about sports and club activities and entertainment and the arts. One of the studies (Almgren manuscript), confirms that users comment on the news if it covers local changes in public space and health care, as well as issues of infrastructure, working life, migration, human rights and the environment.
Also in this study, users declined to comment on news about sports and club activities and entertainment and the arts. On one of the news sites, users refrained from commenting on news covering crime. Regarding the impact of place on participatory practices, the results show that users comment on news that is about things that happen at the same place as where the newspaper is published (i.e., local, regional). One news site in the study is affiliated with a local (rural area) newspaper that (nevertheless) focuses on national news. It has a very low level of user engagement. It can also be noted that the strong interest that today’s users have in news about the local community, has substantial similarities with the older user practice of writing letters to the editor.

4.3 How users express their relation to news producers

How do users of the news express their connection to producers through the participatory practices the exercise within participatory spaces?

4.3.1 Users’ (dis)trust towards producers

Almgren (2017) focuses on users’ views about news media performance in connection to the most commented news article in the empirical material. The news article (Haimi 2014) was published in the national tabloid *Aftonbladet*. The article describes how a celebrity (opera singer Malena Erman) expressed anti-racist sentiment and support for a radio host at Sweden’s public service radio (SR) who had been taken off the air for publicly criticizing the radical nationalist political party – the Sweden Democrats – approximately six months before the 2014 election. The event was controversial, which was clearly illustrated by the high level of user engagement it prompted. The comments exchanged among users show (dis)trust of the news media through the airing of conflict-ridden themes related to xenophobia and international solidarity. The themes concern: (a) in what capacity producers of news allow particular actors to express their views in the news, (b) expectations related to the role of media workers in different media genres, (c) whether a representational approach should be applied in media practices, or whether certain content should be excluded, (d) what it means if the political views of journalists diverge from the public’s, and (e) the view that news about crime is characterized by a special type of contestation. In summarizing these results, one interesting finding that sticks out is that spaces and practices are not only a matter of contention between users and producers of the news. Users also cluster into opposing positions, which illustrates a vivid example of the way in which user comments constitute a conflict-ridden mode of communication.
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section uses the concepts of spaces and practices (Dahlgren 2009) as a starting-point for illuminating the dynamic connection between actors (here, both users and producers of news sites), and then goes on to discuss the ways in which this dissertation can contribute to an increased understanding of the study of mediated participation.

5.1 The point of departure of this study

When this project began, existing research related to user comments and mediated participation showed that ideas about the value of user contributions have been in flux throughout history, and that the emphasis on technological features has been substantial, while attention to users and their practices – especially under various conditions – has been less prominent. The various views about the value of users’ participatory practices (cf. Ekström 2011; Ekström, Jüllich, Lundgren & Wisselgren 2011; Livingstone & Lunt 1994; Lundell 2002; Nordberg 2006) relate to an overall interest in social science about the interplay between structure and the influence of actors. Subsequently, this interest came to include expectations and misgivings about internet, and thus also journalism online (cf. Bruns 2008; Deuze 2003; Jenkins 2008; Olsson 2013; O’Reilly 2005; van Dijck, 2009). As regards user participation in connection to the news, features such as letters to the editor and user comments have repeatedly been identified as prominent (cf. Lundell 2002; Domingo et al. 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Manosevitch 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002).

One major focus in existing research is how technological features enabling user participation are integrated with media content online, and what this might mean in terms of qualitative aspects of user participation, often from the point of view of the professional (cf. Deuze 2003; Diakopoulos & Naaman 2011; Enli 2007; Harrison 2010; Paskin 2010; Tenenboim & Cohen 2015; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). The overall impression is that that there is an ongoing tension between the actors involved in the process that leads up to user-generated content on news sites. More specifically, this tension concerns that various actors seem to take different approaches to whether these spaces for participation should be used for different purposes in different settings, viewpoints that can lead professionals to implement restrictions in various ways and users to perform various kinds of practices (cf. Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2012; Pöyhätä 2014; Tenenboim & Cohen 2015). In more recent years, social media has also entered the scene. Facebook and Twitter, for instance, now constitute salient spaces where users can interact with news (Domingo et al 2008; Gerlitz & Helmond 2011, 2013; Hermida, Fletcher, Korrell, & Logan 2012; Kämpel, Karnowski & Keyling 2015; Levy & Newman 2014; Newman & Levy 2013). At the same time, the previously prominent feature of commenting news on news sites now seems to be in decline (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall & Fast 2015). Research on the various ways of interacting with news has also shown that users with different demographic traits seem to interact with news in different ways (cf. Bastos 2014; Diakopoulos & Naaman 2011; Freund 2011; Fröhlich, Quiring & Engesser 2012; Kämpel, Karnowski & Keyling 2015; Levy & Newman 2014; Nagar 2011; Olmstead, Mitchell & Rosenstiel 2011).
5.2 The study’s contribution: Empirical results

As has been discussed, existing research has primarily focused on producers’ views about user contributions in connection to technological features online. Fewer studies focus on other actors involved in practices performed by users, and studies that explicitly analyse the links between various actors in different settings are particularly rare. Therefore, the contribution of this thesis primarily concerns analytically connecting aspects that have tended to be studied separately. In particular, this has been conceptualized as the spaces that producers structure (by allowing and denying various user practices) and the practices that users perform (i.e., how they make use of the opportunities to participate that producers provide) within a media landscape. The results suggest that several news sites must be analysed in order to understand mediated participation and online news, because there is great variation in user-producer relationships. It is risky to analytically tear user practices as objects of study away from the setting in which they have taken place. The research also shows how the notions of spaces and practices can be operationalized in an online interface in order to illustrate a user-producer relationship.

The results suggest that the ways in which user participation play outs depends on the types of news content published in the contextual and spatial setting, in combination with how each specific technological feature is brought into practice. This concerns both how producers structure users’ opportunities to participate and how users actually interact with news. For instance, producers are more prone to allow users to share news through social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter), than to allow them to leave comments on the news site. However, this restrictive tendency with regard to comments is stronger among national news sites than local ones. Users, on the other hand, primarily share news through Facebook, but refrain from sharing through Twitter, particularly on local news sites. Commenting on news and tweeting it seems to be equally rare. However, as regards spatial characteristics of the news, commenting and tweeting tend to go in opposite directions: tweeting news tends to be more of a national user practice, whereas commenting on news tends to be more of a local user practice. The types of news categories that are published and opened up for users to interact with also affect how mediated participation plays out. The news categories that users are most often allowed to interact with through comments are, in fact, the same news that users tend to ignore (i.e., sports and entertainment). The highest levels of restrictions apply to news that is likely to include descriptions of victims and perpetrators (i.e., crime and accidents). When users express distrust towards professional media practices in the comments feature, it seems to be associated with crime news, perceptions of a split between “elites” versus “commoners”, public service versus commercial media, and media regulations, roles, genres and formats. In addition, these users emphasize issues such as whether media practices should facilitate representation or, under certain circumstances, exclude some opinions; whether journalists’ political views might impact on which media practices are performed, and – when it comes to crime news – whether and how crimes are reported and how victims and perpetrators are depicted. The results point to themes that might be useful to consider in future studies of mediated participation in connection to online news.
5.3 The study’s contribution: Theory on spaces and practices

This section discusses the study’s contribution to theory by using the notions of spaces and practices as analytical constructs, which leads to five primary conclusions.

