Title: Open Data and Empowering Intermediaries. Why and how the Open Data Movement wants to transform Journalism

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Abstract

There is an interesting link between the spread and diversification of 'open initiatives' (like the Open Data or FOSS Movement) that aim to transform social relations and institutions and the growing importance of 'computational' or 'data-driven' journalism. To date, however, the relationship between activists and journalists has not been subject to a lot of research. In this paper, I examine the way in which the German Open Data Movement through their concept of 'empowering intermediaries' tries to influence journalism. I critically interrogate the normative conceptions central to this type of 'openness advocacy' and the role of the software tools employed in this form of activism.

My research shows that empowering citizens is the major goal of activists in the Open Data Movement. For them, Open Data – raw government data that is openly available for anyone to access, use and redistribute – represents a potential 'democratization of information' that enables citizens to better understand and control their governments and gives them more opportunities for participation. However, activists recognize that the empowering potential of Open Data is dependent on the existence of 'suitable' intermediaries that make raw data accessible and enable or encourage participation of citizens. 'Empowering intermediaries', in this sense, should not only be able to handle large data sets, they should also mediate with the public in an open and transparent way. This can mean, for example, that they give access to raw data if possible and allow contributions from citizens. Activists' conceptions can in this way both reinforce the position of traditional journalists as intermediaries, while at the same time impact on journalistic values and expand their practices.

In the paper I will discuss how these activists have a dual function in public space. On the one hand, activists act as intermediaries themselves, regarding themselves as 'civic developers' working in citizens' interest. They build applications – so called 'civic apps' – that are supposed to make governments more transparent, open and accountable. On the other hand, they aim to change established intermediaries, namely NGOs and institutionalized journalism by co-

operating with them, but also by challenging their professional autonomy through their values and the civic apps that are developed to propagate them. My research aims to show this by drawing on a combination of qualitative content analysis and interviews with members of the German Open Knowledge Foundation, a key actor in the German Open Data Movement.

Title: Goldmine or a source of misery? Determinants of success and failure of crowdsourcing in journalism

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Abstract

In 2009, the Guardian made 457.153 pages of documents with declarations of the Members of Parliament public on their website. A total of 20.000 readers got hold of these expenses, reported the interesting outcomes, which then were published by the Guardian. This distinctive example of making use of the public can be referred to the concept of crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing can be defined as 'A system of constructing a story in which journalists request data, analysis or other assistance from audience members' (Singer et al., 2011: 204). The collaboration between the Guardian and the audience revealed several political scandals. Furthermore, the editors would never have had the time and manpower to go through all those documents with information. This example of The Guardian is often cited as the prototype of a successful application of crowdsourcing in journalism (Pleijter, 2013). Determinants of success in this case was the subject matter, which concerned all UK citizens, the way the Guardian motivated the audience to participate, kept their attention and the degree of transparency and the technical framework they used in this process (Andersen, 2009; Brabham, 2013).

In the Netherlands, there are similar cases where the audience assisted in the journalistic production process. A prime example comes from the public news broadcaster NOS, who requested their audience to inspect and report about the annual budget of the Dutch government on newsworthy changes and the possible impact these changes could have on everyday life. Unfortunately it can't be determined whether this crowdsourcing initiative was successful. In fact, empirical research on the use of crowdsourcing in Dutch journalism is lacking and is also rare outside the Netherlands (Vehkoo, 2013).

Therefore this study provides a case study of Dutch crowdsourcing projects of the national public broadcasters NOS Net, Altijd Wat Monitor and Input the regional broadcaster RTV Noord-Holland Hete hangijzers (Hot issues). We interviewed all responsible editors concerned,

analysed the content of the publication platforms and policy documents to answer the question: What are the determinants of failure and success of crowdsourcing in Dutch journalism?

The preliminary results indicate a strong similarity in the vision of crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing ensures that news stories created with the help of the crowd are richer and more complete than stories produced solely by the journalist and their traditional sources. The level of success depends strongly on factors like the described vision, subject, motivation, time, budget and expertise.

Title: Making Analytics Public: really useful analytics and public engagement

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Abstract

Bold claims are frequently made about what the analysis of big data might tell us about 'the public'. People's web and social media use generates a vast source of data which, it is suggested, can be mined for new insights into how publics behave and what they think, feel, and prefer. At the same time, critical commentators have rightly pointed out that access to analytics tools, to the data itself, and to relevant forms of expertise is uneven and that we are seeing the emergence of new digital inequalities and the private enclosure of digital data (boyd and Crawford 2012, Kennedy et al forthcoming).

Drawing on an action research project which assessed the value of analytics as a way for public sector organizations to know and engage their publics, we argue in this paper that if analytics is to serve the public good, it needs to become more public itself, in three main ways. First, analytics needs to be *available to the public to use*. Analytics tools and data must be accessible to public organizations and groups and open to public uses and purposes. Second, analytics should be *open to public supervision*. Whereas the code, algorithms, and methodologies behind analytics are often proprietary and black-boxed, we argue that they should be public so they can be scrutinized and debated. Third, we argue that analytics should be rethought as a *more participatory process*. Analytics should not just be viewed as a way for experts to track and know the public with ever-greater precision, but can also be understood in more participatory terms, as offering the means and forms of representation by which publics can come reflexively to know and constitute themselves in new ways. In this view, 'the public' as a collective subject is something that needs to be imagined and constructed through forms of representation (Barnett 2008).

We suggest that thinking of analytics as offering a way for publics to constitute themselves means, as John Durham Peters (1995: 16) argues, that 'in acting upon symbolic

representations of "the public" the public can come into existence as a real actor'. In this way, we reflect on the ways in which analytics and their visualizations and algorithms might serve the public good. We call this 'really useful analytics', adapting cultural theorist Richard Johnson's concept 'really useful knowledge' (1979), which he saw as both self-defined and empowering.

Title: Properly informed? An analysis of consumption patterns in an algorithm-based mobile news application.

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Abstract

Since the rise of mobile news consumption, audiences are offered abundant updates on current events, wherever and how often they want. Still, this endless stream of information tends to become overwhelming, hence welcoming automatically learning recommendation algorithms to filter what is relevant for each individual user. However, it could be argued that algorithm news brings about a monoculture of lighter forms such as lifestyle and entertainment, rather than offering a well-balanced diet of current affairs.

In this study, we elaborate on the process and outcomes of a media innovation project, inquiring the value of such recommendations as assessed over the course of a month by a panel of 105 test users. In collaboration with a team of creative research engineers, a test environment was designed, logging each individual action with the mobile application. The designed app was continuously filled with branded news items, provided in real time by both commercial broadcasters' and publishers' newsrooms. We report on the analysis of consumption patterns and user appraisals of recommended news, comparing them with self-reported news preferences. In fact, it appears there is a substantial gap between both types of data: what users actually consume (i.e. lifestyle) does not reflect what they report to find important (i.e. politics, domestic news and foreign affairs).

More specifically, our experiment was based on three test conditions, with news updates based on (a) self-reported news category preferences, (b) a self-learning algorithm based on individual content consumption, (c) a self-learning algorithm that supplements the content

consumption with contextual information (i.e. time of day, type of device). Per set of three item consumptions, each user was automatically prompted to assess whether the previous recommended item was either interesting or not (thumbs up or down). The ratio of these logged ratings functioned as dependent variable. After two weeks, the results indicate the content-based algorithm to outperform self-reported preferences and the context-based version, although preliminary data analysis suggests the latter to improve over time.

In discussing the results, we explicitly focus on the tension between declared user preferences, consumption behaviour, and the notion of an informed citizen, which might discord increased algorithm-based selections of news diets.