GATE-KEEPING IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE

A CASE STUDY OF THE SELECTION OF TEXT-MESSAGES IN A CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMME

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Abstract

A key trend in current broadcasting is the combination of traditional TV-formats and digital media. In these multi-platform formats, the Internet and the mobile phone in particular are used as return channels in order to stimulate audience activity. Studies of multi-platform formats have mainly analysed audience participation with cumulative influence on the production, such as *Big Brother* and *Pop Idol*. In this article, I investigate a format that combines traditional journalism with elements of audience participation. In the current affairs format *SevenThirty*, the audience is invited to respond to issues raised in the programme by sending text-messages via the mobile telephone (SMS). The viewers are not guaranteed to get their messages aired; the moderator selects and rejects messages according to the editorial policy, and thus functions as a classic "gatekeeper". The study compares the text-messages received by the TV-station with the ones transmitted on-screen. The main research questions are: What are the main conflicts between journalistic norms of objectivity and participatory ideals of access? How are these conflicts handled in the production? What characterises the "gatekeeper" in the new media age? One of the basic findings is that "gatekeepers" not only select and edit, but also fabricate text messages.

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Journalistic and Participatory Norms

SevenThirty is a Norwegian current affairs programme, which was launched on the third largest channel in Norway, TVNorge in 2004. The debate programme focuses on sensational and personalised issues, often from an anti-elitist point of view. These features position *SevenThirty* among what are defined as *popular journalism (*Sparks 1992; Langer 1998; Gripsrud 2000). A highly publicised feature of the program is that the audience is invited to comment on the debate by sending SMS-messages, which after a selection process might be displayed on the screen.[1] This feedback opportunity traces back to traditional forms of *media participation*, such as letters to the editors (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002; Raeymeackers 2005) call-in radio (Owen1997; O`Sullivan 2005), and talk shows (Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Priest 1994).

Text-messaging in live television represents a new and more integrated level of audience participation, combining traditionally separate media sectors such as broadcasting, ICT and telecommunication. The media are constantly seeking new ways of communicating with their publics, and have thus incorporated individualised return channels such as e-mail, weblogs, and text-messages. However, the need for editorial control requires selection of material, a process that resembles the *gatekeeper*-function identified by White (1950). This article analyzes the selection of SMS-messages in news production by relating the theory of gatekeeping to the context of media convergence.

Journalism is expected to be a resource for public debate, and inclusion of contributions of ordinary people confirms this expected role as a chair for popular views. Editorial use of audience-produced material in combination with journalism might nevertheless imply conflicts between *journalistic norms* and *participatory norms*. Objectivity is the most important norm of journalism, and from this flows more pragmatic aspects of balance, fairness and impartiality (Soloski 1989). Gaye Tuchman (1978) termed objectivity as a "strategic ritual" for journalism. Detachment and independence in news production have been at the core of journalism's unique selling point since the mid-nineteenth century (McNair 2005). The journalists frame news events in order to provide "objective" or "balanced" accounts (Goffman 1974). Todd Gitlin (1980) uses the notion of "frame" to argue that the daily routines of journalism strive to naturalise the social world in accordance with discursive conventions.

These constraints stand in contrast to the ideals of participation which are concerned with providing ordinary people access to the media (Enzenberger 1972; Brecht 1974). Although the combination of journalism and audience participation is an influential tendency in current media, the crossing interests of the two domains are so far under-researched. Transferring the methodology from the "gatekeeper" study to a contemporary context, this article asks: What are the main conflicts between journalistic norms of objectivity and participatory ideals of access? How are these conflicts handled in the production process? What characterises the gatekeeper in the new media age? This article investigates these questions through an in-dept study of how editors and journalists handle the conflict between journalistic norms and participatory norms in practice.