In the first and third paper (Almgren & Olsson 2015; Almgren manuscript), spaces are understood in terms of how producers allow various categories of news to be open for user interactions on news sites (Almgren & Olsson 2015). Three news sites were later chosen for analysis because spaces and practices work in substantially different ways (Almgren manuscript) as regards the publication of various categories of news and the allocation of comment sections. Practices are how users interact with news categories by posting comments in the different settings. The first and third papers emphasize how the actions of users’ and producers can be viewed as two sides of the same coin, and thus must be studied together. They also illustrate both coherence and divergence among users and producers. The difference between the papers is that the first study works as a pilot study, whereas the third one allows for both a more elaborate focus on various spatial and contextual characteristics of the relations between users and producers and functions as a replicative study to the first paper.

The first conclusion is that the results suggest that producers structure spaces for participation adjacent to online news in ways that make user practices more aligned with the professional values at work in the specific news organization. This is similar to examples of structured participation found in historical research about user interaction with the news (cf. Enli 2007; Lundell 2002; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). The news producers in this study emphasize the significance of place by publishing stories of events that are located in places that relate to the location of their audiences. This is true despite the hope that on-line journalism would lead to boundaries being crossed, in the wake of the discussion of the participatory opportunities of internet in general. Among the online news producers who run local rural area news sites, this suggests a tendency to allow users to interact with lightweight news (e.g., news about sports and entertainment), while applying restrictions on user interaction with news that involves depictions of victims and perpetrators (e.g., news on crime and accidents). Implementing restrictive practices is a logical behaviour given that actors legitimize practices by acting in accordance with value systems perceived as appropriate within an institution – i.e., when they encounter interests that seem to work against the perceived interest of the organization, the response is to try to resist/restrict them (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs 1990, 180; Buskqvist 2007; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013). As witnessed after the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011, editors became more vigilant about what impact radical xenophobic content might have on triggering crime and transgressions, and they began applying stricter controls, especially in connection to certain types of news (Hølebek, Sundnes Lovlie, & Mainsah 2013). However, implementing restrictions is not always without risk for an organization. One specific challenge for news organizations (compared to other types of organizations) is that the news media is perceived as having a responsibility to provide opportunity for public debate, which puts particular pressure on online journalism as how they structure spaces for participation.

As regards the user practices that were examined in this study, they are probably most accurately described as modest. When they do participate, users tend to comment on news related to local changes, politics, and health care. These results suggest a second conclusion, which illuminates an important dividing line that relates explicitly to spatiality. In one sense, users display another type of engagement than they are generally given credit for. However, this type of engagement can also be associated with the tendency to engage in (and oppose)
issues particularly intensely if they occur in one’s own neighbourhood, a phenomenon often referred to pejoratively. It has been theorized that electronic communication could potentially lead to a decoupling of spatiality and time. The results of this study suggest that the assumption that people use the capacity of electronic communication to transcend boundaries and reorder social organization needs to take into consideration its subordination to the characteristics of the connection between producers and users in actual settings. The significance of spatiality and context does not seem to have declined. In fact, it seems that users see them as more important, at least as spaces are structured and practices are performed in the empirical material examined here. This directs attention to certain issues related to the discussion about the value of user engagement, in the sense that the spatiality of events continues to be intertwined with user participation. Not only do users – in line with producers – focus on what is close, but they also enhance it even further. This theoretical contribution shows that local news users are a centripetal force, insofar as they emphasize local news, even if they consumed it online.

In the second paper (Almgren & Olsson 2016a, 2016b), how spaces are constructed depends on whether the producers of different news sites permit stories to be accompanied by features for user participation (e.g., comments sections and social buttons for sharing news through Facebook and Twitter). Practices are manifested by how users interact with the news given the various spatial and contextual conditions that different news sites and different technological features create. The comparative approach used here makes it possible to examine mediated participation within a media landscape, through the relation between users and producers. The study’s results support the idea that electronic media, social relations, and people’s perceptions of space are, in fact, irrevocably intertwined (cf. Dahlgren 2009; Couldry & McCarthy 2004).

Sharing news through Facebook or Twitter and commenting on news articles are not interchangeable practices on different types of news sites – neither for producers (who are intertwined with the needs of the news organization) or users (who exist within a flow of narratives that, in various ways, can connect to their everyday life). This leads to a third conclusion. We already know that, in the view of news producers, what is communicated externally is important, and user practices made public constitute one aspect of how the news organization is perceived. However, different types of user practices are not enabled in the same ways. The news producers allow users share news through social media to a much higher degree than they enable them to comment on the news site. Anyone can see the content posted on the online news site. Within social media, however, the audience is limited to the accounts that share news, so responsibility for who can see what content is more blurred. The fact that news producers give users much greater opportunities to share news through social media than to comment on news sites suggests that news producers do not have a problem with this type of editorial responsibility being blurred. In other words, the various ways in which user practices are made public (or not) seem to be one of the explanations as to why spaces for user practices are structured in diverging ways.

Regarding user practices connected to various features of electronic communication, a fourth conclusion is that the way people share experiences also seems to relate to spatial circumstances (cf. Dahlgren 2009; Barnett and Low 2004). Although the issues people engage in can stretch all the way from local to global, user practices seem to be exercised in ways that relate to this dimension. In previous research, the nation has often been the focus. However, a broader approach to spaces in the geographical sense might be necessary, because various places host people with different interests and identities related to aspects of spatiality. Currently, the spaces where people can discuss are in flux (cf. Dahlgren 2009;
Hénaff & Strong 2001). We are talking about spaces that are created by someone who has the capacity to enable others to speak to one another, if conversation is considered desirable. These spaces currently contain a range of characteristics that fall in between the distinction between public and private. In addition, since actors aim to shape spaces by their use (cf. Hénaff & Strong 2001, 5), studying users’ practices make particular sense. As in a theatre, people evaluate what others do and navigate issues that concern them in ways that are related to social networks, skills, trust and geographical regions (cf. Dahlgren 2009; Agre 2004). In times of change, actors aim to advance their own positions. For instance, the historical review showed a move from openness to closure, as influence over content was transferred from users to editors (Lundell 2002). This resembles the more recent development of the user comment feature (i.e., its decline) (cf. Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast 2015). At the same time, this study shows that other practices remain salient (e.g., sharing news through Facebook). Producers and users can develop different views about what spaces should be used for, but it is first when user participation is allowed and exercised that it becomes clear which expectations hold true. For users, different communication practices serve different purposes. Sometimes we talk with our close friends in familiar social networks, in a mode of communication imprinted by anity. The communication that takes place in the comments section on a news site is substantially different. Here, the user cannot choose with whom to interact and who the potentially responding audience members are. From the news producers’ perspective, it would not be surprising if the different modes of communication raise different types of concerns, which, in turn, shape how producers structure the participatory spaces.

