

Dave Lawrence  
MASC 683 Multiplatform Storytelling  
March 26, 2011

Quandt, Thorsten. (2008). (No) News on the World Wide Web: A comparative content analysis of online news in Europe and the United States. *Journalism Studies* 9(5): 717-738.

First, allow me to come out of my contrarian closet. I've heard a lot of hype over the years about how interactivity made possible by the internet is going to create a "whole new journalism" that will revolutionize the profession. I remain skeptical. Audience participation may be important from a business standpoint—though I have doubts about how well efforts to get the audience more involved have helped the balance sheets among media companies—but I fail to see how audience interactivity promotes the goal of producing an informed public in a democratic society. Journalism is a profession for a reason. The press should be an unbiased, or at least fair and balanced, filter of information for the public—society's bullshit detector, if you will. Allowing the public unfettered involvement in the process of news production seems to me to undermine that vitally important role.

Quandt conducted a comparative analysis of online news sources in France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States in an effort to find evidence that this "whole new journalism" is emerging. He frequently mentions "participatory journalism" in his introductory sections, yet there seems little in terms of results and discussion devoted to what he calls "participatory journalism." (I am of a generation that remembers "participatory journalism" as something completely different, not as audience interaction but as the journalist participating in what he covers, such as George Plimpton playing quarterback for the Detroit Lions and goalie for the Boston Bruins.) It is possible that Quandt never intended to focus much on "participatory journalism," but, as he writes in his abstract, "Looking at the overall findings of the study, one has to conclude that the promises of an interactive age of reporting are not fulfilled yet," I have to conclude that was on his research agenda.

What does Quandt do? He competently compares news site content in terms of layout, structure, number of articles, length of articles, and multimedia content. He tries to stratify the sample to that the publications he looks at are fairly similar, despite their country of origin. His main finding (to me) is that all publications follow traditional journalistic principles in terms of what they cover and how they cover it. He also finds that many of these publications lack

offerings in terms of multimedia content—most of what they offer are traditional print stories published in different medium. He never notes (at least I did not see where he notes) that such content has little to do with interactivity. It diversifies the offerings available to the public, but it does not increase the public's role in generating that content. His definition of interactive content is quite limited: e-mail, contact addresses, feedback forms, forum links, chat links, and a vague “Other options.” I frankly don't see how revolutionary these modes of “interactivity” are—when I began my career people used telephones and letters, or just harangued us when they saw us in public. At most, the new technologies allow journalists to more effectively hide from their public by allowing them to avoid synchronous communication.

There is a lot I find useful in this paper, but there seems to be a disconnect between what Quandt said he was looking for and what his methods allowed him to find.