Journalistic Norms and Selection of Sources

A central question within communication studies is what criteria decide the selection and rejection of news stories. Early production studies focused on the choices made by individual journalists and editors, which were named *gatekeepers*. The key idea was that news production involves certain "gates" through which a story has to pass in order to become news (White 1950; Breed 1955; Gieber 1956). More recent studies have criticised the gatekeeper-tradition for over-emphasising subjective decision-making (Schudson 1989; Shoemaker 1991). The critics argue that the individual choices made by journalists do not take place in a vacuum, but are constrained by institutional factors such as editorial routines, journalistic culture, and market needs (Epstein 1973; Galtung and Ruge 1981; McQuail & Windahl 1981; Bleske 1991).

News production involves "framing"; stories are framed to match the journalists' perceptions of newsworthiness, and how news should be presented (Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978). Two key norms in this process are those of objectivity and impartiality. Objectivity provides legitimacy to the journalistic profession. However, as journalists have acknowledged problems associated the ideal of objectivity, it has become more common to speak of balance and accuracy. In practice balance is pursued by allocating equal time to opposing viewpoints, while accuracy implies getting the facts right (Reese 1990; Sanders 2003). The term impartiality is often used in media companies' own code of practice, and has many of the same implications as balance: even-handedness, fairness and dispassionate reporting (Middleton 1993).

The selection of news involves not only internal relations, but also external constituencies and, in particular, the news sources (Schlesinger 1990). Professional sources often negotiate with the production staff in order to get their message across (Tuchman 1978; Ericson et al. 1989). While both parties have interests in this exchange of information for publicity, it is argued that the sources play the leading role (Gans 1980). As the PR-industry has expanded dramatically, source strategies have been regarded as a key challenge in contemporary journalism (Miller and Dinan 2000). A strategy to cope with "spin-doctors" is to critically examine sources' motives, and to generally avoid anonymous sources (McNair 2000; Middleton 1993). The increased use of contributions from the audience provides non-professionals with access to the media.

Participatory Norms and Editorial Constraints

The gate-keeping studies focused on media access: which individuals, interest groups and perspectives gain access to the news media? A very different body of research that also focuses on media access is the study of how ordinary people are included in the media (for example Berrigan 1977). Critics have lamented the one-way direction of broadcast communication and have encouraged broadcasters to create participatory opportunities. As early as in 1930, Bertold Brecht (1930/1974) argued that the media should be regarded as instruments for emancipatory change. Since then, idealists have argued that non-professionals should be given access to the means of media production: unconstrained access and a more representative public sphere would empower people and strengthen the democratic process (Enzenberger 1972; Brecht 1974).

Later studies have been more cynical as regards political participation in the media. One key finding was that access programming provided by local radio and TV-stations during the 1980s did not attract new groups of participants. The airways were rather occupied by those already active in the public debate (Prehn 1981; Skogerbø 1988). And to the degree that new perspectives were included in the public sphere, they lacked political and social engagement, and rarely challenged the social order (Jakubowicz 1988). This disappointment over non-professional media participation displays elitist and unrealistic expectations, and as noted by Ole Prehn (1990):

> *When people got access to the local airwaves, all they did was to play music and air small-talking phone ins. Perhaps this approach is too pessimistic; perhaps the utopian visions of community radio are rooted in the same high-brow culture, which they claim to combat* (Prehn 1990, 25).

More recent studies have illuminated how audience participation is formatted and constrained by the demands of production. A key finding is that participants need to master certain performance criteria in order to be selected by producers (Carpentier 2001; Ytreberg 2004; O'Sullivan 2005). According to Simon Cottle (1993), the voices of the public must be seen as appropriate and articulate to be deemed relevant. Wahl Jorgensen (2002) identified relevance, brevity, entertainment and authority as the main rules for selecting letters to the editor for publication. In a later study based on similar material, Karin Raeymaeckers (2005) shed lights on how editors even change the overall arguments in the incoming letters to achieve the desired content:

> *Arguments were exaggerated and embellished with colourful vocabulary. Even worse, certain editors did not baulk at inserting arguments that were totally absent from the original letter. In some cases, the edition even changes the original letter's standpoints* (Raeymaeckers 2005, 215).