In the fourth study, spaces are manifested through the practices that the news media performs in connection to a case chosen specifically because of its high level of user engagement (which takes place on a news site affiliated with a tabloid). This includes, for instance, how news events are depicted and how professional practices (for instance, guidelines about representation and restrictions) are legitimized with various arguments. Practices are manifested by how users respond to media practices through, in this case, user comments. When the criteria for identifying the article with the most comments was elaborated on order to study the connection between users and producers, it was not anticipated that issues related to the transcendence of national identity would be a component. But it turned out to be so, because the most-commented-on article depicted actors with anti-racial engagement taking stances in the media. This also connects the fifth, and final, conclusion with the others. The connection between producers and users on this national tabloid news site also relates to aspects of spatiality. However, when it is manifested by how users express themselves about professional media performance, it is directed towards the tension between what is national (i.e., citizens’ rights) and what is universal (i.e., human rights).

To conclude, if we think of mediated participation as a venue for interaction between news producers and users, what is given salience becomes crucial. Narratives might be made salient both by the actions of new producers (through reporting), and by actions of users (through user-generated content). Hence, both producers and users shape participatory practices, but from different horizons. News articles, as well as users’ comments, are full of statements with claims about identity, values, (dis)trust and knowledge, and they continuously shape the realms of participatory spaces and practices. In addition, each feature for user participation can set specific limits and allowances in terms of mere technology, but when its use is mediated between actors, it becomes a unique participatory space shaped by how users and producers implement it. Tweeting from a national tabloid’s news site seems
to be something entirely different from doing the same from the news site of a local rural newspaper. The papers included in this thesis show how electronic communication and spatiality are intertwined in various ways in the connection between users and producers. Access to a multitude of spaces has been considered important, so from this perspective, limiting the characteristics of spaces seems undesirable. In this study, no solutions can be offered to resolve the problem of how to balance the value of conversation itself with the negative consequences conversation can have for those affected by it. The best that can be offered is help in teasing out some of this tangle, as it presents itself in online news today. Balancing such issues will likely involve increasingly demanding tasks related to the connection between users and producers in conjunction with online news. It is worth mentioning here that, despite the fact that the Swedish setting would seem to provide a fertile environment to encourage user practices pertaining to news, this is not what the results show. For example, the level of user engagement through comments is modest, especially when compared to countries in southern Europe and South America (cf. Bergström 2008; Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall & Fast 2015; Levy & Newman 2014; Nygren & Leckner 2016). This illuminates a subject that remains under-researched: how user engagement pertaining to online news fits into other comparative examinations of the relationship between politics, the media and citizens. It seems as if, in the Swedish media landscape, explanatory factors might be found on both the user and producer side, which might be useful to keep in mind when studying other settings. The aim of this study, to contribute to research about mediated participation, might be useful in a wider sense than in connection to online news, because – at least to some extent – it teases out the influence of various actors. Using the notions of spaces and practices in similar approaches might illuminate new aspects of this field of research.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING


Några år senare, nu som medieforskare, har jag sett att formerna för publikdeltagande i anslutning till nyheter har varierat genom historien. Det har också användarnas inflytande gjort. Ny teknik har varit en del i att publikdeltagande har kunnat göras möjligt, därför kanske det inte är så konstigt att spridningen av teknik ofta fått ett stort fokus i medieforskningen. I denna studie riktas det huvudsakliga intresset istället mot samspellet mellan användare och nyhetsproducenter, och därmed också de olika sammanhang där dessa möts. Möten kan ta plats på nyhetssajter som har sitt ursprung i landsortsspress såväl som storstadspress, i artikelkommentarer eller genom delningar av nyheter via olika sociala medieplattformor, och i anslutning till vissa typer av nyhetsinnehåll mer än andra.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att belysa principer hos medierad deltagande, dess begränsningar, samt hur de möjligheter som finns att delta, faktiskt tas i bruk. Det handlar inledningsvis om att kartlägga de möjligheter användarna ges, samt de restriktioner som sätts för användarnas deltagande. Användarnas praktiker sker inom ett utrymme för deltagande som är strukturerat av nyhetsproducenter. Det handlar också om hur möjligheter som finns att delta faktiskt används, när användare interagerar med nyheter inom det strukturerade utrymmet där de tillåts verka.

Hur möjligheterna för deltagande skiljer sig åt:
(1a) mellan olika typer av nyhetssajter?
(1b) i anslutning till olika typer av nyhetsinnehåll?

Hur användarnas deltagande tar form:
(2a) på olika nyhetssajter?
(2b) i anslutning till olika typer av nyhetsinnehåll?
(3) när användarna själva talar om relationen till nyhetsproducerena
(via deltagande praktiker inom strukturerade utrymmen för deltagande)?

Tidigare forskning
Detta avsnitt börjar med en tillbakablick på hur användare varit delaktiga i medier på olika sätt, och särskilt i anslutning till nyheter. Efter detta riktas intresset mot mer nutida former av användares deltagande, för att därefter illustrera en översikt av olika tankegångar som relaterar till mediert deltagande. Avshutningsvis beskrivs hur de teorier som används, kommer till bruk i detta arbete.


Tankegångarna om användarnas deltagande förändrades dock (Lundell 2002). I tider av krig ökade både efterfrågan och tillgången på nyheter och när utrymmet i spalterna blev en bristvara, förflyttades det användarvskapade innehållet till mer undanskynning positioner. Redaktörens profession utvecklades på så sätt att de blev mer involverade i nyhetsproduktionen. Alltjämt, som tidningarna upplevdes som viktiga, blev partipolitiken mer synlig (Lundell 2002). För att hantera spänningen mellan olika intressenter, blev objektivitet ett uttalat mål (Allan 1997). Konkurrens
mellan tidningarna ökade. Synen på användarna skiftade både hos redaktörer och hos publik. Från att redaktörerna hade betraktat användarskapet innehåll som en självklar del, ökade misstänksamheten mot användare som bidrog med innehåll. Nu var det eliten som skulle upplysa de mindre upplysta.


skackats in i anslutning till en TV-show, väljs ut av producenterna i enlighet med principer för att balansera åsikter, på sätt som liknar ideal om objektivitet när det gäller hur nyheter ska valjas ut och presenteras (Enli 2007). Sådana resultat är av intresse för detta arbete, därför att de föreslår att de värdesystem som finns i ett sammanhang, spiller över på ny teknik när den implementeras, på ett sätt som tor sig ganska oberoende av vad nya funktioner skulle kunna tillåta i teknologisk mening. Det kan med andra ord vara riskabelt att närmare sig frågor om användares inflytande med ansatser som är alltöver fokuserade på själva teknikens utformning, om dessa ansatser inte också tar in betydelsen av den sociala och kulturella kontexten, exempelvis att en och samma teknologiska funktion kan implementeras på mycket olika sätt i olika sammanhang.


När arbetet med denna avhandling inleddes 2012, var ett centralt begrepp i fältet användarskapet innehåll (UGC=User-Generated Content alternativt UCC=User Created Content). Användarskapet innehåll (OECD 2007) har definierats som material med allmän tillgänglighet, innehållande något mätt av kreativitet skapat utanför professionell praktik.


Ett antal studier undersöker användarnas konversation, ofta utifrån särskilda kvalitetskriterier (Freund 2011; Diakopolous & Naaman 2011; Douai & Nefal 2012; Ruiz et al. 2011; McCluskey & Hmielowski 2012; Nagar 2011; Paskin 2010; Singer 2009). Kvantitativa analyser av läsarkommentarer är vanliga, och resultaten visar att användarnas bidrag utifrån de nämnda ansatserna ofta bedöms ha låg kvalitet. Andra studier föreslår att läsarkommentarer kan fylla andra syften för användarna (Aharony 2012; Winsvold 2013), som exempelvis att tydliggöra skillnader mellan olika politiska argument. Det har också argumenterats för att intresset för att mäta rationalitet i konversationer, i själva verket kan maskera makttrender och orsaka att marginaliserade röster tystnar (Moefue 2005).

Nyheterna som mer konflikteorienterat innehåll diskuteras mer i kommentarer på nyhetssajter därför att de erbjuder en högre grad av anonymitet, medan mer konsensusorienterat nyhetsmaterial delas i personliga nätverk bland vänner. Samtidigt valjer användare olika nyheter på menyn (Swart, Peters & Broersma 2016). De interagerar med innehållet som de bryr sig om (Green & Jenkins 2011; Tenenboim & Cohen 2015) men det ska inte förväxlas med att de håller med om vad som sägs, här exempelvis i nyheterna. Tvärtom verkar det som att användare kommenterar nyheter för att de upplever att de är ofullständiga i något avseende, och därför känner behov av att lägga till egna aspekter till det som beskrivs i nyhetsartikeln (Almgren 2012; Morrison 2017).


**Teoretiska reflektioner**


Deltagande och medborgerliga kulturer

Medborgerliga kulturer kan vara både svaga och starka, uppståda på osannolika platser, men försvinna snabbt om de omgivande villkoren är olycksamma. Det är emellertid så att livskraftiga medborgerliga kulturer behövs för att en demokrati ska fungera. Därför är det bättre att medborgerliga kulturer existera än att de inte gör det, och de kan studeras via fokusering på villkoren för deltagande i förändring som omger människor.

**Medborgerliga kulturer och dess dimensioner**


Ett mått av kunskap krävs för att människor ska delta i diskussioner (Dahlgren 2009, 109) i sammanhang där mediemehåll tar upp händelser som upplevs som aktuella och viktiga. Detta handlar inte bara om befintliga kunskaper, utan också om att strategier är tillgängliga så att människor kan skaffa sig nya kunskaper allteftersom behov uppstår. Kompetens om hur man använder språk och medier, är viktiga, men nu mer än någonsin kan olika aktörer framföra anspråk på vilken kunskap som är giltig och pålitlig, vilka förmedlare av kunskap som det går att lita på, och om kunskapen följaktligen lämpar sig att göra bruk av. Nya medier erbjuder nya sätt att få veta saker och människor använder olika medieformer för att uttrycka sig, på sätt som relaterar till utbildningsnivå, kulturell bakgrund och maktrelationer.


Till dit gynnar det demokratiska systemet på många sätt. Utan den får man problem (Dahlgren 2009, 112). Av intresse har, är inte bara medborgarnas grad av tillit gentemot samhälleliga institutioner (som exempelvis nyhetsmedier), utan också medborgarnas tillit i förhållande till varandra. Olika grader av tillit finns i våra personliga relationer, men den riktas också mot andra genom förväntningar på hur människor i allmänhet ska uppträda mot varandra. När intressen står i konflikt kan sociala relationer färgas med misstro. Om det finns en blind tillit, kan människor missa att det finns maktkamper som skulle behöva uppmerksammas. Samtidigt är det så, att om människor ska kunna realisera sin potential, så behöver de ha så mycket tillit att de inte behöver använda sin energi huvudsakligen till att skydda sig gentemot andra som de är omsesidigt beroende av i olika sammanhang.

De satt på vilka människor formar sina identiteter är viktiga därför att de relaterar till huruvida de ser sig sjalva som deltagare (Dahlgren 2009, 119). Om man ska kunna utöva inflytande så behöver man uppleva att man hör hemma i ett sammanhang med andra. Identitet omformas ständigt av kunskap, värdesystem, tillit, utrymmen för deltagande och de praktiker som utfors i olika sammanhang där deltagande kan ske.

I denna avhandling är utrymmen där deltagande kan ske, av sarskt intresse. Om medborgare ska kunna tala med andra, så behövs det mötesplatser där människor kan prata (Dahlgren 2009, 115), mötesplatser som är synliga medborgare emellan, men också potentiellt för dem som representerar


Utrymmen för deltagande och deltagande praktiker i denna studie

I denna studie, handlar meridian deltagande inte främst om teknologi, utan om relationella aspekter mellan aktörer av särskilt intresse, och de praktiker som dessa utför. Meridian deltagande ses här som resultatet av en förhandling mellan (1) de aktörer som strukturerar utrymmet för deltagande, och (2) de aktörer som utför deltagande praktiker inom utrymmet för deltagande. Hur denna förhandling utfaller, kan analyseras via den formen hos det innehåll som har skapat och delats av användare för att bli publikt. Utsår från detta perspektiv, så blir tekniken ett kärl (som visserligen är obligatoriskt) men som ändå bara bär fram den förhandling som pågår mellan aktörer. Hur teknik tilldelas och används av aktörer kommer då att illustrera vad som tillåts att finnas eller inte. Satten på vilka teknik blir praktik i ett sammanhang, säger något viktigt om hur användare och producenter ser på mötet dem emellan. Användarpraktiker som att kommentera nyheter och dela nyheter via sociala medier, kan då fungera som analytiska lager som illustrerar kopplingarna mellan användarna (genom deras sätt att interagera med nyheter) och producenten (genom deras sätt att strukturerar tillträdet till utrymmen som ger olika möjligheter att interagera med nyheter).