Based on this finding, Raeymaeckers (2005) suggests that the "feedback opportunity is turned into a marketing tool". The link between audience participation and market interests is also identified in a study of call-in radio: "wearing the shirt of 'the people's defendant' is perfect for obtaining credibility" (Winocur 2003, 39).

Despite extensive formatting, however, most studies of audience participation in the media still conclude that audience-based formats include more diverse voices in the public sphere. Lunt and Stenner (2005) argue that formatting is not the opposite of spontaneity, but that crafted creation rather has contributed to an "emotional public sphere."

These recent contributions have brought studies of media production and studies of audience participation closer together. This article will contribute to this combined field of research by investigating how text-messages from ordinary people are selected and edited in a context of popular journalism. The case study of the current affairs format SevenThirty will illuminate the conflict between journalistic norms of balance, fairness and impartiality on the one hand, and participatory norms of access, authenticity, and influence on the other hand.

The methodological design of this study resembles that of the classic article "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News". The pioneer study by David Manning White (1950) was based on material provided by "Mr. Gates", the wire editor of a morning newspaper: "Mr. Gates saved every piece of wire copy that came to his desk. Instead of throwing the dispatch into the waste basket once he had decided not to use it, he put it into a large box next to his desk" (White 1950, 387). This article benefits from a similar kind of unique cooperation with whom I have chosen to regard as a new "gatekeeper" – the moderator. White's (1950) study shed light on how the gatekeeper's subjective value-judgments influenced the news selection. The position of the moderator is a typical gatekeeping function; he is individually responsible for the selection of text-messages. The proportions of selected messages and rejected messages were strikingly similar in the two cases of selection; among the incoming pieces of wire copies (White 1950), and among the incoming SMS messages, only about one-tenth of the material was included in the editorial production.

The moderator in *SevenThirty* provided access to the totality of messages received by the producers within a period of two months, from 19th February to 19th April 2004.[2] This unique access to the totality of text-messages enabled an analysis of how the contributions from the audiences were evaluated by the editorial staff. The content analysis of the messages was conducted in two phases; in a first phase I classified all the messages in order to outline the pool of messages from which the moderator made his selections. Based on Wahl-Jorgensen`s (2002) four criteria for selection of letters to the editor (relevance, brevity, entertainment and authority), I developed categories for analyzing stylistic and thematic features in the messages. In the second phase the messages actually shown on the screen were compared with the totality of incoming messages, in order to identify the key criteria for the selection. Like the classic "gatekeeper"study, I additionally made an interview with the moderator as the major decision-maker in the selection process. The focus of the interview was to uncover his reasons for selecting some messages, while rejecting others.

Running weekdays at 7.30 pm, the current affairs programme *SevenThirty*[3] was expected to serve a lead-in function by attracting a large number of daily viewers to the commercial channel TVNorge. While the two largest channels – NRK and TV2- have obligations as public broadcasters, TV3 and TVNorge are private, niche channels with less diverse programming. In an analysis of news production in Norwegian TV3, Helland (1993) suggests that the main concern for commercial niche channels is that their news formats "looks like news". *SevenThirty* was launched as an attempt to produce a flagship that could broaden the TVNorge's audience appeal.

Following Örnebring (2003), I define current affairs debate formats as programmes that (1) claim to cover important societal issues, and to play an important role in the public sphere, and (2) that the dominant form of communication is debate or discussion, with a host leading the debate. Like most current affairs programs, *SevenThirty* was built around a high-profile host. The young male journalist addressed the audience directly in a dramatic and fast-paced mode of communication. During the 25 minutes airing time, the program included short

news reports, an interview and finally a current affairs debate. Thematically, the TV-debates focused on controversial and sensational issues, emphasising sexuality, immigration, violence and human interest. Stylistically, the debates were arranged as a duel between two studio guests, who expressed conflicting and polarised arguments.

Current affairs programming is among the traditional TV-genres that most extensively have included participatory features. Already in the late 1960s, members of the general public started to appear in the formats, both as lay participants and as studio audiences. Since then, the genre has introduced various devices to engage more directly with the viewers, including e-mail, web-pages and text-messages (McNair 2000; Örnebring 2003). Since 2000, most Norwegian current affairs formats have included text messages from the viewers during live broadcasts. *SevenThirty* nevertheless gave more prominence to the contributions from the audience than previous formats; the feedback component was more extensively promoted, both on the screen and by the host. This mixture of text messages and editorial content was also widely commented on by the TV-critics, which labelled the format as "SMS-talk show" and "Tabloid-TV for the SMS-generation" (*Dagbladet* 2004)[4]. The audiences were encouraged to respond to such questions as "What do you think about homosexual marriages? Send OPINION and your opinion to 1900" (19.04.04)[5].

SevenThirty was a pioneer program, experimenting with SMS-messaging to a degree that was unfamiliar to the viewers. This might explain why only about one per thousand viewers responded to the invitation to send SMS-messages.[6] The format is however of great academic interest, because it provides a possibility to grasp the early stages of audience-generated material in news production. In order to systematically examine the process of transforming contributions from the audience into editorial content, I will distinguish between the primary selection, in which the required quality is that the messages are stylistically congruent with the format, and the secondary selection, in which the required quality is thematic congruency with the editorial policy.

Primary Selection: Formalistic Criteria

In what I have termed the primary selection, the incoming material was evaluated according to media specific requirements. SMS-messaging is an interpersonal form of communication that needs to be adapted to a mass mediated context; the TV medium addresses large audiences and the contributions thus had to meet demands of viewer-friendliness. Technical features impose limitations on the audience-produced content; the SMS-crawl in the bottom of the screen only made up about 10% of the TV-frame, and the messages were given a relatively brief display time. The messages thus had to be easily recognised and understood.

In a period of two months (February 19 to April 19, 2004), the editors of *SevenThirty*, received 1063 incoming messages, of which 238 were broadcast. Less than 15 % of the incoming messages were broadcasted, and the available messages by far exceeded the editorial need for audience-generated material. The incoming messages consequently had to undergo a process of selection. In this process, the moderator of audience contributions performed tasks comparable to those of the gatekeeper in news production.

First, *timing* was the most crucial aspect: the viewers had to respond quickly enough to deliver messages that are useful for the producers. In general, the earlier the moderator received the SMS-messages, the better chances they had to be selected. The importance of timing as parallels was also pinpointed in the classic gatekeeper-study: "The closer to deadline, the harder to pass the gate" (White 1950).

Second, for pragmatic reasons of space and the need for viewer-friendly content, *brevity* is among the most prominent formalistic criteria. The overall tendency is that short messages had considerably better chances of being selected than long messages, and as table 1 below illuminates, nearly 70 % of the aired messages contained fewer than 10 words:

Table 1: The Length of Incoming and Broadcast Text Messages (N = 1063)

Length of messages	% incoming messages	% aired messages
0—5 words	28.9	12.2
6—10 words	39.5	29.1
11—20 words	26.3	40.6
21+ words	5.3	18.1
Total = 100 % =	1063	238

Messages of more than 11 words were more often edited than the shorter messages, and as a rule, only messages up to 15 words had a chance to be broadcast in their original form. Clearly, brief messages were most congruent with the format. This corresponds with Wahl-Jorgensen´s (2002) and Raeymaecker´ (2005) findings that brevity is also a central criterion for selecting letters to the editor.

A third formalistic criterion for selecting SMS-messages was *relevance*; in *SevenThirty*, about 10% of the messages did not relate specifically to the topic under discussion and were brutally rejected. Some of these "format-dissonant" messages were from viewers who seems to have misunderstood the format and interpreted the feedback opportunity as a channel for meta-comments and personal requests, such as: "The host is good looking. Can I have his phone number?" (17.03.04).