Perspektivet som får sina konturer här, betonar ett analytiskt fokus på praktiker snarare än interna processer som handlar om vad användare tanker, känner eller uttrycker privat. Detta ska emellertid inte förstås som ett ointresse för vad människor tanker, känner eller uttrycker privat. Tvärtom,
betraktas detta vara en förutsättning för handling. Det är dock viktigt att belysa, att människor kan ha intresse av en rad olika nyhetshändelser utan att det nödvändigtvis resulterar i att man skapar ett innehåll och delar det så att det blir publikt.

Studien fokuserar således på de omständigheter som omger de situationer då användares engagemang blir publika handlingar i form av användarpraktiker som nyhetssajter kan möjliggöra. Medernt deltagande betraktas då med hjälp av ett perspektiv som binder samman utrymmen för deltagande med de praktiker som utförs där. Tekniken kan ur detta perspektiv inte framkalla något som inte redan finns i aktörerna, men däremot illustrera vad aktörerna tillskriver tekniken via användningen, i motet dem emellan. Nästkommande avsnitt drar upp tankegångarna runt hur detta blir synligt i forskningsdesign, metodologi, metoder och material i studien.

**Metodologisk ansats**


Kombinationen av analyserna är till hjälp för att förstå olika aspekter av medierat deltagande i anslutning till nyheter på nätet. Tillsammans illustrerar de olika moten mellan användare som deltar med innehåll och producenter som strukturerar utrymmet där deltagandet tar plats. Materialets omfång (cirka 1100 respektive 3400 nyhetsartiklar i de två olika urvalen) insamlades från totalt tio

När det gäller begreppsvärdetiden, har en utmaning varit att konstruera de kategorier som utgör variabler i de kvantitativa innehållsanalyserna. Eftersom flera av avhandlingens delstudier använder komparativa ansatser, så har det inte varit något alternativ att använda de kategorier som nyhetssajterna själva använder (olika nyhetssajter gorn på olika sätt). Till saken hör också att nyhetskategorier som återfinns i tidigare forskning, ofta lutar sig mot teorier om nyhetsvärde eller har sakområden i fokus som bedömts vara viktiga i anslutning till värderelser. Sådana kategorier har bara kunnat användas till viss del i det här arbetet, därför att de är aningen för breda och saknar den precision som behövs för att möta användarnas sätt att interagera med nyheter. Ett exempel är att vällfärdsfrågor ofta hanteras som en kategori, utan att göra åtskillnad på sjukvård, skola/barnomsorg m.m. Därför har tidigare forskning primärt utgjort en utgångspunkt, som tillsammans med testkodningsskorduer använts för att skapa kategorier från mer induktiva utgångspunkter. Reliabilitetstest har genomförts (Hayes & Krippendorff 2007), och alla mått uppvisar acceptabla värden (se respektive artikel för enskilda variabler). Validiteten stärks ytterligare av replikeringen av variabler från artikel 1 till artikel 3, har utförts med material från olika studieobjekt, som dessutom har samlats in vid olika tillfällen. Utöver kodboken i bilagorna, finns också en mer utförlig redogörelse på svenska om överväganden som kan behöva göras vid denna typ av materialinsamling, datahantering och analys i Almgren (2012).

Infor den kvalitativa textanalysen av läsarkommentarer, testades ett antal olika metoder, eftersom den valda metoden behövde (a) åstadkomma ett urval av relevanta utsagor ur ett stort material präglat av konflikt, (b) separera just de antagonistiska ståndpunkter som frågeställningarna handlar om, samt (c) ändå vara tillräckligt öppen för att fånga teman som uppstår induktivt ur materialet. Analysen har inslag som liknar såväl diskursanalys som argumentationsanaly och netverksanalys. Det slutliga valet blev att använda en kvalitativ textanalys av kommentarer återfinna i anslutning till den nyhetsartikel som engagerade användarna i högst utsträckning. Här fick begrepp som objektivitet och tillit (och dess avsaknad; missstro) fungera som selektierings- och kategoriseringsinstrument inför den tematiska analysen av likhet och skillnader i materialet. Det omfångsrika materialet (cirka 300 läsarkommentarer) i anslutning till den aktuella artikeln bör betyda att i alla fall de mest framträdande teman som finns, har kunnat illustreras.

nyhetssajterna låter gammalt material ligga kvar på nyhetssajten, en företeelse som är mycket vanlig, och som behöver hanteras metodologiskt. Vidare kräver arbetet med att skapa kategorier reflexivitet vid arbetet med många nyhetssajter. Justerings ska kunna göras av målinstrumentet så att det fungerar på samma sätt över hela materialet, och det kan man inte veta om det gör förbigå efter en systematisk genomgång av innehållet på de nyhetssajter som ska inkluderas, så att det framgår vilka variationer som finns. Dubbla versioner (eller fleer) av samma innehåll förekommer frekvent, vilket kräver noggrann kontroll. Därför användes flera identifikationsvariabler, bland annat nyhetartikels rubrik. Åvändarnas interaktion med nyheter är av en sådan karaktär att de tydligt ansamlas runt vissa analysenheter (nyhetartiklar) medan många lämnas utan åtgärd. Detta innebär någonting helt annat än en statistisk normalfördelning (jfr Singer 2009), vilket forskaren behöver ha i åtanke när det gäller hur olika resultat kan och bör betonas.

Resultat och analys

I följande avsnitt, som redovisar studiens resultat, beskrivs först hur villkoren för användarnas praktiker skiljer sig åt mellan olika typer av nyhetssjäler (frågeställning 1a), och mellan olika typer av nyheter (frågeställning 1b). Därefter riktas intresset mot hur användare utvärderar möjligheten till deltagande praktiker i anslutning till olika typer av nyhetssajter (frågeställning 2a) och i anslutning till olika typer av nyheter (frågeställning 2b). Det avslutande avsnittet riktar intresset mot hur användarna själva uttrycker sig om relationen till nyhetsproducerarna, när de deltar med innehåll som utrymmer för deltagande strukturerat av producer (frågeställning 3).

När det gäller hur villkoren skiljer sig åt för användarnas praktiker på olika typer av nyhetssjäler, så visar artikeln Almgren och Olsson (2016a) att även om funktioner för användardeltagande existerar på en nyhetssajt, så betyder det inte att användarna tillåts använda sådana funktioner i anslutning till allt nyhetsinnehåll. Skillnaderna återfinns både mellan olika funktioner för användarpaket (att kommentera, att dela nyheter via Facebook och att dela nyheter via Twitter) men också mellan olika typer av nyhetssjäler. Ett genomgående mönster är att nyhetsproducerarna i mycket högre grad tillåter användare att dela nyheter via Facebook och Twitter, än att låta användarna kommentera nyheter på de egna nyhetssjälen. Tidigare resultat som poangerat läsarkommentarer som den vanligaste funktionen för innehåll genererat av användare (Domingo m.fl. 2008, Hernida & Thurman 2008; Manosevitch 2011), verkar här inte vara ett resultat som står sig när analysen fokuserar på enskilt nyhetsinnehåll, och inte bara på att funktionerna existerar i sin teknologiska bemärkelse. De sedan tidigare kända åsikterna hos nyhetsproducerarna om att läsarkommentarer upplevs som problematiska (ex. Bergstrom & Wadbring 2015; Diakopolous & Naaman 2011; Paskin 2010) sammanfaller vid en jämförelse med restriktivitet av användarnas möjligheter att kommentera, medan interaktion via sociala medier istället uppmuntras på så sätt att nyhetsproducerarna låter användarna interagera med nästan alla nyheter på detta sätt.

När det gäller hur villkoren skiljer sig för användarnas praktiker i anslutning till olika kategorier av nyheter, visar artikeln Almgren och Olsson (2016a) att just läsarkommentarer är den funktion för användardeltagande, där restriktioner är mest uttalade. Artiklarna Almgren och Olsson (2015) och Almgren (manuskript) illustrerar hur restriktionerna tar konkret form på två olika sätt. Först och främst skapar journalistikens egna sätt att välja ut och presentera nyheter en yttre ram för vilka typer av nyheter användarna kan interagera med i olika omfattning. Om en viss typ av nyheter är mycket ovanlig, så kan dessa nyheter heller inte kommenteras i särskilt hög utsträckning. Men det är också så att mellan olika nyhetskategorier så skiljer sig andelen åt när det gäller hur stor del av de befintliga nyhetsartiklarna som användarna kan kommentera. Starkast restriktioner återfinns i anslutning till nyhetsartiklar om brot och olyckor, vilket skulle kunna relateras till journalistiska riktlinjer om


De nyhetssajter där användarna interagerar mest genom att kommentera nyheter, är alla lokala (när hansyn tas till skillnad i upplagesstorlek för pappersstämningen). De nyheter som kommenteras har också förhållandevis ofta en större närhet till utgivningsorten. De som kommenterar nyheter på nyhetssajten kan ha hela publikens till sitt förögdande, i en kommunikationsform som verkar höras ihop med behovet av att föra fram olika åsikter, på sätt som kan ta ganska konfliktfyllda former. Förhållandevis få användare verkar således tilltalas av detta sätt att interagera med nyheter. Att dela nyheter på Twitter förekommer bara att anslutning till de nyhetssajter som har ett ursprung i de största kvälls- och dagstidningarna. Denna användarpraktik kan därmed relateras till tydligare fokus på nationella nyheter, än vad användarnas kommenterande på nyhetssjät och nyhetsdelande via Facebook gör.

Exempelvis så kommenterar användarna av Arbetarbladets nyhetssajt (obunden socialdemokratisk) nyheter om arbetslivet i högre utsträckning än användarna av andra nyhetssajter, vilket också gäller nyheter om infrastruktur, migration, mänskliga rättigheter och miljö. Användarna kommenterar även här nyheter som handlar om det som finns nära, hellre lokala och regionala nyheter, än nationella och internationella.

När det gäller hur användarna själva uttrycker sig om relationen till nyhetsproducenterna, när det gäller tillit och misstro, så visar bokkapitlet Almgren (2017), hur användarna uttrycker sig om medernas prestationer i anslutning till den mest kommenterade nyhetsartikeln i materialet (Hanna 2014). Artikelken beskriver hur operativa Mål Erima, känd för sitt anti-rassistiska engagemang, uttryckte stöd för en radiotradare från svensk public service-radio, som inte fick vara verksam som programledare en tid före valet 2014, med anledning av framford kritik mot partiet Sverigedemokraterna som är starkt kritisk mot svensk invandringspolitik. Denna medielerelaterade händelse blev omdiskuterad, vilket skildras av att användarna kommenterade artikelken i mycket hög utsträckning. Analysen fängar aspekter av tillit och misstro som användarna uttrycker när det gäller medernas prestationer i anslutning till de nämnda händelserna. Ett antal teman synliggörs, vilke handlar om (a) i vilken egenskap människor ges möjlighet av nyhetsproducenterna att uttrycka sig via medern, (b) vilka förvåntningar användarna har på dem som arbetar med medier på olika sätt, (c) huruvida representativa tankegångar ska styra hur mederns agerar, eller om det kan finnas skal till att vissa typer av innehåll ska exkluderas, (d) vad det betyder att journalisters politiska uppfattningar avviker från organisationen, och (e) att nyhetsrapportering om brott är förenad med alldeles särskilda utmaningar när det gäller konflikterering. Sammantaget visar analysen hur den journalistiska praktiken blir ett nav, rent vilket användarna ansluter sig utifrån olika ståndpunkter.

**Diskussion och slutsatsar**

I detta kapitel ans behaggen utrymmen för deltagande och deltagande praktiker, som utgångspunkt för att belysa den foränderliga och mångsidiga relationen mellan aktorer, i detta fall producenter och användare av nyhetssajter. Därefter förs en diskussion om hur detta arbeta kan bidra till en utökad förståelse av medieras deltagande.


Det har visats att funktioner för användardeltagande i anslutning till nyheter varit av forskningsintresse, och då ofta utifrån kvalitetsaspekter såsom de professionella ser dem (jfr Deuze 2003; Diakopoulos & Naaman 2011; Enli 2007; Harrison 2010; Paskin 2010; Tenenboim & Cohen 2015; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). Det genomgående myntet är att det finns en spanning mellan de aktörer som är inblandade i processen som kan leda fram till användarskapad innehåll på nyhetssajter. Forskare som haft lite olika ingångar i forskningsfältet, har beskrivet olika enskilda förhållningssätt som kan relateras till vad olika utrymmen för deltagande ska användas till,

När det gäller studiens bidrag i form av empiriska resultat, så kompletterar den tidigare forskningen om producenternas sätt att se på användares bidrag i anslutning till teknologiska funktioner på nyhetssajter. Studien fyller en forskningslucka eftersom flera studier har fokuserat på flera aktörer involverade i processen som leder fram till användarpрактиker i anslutning till nyheter, och särskilt då när det gäller förhållandena mellan olika aktörer i flera sammanhang. Studiens bidrag är att den för samman aspekter som tidigare studier har för sig, och begreppsliggjort relationer mellan olika aktörer med hjälp av utrymmen som producenterna strukturerar (genom att möjliggöra vissa användarpрактиker men inte andra) och de praktiker som användare utövar, eller inte utövar (inom ramen för de möjligheter som ges).