Fourthly, the language in the messages was a way to signalise *authenticity*. The moderator was instructed to edit spelling mistakes, but to keep words of a particular dialect (interview, 01.12.03). While spelling mistakes could undermine the authority of the current affairs programme, the oral style in written dialects was considered to provide legitimacy as "the voice of the people."

A fifth requirement of the format was that the messages were formulated in a language of *decency*. The content analysis showed messages including swearwords and unorthodox styles were considered as suitable and categorically rejected. Exclusion of offensive content can be explained by the TV-company's editorial responsibility for the broadcast output.

Sixthly, the messages had to be *unambiguous* in order to pass the first "gate" of selection. The analysis showed that common-sensical and simple messages were generally given priority above more complicated texts. For example common phrases and proverbs had a good chance of being selected because they have an immediate and popular appeal (interview, 01.12.04, with the moderator).

The formalistic criteria of timing, relevance, brevity, authenticity, decency and lack of ambiguity illuminates the conflict between journalistic norms and participatory ideals of access, and how traditional gate keeping was a way to handle this conflict. The criteria were not made explicit to the viewers in the program, but have become evident through the selection study comparing the incoming and broadcast messages. Importantly though, these criteria are necessary but not sufficient to explain the selection of messages.

Secondary Selection: Thematic Criteria

After passing the primary "gate" in the mediation process, the messages meet a second threshold. In order to be selected, the messages not only had to be compatible with the TV medium, but also to correspond with the requirements of the current affairs format. In the context of news production, journalistic norms of impartiality and balance influenced the selection of SMS-messages.

The thematic content in the messages could have been classified according to many different categories, such as political orientation. The moderator for example stated in the interview that: "The contributions from the audience gave me an impression that the viewers were quite right-wing" (interview, 09.03.05). I found that although some messages obviously were written on the basis of left wing or right wing opinions, most messages could not easily be placed on a left right scale. It appeared to be more fruitful to categorise the messages according to how they treated the topics. The most relevant concepts here are polarisation, personalisation and anti-elitism, which are also central concepts in the research literature on popular journalism and audience participation (Langer 1998; Gripsrud 2000; Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Lunt and Stenner 2005). In this study, the concepts are not used as exclusive categories, but are intended to identify main tendencies in the thematic selection[7].

Table 2 presents the distribution of messages according to the following definitions: *polarised*; the degree to which messages tend to express extreme opinions; *personalised*; the degree to which messages offers everyday, first-hand experiences, *anti-elitist*; the degree to which messages are critical towards political and intellectual elites, and *not relevant*; messages which did not relate to the issues raised in the programme.

Table 2: Thematic Tendencies in the Messages (N = 1063)

Type of Content	Incoming	Broadcast
Polarised	23 %	57 %
Personalised	39 %	2 %
Anti-elitist	28 %	41 %
Not relevant	10 %	-
Total = 100 % =	1063	238

Fabrication of Polarised Messages

Responding to the TV-debate, writers of messages heavily seem to emphasise their sympathies or antipathies. As illustrated in the table above, 39% of the in-

coming SMS- messages may be classified as *polarised*, and thus to a certain extent corresponded with the spectacular and populist style of the program, but incoming messages as a rule were even more polarised than the TV-debate. A particularly interesting finding is that the symmetry designed in TV-debate – achieved through guests with diverging opinions – was not reflected in the audience-generated material; the incoming messages tended to support one side in the debate, and the one-sidedness often included quite extreme viewpoints.