Resultaten kan tolkas som att flera sammanhang behöver studeras parallellt (här nyhetssajter) för att förstå medierat deltagande, eftersom relationerna mellan användare och producenter kan ta så olika former. En rekommendation blir då att försoka undvika att analytiskt åtskilja användarpрактиker, från det utrymmen och det sammanhang där de uppkommit. Studien exemplifierar också hur begreppen utrymmen för deltagande och deltagande praktiker kan operationaliseras via gränssnitten hos nyhetssajter för att illustrera relationen mellan användare och producenter. Resultaten visar att sätten som användardeltagande utspeglar sig på, hör samman med typen av nyhetsinnehåll som publiceras i olika kontexter i kombination med hur aktörer förhåller sig till specifika teknologiska funktioner för användardeltagande. Skillnaderna finns både när det gäller hur producenterna strukturerar utrymmet för deltagande, och när det gäller hur användarna utövar de möjligheter de ges. Ett exempel på detta, är hur producenterna är mer benägna att låta användare dela nyheter via sociala medier (här Facebook och Twitter) än att tillåta användare att kommentera på den egna nyhetssajten. Nyhetssajter tillhörande storstadspress är i detta sammanhang mer restriktiva än nyhetssajter som tillhör landsortspress. Användarna däremot, delar framförallt nyheter via Facebook, men ignorérer möjligheten att dela nyheter via Twitter, och i synnerhet då från lokala nyhetssajter. Och när användare kommenterar på nyhetssajter, så ligger de lokala i topp, när man tar hänsyn till skillnader i upplaga. Effekten blir att användarpрактиker som att kommentera på nyhetssajt och att dela nyheter via Twitter, kommer att peka åt motsatta håll när det gäller rumsliga aspekter, på så sätt att dela nyheter via Twitter får mer nationell prägel medan att kommentera på nyhetssajt får mer lokal prägel.

De kategorier av nyheter som publiceras och görs tillgängliga för användare, sätter ramar för det medierade deltagandet i kombination med hur teknologiska funktioner för användardeltagande allokeras av producenterna i anslutning till olika kategorier av nyheter. De kategorier av nyheter som användarna tillåts att interagera med i högst utsträckning, sammanfaller med de nyheter använderna ofta ignorérer (nyheter om sport och underhållning). Starkast restriktioner tillämpas på nyheter som relaterar till offer och förövare (nyheter om brott och olyckor). När användare utnyttjar mönster, refererar de till nyheter om brott, motsättningar mellan "eliten" och "vanligt folk", public service och kommersiella nyhetsmedia och regler, roller hos dem som ges utrymme i medierna, genrer och medieformat. Andra frågor som användarna berör, handlar om det vi ser i medierna ska baseras på representation eller om vissa ämnen måste uteslutas på grund av sin inneboende skadlighet, om
journalisters politiska åsikter påverkar nyhetsformdelningen, samt när det gäller nyheter om brott hur brottsoffer och förövare skildras. Dessa teman kan vara användbara att ha i åtanke när man studerar medierad deltagande fortsättningvis i anslutning till nyheter på nätet.

När det gäller studiens bidrag till teoriutveckling av begreppen utrymmen för deltagande och praktiker utförda av användare, så kan detta sammanfattas i fem primära slutsatser. I delstudierna (Almgren & Olsson 2015; Almgren manuskript), beskrivs hur utrymmen för deltagande manifesteras genom hur nyhetsproducenterna möjliggör interaktion för användarna på olika sätt på nyhetssajter, både när det gäller publiceringen av olika kategorier av nyheter men också när det gäller hur möjligheten att kommentera nyheter ges på olika sätt i olika sammanhang. Delstudierna illustrerar hur användarna och producenterna kan ses som två sidor av samma mynt, som behöver betraktas tillsammans, om man ska kunna studera på vilka sätt användares och producerers förhållningssätt sammanfaller eller skiljer sig åt.

Den första slutsatsen är att producenterna strukturerar utrymmen för användarnas deltagande i anslutning till nyheter på nätet, på så sätt att de ligger i linje med värdesystemen i de aktuella nyhetsorganisationerna. Liknande sätt att struktura utrymmen för användardeltagande har setts tidigare genom historien (jfr Enli 2007; Lucadell 2002; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). I en av delstudierna illustreras att fokus när det gäller rumsliga aspekter av nyheterna (i de fall nyhetssajten är framgångrik när det gäller att ha engagerade användare) ligger i linje med tidningsorganisationens kontext och publik (Almgren manuskript). Resultatet går emot idén om att internet per automatik skulle framjäda att gransker överbyggas och att vyer vidgas. Att nyhetsproducenterna är mer benånga att låta användarna bidra med innehåll i anslutning till mer lättviktigt nyhetsinnehåll (som sport och underhållning) än i anslutning till nyhetsinnehåll som skildrar offer och förövare (som brott och olyckor), kan relateras till värdesystem i sammanhanget, exempelvis etiska regler. Samtidigt är det ju så, att det är logiskt för aktörer i vilken institution som helst att legitimera sina praktiker i enlighet med sitt eget värdesystem och att agera som motkraft till intressen som upplevs gå emot det egna (ifr Ashforth & Gibbs 1990, 180; Buskqvist 2007; Viscovi & Gustafsson 2013). Efter terroristattacken i Norge såg man hur redaktörer blev mer vaksamma gällande främlingsfientligt material från användarna, och befarade att detta skulle kunna triga igång brott och avvikande beteende, varför man skäptade kontrollen, och särskilt då i anslutning till vissa nyheter (Ihlebakk, Sundnes Lavlie, & Mainsah 2013). Men att införa restriktioner är inte riskfritt för organisationer under några omständigheter, och en särskild utmaning för nyhetsorganisationer är att de forvantas garantera tillgången till offentlig debatt. Detta gör att nyheter på nätet, sätter journalistiken under en särskild form av press, när det gäller hur nyhetsproducenter strukturerar utrymmen för deltagande.

När det gäller användarnas praktiker, i den här studien, så bör de bäst beskrivas som blygsamma i omfattning, men när de förekommer, så gör de det i anslutning till nyheter som relaterar till förändringar i närområdet, politisk och hälso- och sjukvård. Resultatet leder till en andra slutsats som synliggar en skiljelinje som relaterar specifikt till rumsliga aspekter. Användare uppvisar ett mer allvarstystt engagemang än vad de vanligtvis förknippas med. Samtidigt kan detta engagemang relateras till ett användardeltagande med ett särskilt starkt engagemang (och motstånd) i förhållande till frågor som rör förändringar i det egna grannskapet, ett fenomen som brukar beskrivas som allt annat än smickrande. Teorier om att elektronisk kommunikation skulle luckra upp gränser i tid och rum, och tanken att människor skulle göra bruk av tekniken för att överbygga avstånd för att åstadkomma social omorganisering, verkar med andra ord inte finna stöd när man betraktar kopplingen mellan användare och producenter när det gäller de har specifika studieobjekten. Det är inte bara så att användare anpassar sig efter hur nyhetsproducenterna organisera deltagandet när det gäller rumsliga aspekter som ger särskilt eftertryck till det som finns nära. Användarna förstärker denna tendens ytterligare. Att användarna faktiskt utgör en centripetal kraft i sig som förstärker
betydelsen av det som finns nära och tonar ner betydelsen av det som finns på avstånd, är ett teoretiskt bidrag som ger en annan bild än de associationer som inte sällan förknippas med elektronisk kommunikation på internet.