Debates on news issues related to immigration, homosexuality and abortion generated most polarised messages. When these issues were debated, a comparatively higher number of messages were received. The incoming SMS-messages during the debates on immigration, homosexuality and abortion were strikingly biased. A debate on crime among immigrants was for example dominated by what I would classify as xenophobic messages, such as: "I think Norway has enough immigrants! Norway for Norwegians!" and "Send the bastards home!" (19.04.04). Audience's response in a debate on homosexual marriages included such homophobic messages as: "This is not normal. Were Adam and Eve of the same sex?" and "Homosexuals are sick people" (03.03.04). A debate on abortion resulted in twice as many incoming polarised messages containing anti-abortion opinions than messages with pro-choice arguments, and several messages included extreme statements such as: "Abortion is murder" (26.02.04).

These examples typically challenged the editorial policy, and illustrate the conflict between participatory ideals and journalistic norms. The moderator handled these challenges by categorically rejecting messages that were considered inappropriate. However, a significant observation was that the broadcast messages were not selected solely on the base of actual incoming messages – the moderator also had prepared a number of messages. According to the moderator, this practice is a result of pragmatic considerations; the live production required a back-up solution in case of system breakdown (interview 01.12.05). However, in the material selected for this study, I found that there were clearly editorial reasons for transmitting messages with alternative opinions such as "Equal rights for homosexuals".

In order to achieve balance and impartiality in the editorial content, *fabricated* messages were feed into the debates. Fabrication of contributions form the audience seems to be a quite widespread phenomenon, as key editorial changes are also identified in studies of letters to the editors (Raeymeackers 2005). Table 3 below pinpoints the uneven relation between the feminist incoming and the broadcast messages in a debate on crime among immigrants. The table shows categorisation of the messages according to what I have termed xenophobic, moderate and pro-multiculturalism messages.

Table 3: Incoming and Broadcast SMS-messages During a Studio Debate on Crime Among Immigrants N = 1063)

	% incoming	% broadcast
Xenophobic	60.0	37.5
Moderate	28.0	25.0
Pro-multicultularism	12.0	37.5
Total = 100 % =	1063	238

Note: The table indicates that the editorial process included feeding fabricated messages into the debate.

The balance in the broadcast messages illuminated in table 3 was achieved by reducing the xenophobic messages from 60 % of the incoming to 38 % of the broadcast messages, and by increasing the pro-multiculturalist messages from 12% of the incoming to 38% of the broadcast messages. Examples of fabricated pro-multiculturalism messages enabling this adjustment are: "Yes to immigration and a colourful community!" and "Can't we look at immigration as something positive?"

Two thirds of the pro-multiculturalist messages were produced in the newsroom and aired as if they were messages from viewers. This highlights how polarised messages were mediated according to journalistic norms of balance rather than participatory norms of open access.

Rejection of Personalised Messages

Few of the quite high number of messages that linked the debated issues to concrete personal experiences were selected for airing. The personalised messages vary widely in content and style, and ranges from sober pieces of information to rather desperate cries for help. 28 % of the incoming messages could be classified as personalised. Only 2 % of these were selected for broadcasting. A possible explanation for the low inclusion rate is that personalised information requires a high degree of formatting in order to fit with the de-personalised editorial context. There is a clear contrast between the mobile phone as a highly personal artefact, and the public character of the television medium.

As a rule, the TV-debates that generated most incoming personalised messages dealt with family values and human touch. For example the debates on abortion and drug abuse generated a sizeable amount of emotional messages, such as: "I was forced to have an abortion when I was 15 weeks pregnant! It destroyed my life!" (26.02.04), and "I lost my brother because of drugs. People are dying! Please try to save them!" (04.03.04). In spite of their obvious relevance for the topics under discussion, these messages were not transmitted. This rejection illustrates how personal confessions might challenge journalistic ideals of distance to the debated issues.

The elimination of private discourse was also visible in the editors´ reluctance to broadcast personal data such as names and phone numbers. Messages with information that could be traced to individuals were categorically rejected, or edited to achieve anonymity. The editorial policy of anonymity is, on the one hand, based on an ideal of inclusiveness; people are invited to partake without the risk of public disgrace. On the other hand, anonymity is a means for the editors to protect the media company from unpleasant consequences and responsibilities. In news journalism, anonymous news sources are controversial, and should under normal circumstances be avoided (Reece 1990).