I den fjärde delstudien, manifesteras utrymmen för deltagande av hur nyhetsmedier framställer en händelse som användarna kommenterar i särskilt hög utsträckning, på en nyhetssajt tillhörande Aftonbladet (en kvällstidning tillhörande stortidningspress). Praktiker manifesteras av hur användarna uttrycker sig om professionella mediepraktiker, i detta fall via kommentarer. Användarnas kommentarer relaterar till nationell identitet på så sätt att kommentarer om aktörer som tar tydlig ställning i medierna mot rasism och främmandeidentitet. Detta relaterar till en femte slutsats, namligen att relationen mellan producenter och användare (även när det gäller nationell kvällstidningspress) präglas av att den relaterar till rumslighet, fast i det här fallet på så sätt att när användare uttrycker sig via kommentarer om professionella mediepraktiker, så handlar det om spänningsfältet mellan vad användare upplever som nationella medborgerska rättigheter och universella människorättigheter.

För att sammanfatta detta arbete, om vi tankar på medierat deltagande som resultatet av ett möte mellan producenter och användare, så är det medieinnehåll som blir publik, särskilt viktigt. Händelser kan ges en framskjutande plats både genom hur nyhetsproducenterna väljer ut och presenterar nyheter, men också genom att användare bidrar med egen innehåll i anslutning till händelser. Således formas både producenter och användare de deltagande praktiker som realiseras, men utifrån sina egna horisonter. Nyhetsartiklar, såväl som användares kommentarer, rymmer utsagor som skildrar anspråk som relaterar till identitet, värden, tillit och missstro, samt kunskap som tillsammans konsumeras formar de yttre gränserna för hur samspel mellan utrymmen för deltagande och deltagande praktiker kan ta form. Varje funktion för användardeltagande må sätta gränsar i rent teknologisk beräkning, men det är i det medierade deltagandet som visform i samspel mellan aktörer som ett unikt utrymme för deltagande har form, och som får sina inre (och faktiska) gränsar definierade av hur användare och producenter sätter utrymmet för deltagande i bruk.

Att dela nyheter via Twitter från en nyhetssajt tillhörande en nationell kvällstidning, är en annan form av medierat deltagande än att göra det från en nyhetssajt tillhörande lokal landsortspress. Delstudierna som ingår i avhandlingen visar att elektronisk kommunikation och rumsliga aspekter är sammantvunnna i relationen mellan användare och nyhetsproducenter på olika sätt. Tillgång till en mångfald av utrymmen för deltagande har ansetts vara viktigt, så utifrån detta perspektiv kan det te sig problematiskt om de blir farre eller mer likriktade. Detta arbete gör dock inga anspråk på att kunna lösa den svåra frågan om hur värden av konversation i sig, och de som kan utsättas för negativa konsekvenser av konversationen, bör balanseras, mer än att avhandlingens redogör för en del av de motsättningar som uttrycks i materialet. Att hantera denna fråga, kommer sannolikt att utgöra en avsevärd utmaning för relationen mellan användare och nyhetsproducenter under överskådlig tid.
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Some Extent: Analyzing Online News

Introduction

The development of social media applications, such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, has offered new opportunities for everyday media users. This article contributes to research by looking into one specific aspect of the increasingly more participatory media ecology – the news comment feature. Drawing on a quantitative content analysis of 1,100 news pieces (sports and entertainment). In the concluding section, the discrepancy in preferences is discussed.

Abstract

Some extent: analyzing online news

Susan M. Almgren 1 and Tobias Olsson 2

Keywords

Participation, user-generated content, social media, news comments, content analysis

For traditional media companies, this transformation has meant a shift in editorial work to include the participation of users. At the same time, the idea of user-generated content has become more prevalent. In the era of more participatory media, user-generated content can take the shape of traditional formats, such as articles and videos. However, the current situation, with new participatory opportunities for everyday media users, makes user-generated content an even more alien feature for media companies. It becomes an issue for them to address on both a policy level (how to think about it, how to handle it, etc.)

One concrete challenge is whether user-generated content can be referred to as news. In the online environment, as well as for formats unique to the online environment, such as discussions and forums, user-generated content can take the shape of traditional formats, such as articles and videos. The challenge is how to approach the actual user contributions, etc.

The power relationship between producers and users is still an unequal one, in which the former takes upper hand (Olsson, 2013). Research has also revealed that user-generated content – news comments – often have the upper hand (Olsson, 2013). Research has also revealed that user-generated content – news comments – often have the upper hand (Olsson, 2013). Research has also revealed that user-generated content – news comments – often have the upper hand (Olsson, 2013).

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Users and Producers

Online News as Mediated Participation

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate principles that guide mediated participation, taking place through the interplay between users and news producers. The research questions concern how the conditions comprising mediated participation – in terms of opportunities for users’ participatory practices – differ between (1a) various types of online news sites, and (1b) various types of news, as well as how users exercise participatory practices (2a) on various types of news sites, and (2b) in connection to various types of news. The last research question (3) concerns how users express the connection to news producers, through participatory practices within participatory spaces. The results show that users and news producers take diverging approaches to user participation adjacent to online news. This is illustrated by the fact that the categories of news that users are most often permitted to interact with, coincide precisely with the news that users tend to decline to interact with, while the news categories that users tend to interact with (when given the chance) occur comparatively sparsely. The results also show that news producers are much more prone to permit users to share news through social media, than to permit them to comment news on the news site. When it concerns user practices, users share news on Facebook 20 times more often than they share news through Twitter or comment news on news sites. Tweeting news almost only occurs in news sites affiliated with big city national newspapers. Overall, the thesis illustrates that there are connections between various forms of electronic communication (i.e. commenting and sharing news through Facebook and Twitter), and the specific contextual and social settings that news sites are embedded within, with its specific situated audience, shaping the connections between users and news producers.

SUSANNE M. ALMGREN is a researcher and lecturer at Jönköping University, where she currently (2012-2017) conducts research on online news sites and their users. The public defence of her PhD thesis took place November 24, 2017. Her research interests primarily concern mediated participation related to newsroom cultures and audience reception studies.