Displays of personal feelings and strong outrage are valued as authentic and sellable television in participatory formats (Grindstaff 2002). In the selection of SMS-messages, however, there seemed to be an opposite mechanism; the personalised messages were at large rejected because they challenged the production culture of news journalism. In a study of the convergence of politics and popular culture, van Zoonen (2005) argues that, in journalistic discourse the emotional is regarded as a challenge to the rational. This conflict might explain the rejection of

personal messages in a journalistic discourse. Although the individual responses are required in order to produce the SMS-scroll, the editorial interest is not in establishing a dialogue with viewers of flesh and blood. The rejection of the attempts from the viewers to use the format as an arena for confession and self-disclosure is a pragmatic way for the editors to manage the conflict between participation and journalism.

Recognition of Anti-elitist Messages

The anti-elitist messages were most congruent with the format; 23 % of the incoming messages could be thematically classified as anti-elitist, while 41 % of the SMS-messages displayed on screen were anti-elitist. The contributions from the audience did not come in conflict with the journalistic norms, but rather confirmed the editorial policy in the current affairs format. A central feature of popular journalism is a general scepticism against elites, and in particular against the political establishment (Sparks 1992; van Zoonen 2005). The messages defined as anti-elitist portrayed individuals representing "the people" as everyday heroes, while members of "the elite" were portrayed as scoundrels. In the sample selected for this study, I identified a fundamental distrust of politicians, intellectuals and bureaucrats. Typically, the messages sarcastically claimed that learned people and political elites lack practical knowledge: "Educated idiots, without social experience!" (child protection service debate, 02.03.04), and "They are good at talking, but they don't do anything" (drug addiction debate, 04.03.04). Moreover, the scepticism against bureaucracy and state regulation, and the request for individual freedom was a central aspect of incoming messages. For example: "All the strange rules they make are just nonsense, we are more controlled than in Russia, everything is regulated" (debate on porn legislation, 18.03.04).

The fact that the above examples were all selected for broadcast is symptomatic of how the SMS-messages defined as anti-elitist was given priority in the thematic selection. In contrast to the balancing of polarised messages and the rejection of personalised messages, anti-elitist messages were recognised as thematically congruent with the editorial policy and not balanced with for instance fabricated SMS-messages sympathising with "the elite." This congruency with the format pinpoints how anti-elitist perspectives contextualise the popular journalism paradigm.

The ideal SMS-message, from the gatekeeper's point of view, seems to be a punch-line formulation that confirms the alliance between ordinary people and popular media discourse. SMS-based participation requires communicative competence, which is partly about adjusting to the restrictions of the format and partly about fitting a stereotypical understanding of "ordinary people." There is a paradox between the seemingly inclusion of "the people," and the restrictions of "inappropriate" contributions. The exclusion of unpleasant accounts of the "people's voice" demonstrates that editorial selection process constructs the audience in order to be compatible with established notions of an enlightened debate and a "right-thinking" public. The stereotypy of "ordinary people" is thus valuable as journalistic raw material, while the real viewers often challenge editorial policy with their unpleasant, indecent, and politically incorrect opinions. The appearance of unconstrained access and authentic participation obviously serve strategic institutional goals, but the contributions are in fact tightly restricted to fit the ideological frames of a national audience.

New Gate-keeping and New Journalistic Challenges

The development of hybrid formats, which include interactive components in traditional studio productions, implies major changes for broadcast media. This article has used the case of *SevenThirty* to show how user-generated material is transformed into viewer-friendly television and included in a context of popular journalism. Editorial staff are exposed to a new kind of raw material, and thus provided with new possibilities, but also new journalistic challenges.

The present article has illuminated how the combination of audience contributions and editorial content in news production impacts on contemporary journalism. First, the fact that ordinary people are invited to respond, and thereby gain access to news media contrasts broadcast journalism's traditional ignorance of audience response (see e.g. Schlesinger 1987). Along with user-generated content such as weblogs, digicam footage, and more prestigious "citizen journalism," SMS-participation provides media access and can thus be argued to contribute to a more inclusive public sphere.

Second, the feedback from the audience includes various degrees of subjective and opinionated raw material. This implies challenges for journalistic norms of objectivity, impartiality and accuracy. Although there are examples of subjective journalists and documentary filmmakers, the mainstream news media have been reluctant to include personalised and emotional reporting. Feminist researchers have criticised the ideal of "objectivity," and argue that the ritualised practices of "objective" news reporting might mobilise dominant discourses about truth (Allan 2004, 121). In turn, contributions from the audience might represent a transition towards a more personalised and biased news journalism.

Third, as a result of the new access possibilities, a moderator is included in the production process in order to constrain the influence of the audience activity. The moderator is a new role in news production, though similar to the "gatekeeper" function identified by White (1950). He is responsible for selecting and editing of text messages, and trusted by the producers to make decisions that are compatible with editorial policy. While the journalists producing the studio debate are socialised into a culture of defined ethics and practices, the moderator is to a greater degree an individual decision-maker. Being a relatively new function in news production, the moderator does not in the same way accede to editorial practices. While "Mr. Gates" had approximately a 25-year experience as a journalist, the moderator of *SevenThirty* had no editorial experience.

This new gate keeping involves ethical problems related to the controversial journalistic methods employed to constrain audience influence. Most severe is the fabrication of editorial material, which is at odds with the norm of accuracy, and the ethical principle that quotes are reproduced in a form that preserves their meanings (Sanders 2003; Franklin 2005). The audience is not informed about this method of fabrication, and is thus led to believe that the SMS-based scroll is relatively representative of the incoming SMS-messages. The inclusion of fabricated messages is possible because as news sources they are anonymous, which challenges another journalistic practice in so far as sources cannot be held publicly accountable for their contributions (Bok 1982; Middleton 1993). News organisations have been known to occasionally use material in dubious ways, such as misreporting quotes

and inventing interviews. Anonymous audience participation will however make such practices more manageable for the producers. There is a risk that audience contributions will be incorporated in journalistic production without the norms and ethics normally expected from journalism and editorial use of news sources.

Anonymity, however, also has certain advantages; allowing people who prefer anonymity to take part in the public debate represents an alternative to traditional participatory arenas. Letters to the editors have for example traditionally required identification and the editors are found to select letters from prominent persons (Wahl Jorgensen 2002, 77). Another inclusive feature of SMS-messaging is that the mode of communication is informal and does not require advanced literacy skills. Consequently, in spite of editorial challenges and ethical problems, text messages from the audiences are still a potentially democratising development of the journalistic sphere.

Notes:

1. The short messaging system (SMS) allows for 160 characters to be sent between GMS telephones. Each sent message costs 5 Norwegian kroner, or a little less than one Euro.

2. Access to the incoming messages was gained through a former moderator working in the production company (MTV*)* producing the format *SevenThirty* for the channel TVNorge. Thanks to Espen Blystad for assistance during the process of data gathering.

3. The program was originally called "19.30," from the 24 hr clock, or 7.30 pm (SevenThirty).

4. Even though Norwegian viewers had been familiar with SMS-messaging as a feedback opportunity in news formats since 2001, SMS-messages had never been as prominent as in *SevenThirty*.

5 Other examples are "What do you think about handsome young men buying sex?" (April 12) "What is your opinion on immigration?" (March 3, 2004).

6. The average rating was about 3.5 % market share (50,000 viewers) (www.kampanje.com; 24.03.04).

7. A methodological challenge appeared when a message for example had aspects of both polarization and personalization. Identifying the main argument of each message and including a second researcher in the classification were attempts to approach the challenge.

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