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Integration of active user feedback to editorial processes

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Executive Summary

This is the final report of the project ***Integration of active user feedback to editorial processes***, which was conducted in June – December 2012. The project was carried out by *Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication*, University of Tampere in collaboration with Kaleva Oy.

The project aimed to analyse what kinds of user feedback newsrooms get, how this feedback is utilized in news work, and how the utilization could be improved in editorial processes. Ten journalists in four newsrooms (Kaleva, Aamulehti, Hufvudstadsbladet, Helsingin Sanomat) were interviewed and two workshops were carried out in Kaleva newsroom.

The research indicated that the amount of user feedback coming through increasing number of channels is already unmanageable for the newsrooms, and its utilization is not systematic. Some feedback may be lost and some may not be replied. Many of the current weaknesses are related to inadequate dialogue with the audience.

The workshops brought about concrete ideas and suggestions to improve both audience relations and feedback utilization. Some of the ideas were technical improvements like *a feedback database*, which would facilitate the collection and management of feedback. *An open forum for dialogue* was another technical idea, which would improve the interactivity and transparency of the company.

Besides technical improvements, the workshops brought about ideas to journalistic practices like *a regular editorial meeting* to discuss feedback and its further use, and an *audience-oriented story format*, which should be further developed and circulated in journalistic work. This story format could involve e.g. feedback as part of the stories or have another kind of audience contribution. Some of the ideas were mainly attitudinal, like *an open daily news desk* for audience to comment, and *an etiquette guidebook* for interacting with audience.

The discussions and workshops with journalists in this project showed that there are emerging signals of practices, which aim to integrate audience feedback and involve audience as participatory members in news production. These practices are still experimental and in an evolutional stage, but journalists seem to be eager to listen to audience and try new methods and practices to improve their dialogue. The main issues to carry on are to have user friendly interfaces for both submitting and managing feedback, and to further develop and recycle good practices in utilizing feedback.

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Introduction

Media companies get a lot of feedback from their audiences, but the methods and journalistic criteria for feedback utilization are undeveloped. This report describes the research project *Integration of active user feedback to editorial processes* (June-Dec 2012), which aimed to analyze user feedback and its use in newspaper companies and to develop its utilization in editorial practices. The approach of this project was journalist and newspaper oriented. This is why we mostly used the terms users and audience instead of e.g. public or citizens.

The context of this project is today's constantly changing communication environment, which enables various possibilities for audience participation and contribution, but has not taken its final shape. News media is no longer only one-way channel, where journalists push content to the audience, but multi-way interaction sphere with different criss-crossing information flows. This transformation is mainly due to the increasing use of social media for free publishing, sharing and distributing information.

News media companies are faced with the challenge to retain their audiences in competing markets of news, not least because of free news in social media. On the other hand, many scholars see participatory audiences as untapped potential for journalism (e.g. Gillmor 2004; Rosen 2010). What is needed is new understanding of audiences as actors that have different kinds of knowledge, which could be integrated more effectively into editorial processes.

This project studied *1) the kinds of user feedback newspapers get, 2) how this feedback is utilized in news work, and 3) how feedback could be better used* to improve news journalism and to strengthen the ties with the audiences. To find answers to these questions, the project conducted ten interviews and two workshops among journalists in different positions and duties. Additionally, we received feedback material of one month from Kaleva newspaper to be analyzed (April - May 2012). The interviews clarified the frame of reference about the present attitudes and practices, and the workshops were arranged to discuss the weaknesses and to develop ideas to improve the current state. The interviews were conducted in four newspapers (June 2012): Kaleva (4), Aamulehti (2), Hufvudstadsbladet (2) and Helsingin Sanomat (2), and the workshops were set in Kaleva newsroom in Oulu (September - October 2012). Kaleva Oy was the collaborative partner of this research project.

This report will first describe the present practices and their weaknesses in the newsrooms (chapters 1-3). The second part – also based on the empirical research – will suggest some improvements in the utilization of the feedback (chapter 4). The third and more theoretical part of this report is meant to deepen our understanding of the changing media-audience -relations (chapter 5).

1   How feedback is channelled?

Feedback from the audience comes to newsrooms through various channels. Some of the feedback comes directly to the journalists (e-mails, phone calls), but most of it comes through different online channels (feedback forms, commenting forums). The amount of user feedback through these (indirect) channels is already unmanageable for many newsrooms. For example *Kaleva* newsroom receives about 27 000 readers' comments after online stories in a month, and about 200 comments from online feedback form. Additionally, they receive feedback from e.g. customer services, readers' events, surveys, and their social media services. Furthermore, many undetected discussions on media topics happen in various online spheres in social media. The new arenas of social media have changed the ways of communication, and partly replaced the old communication channels like e-mailing. This change forces also the journalists to be more active in social media to be able to follow their audiences.

The journalists interviewed for the project (June 2012) mentioned altogether twelve different channels for audience feedback, and the amount seems to be increasing.
1: **Personal and directly given feedback**. These are e-mails, phone calls, and letters.
2: **Feedback from the online form**. Feedback is usually redirected by an editor inside the media house to those people concerned.
3: **Readers' comments after online stories**. These are moderated comments and thumbs up/down.
4: **Feedback in social media services** used by the company. Audience can share or recommend stories in Facebook or Twitter.
5: **Comments in the discussion groups**. Some newsrooms provide discussion forums for their audiences.
6: **Clicks to online stories**. Most newsrooms follow how many readers each story gets.
7: **Comments with text messages**. These are various kinds, sometimes tip-offs or photographs.
8: **Readers Panels**. A group of readers are invited to critically analyze some stories e.g. once a week.
9: **Reader Surveys**. Surveys are conducted routinely in most media companies.
10: **Feedback through customer services** such as subscription and delivery services.
11: **Feedback in events.** Feedback may be received in events like seminars or markets.
12: **Readers columns**. The opinions and comments in print papers or readers´ web blogs.
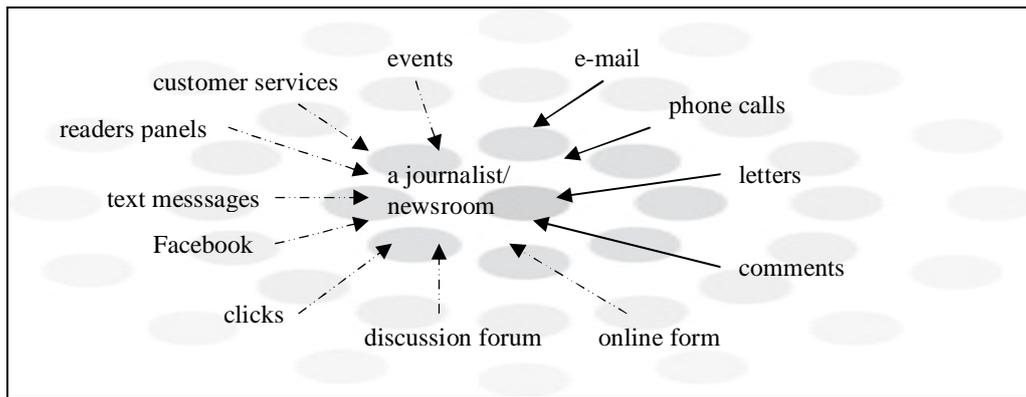
Fig 1: Direct and indirect feedback comes through increasing number of different channels.

Besides directly and indirectly channeled from audiences to newsrooms, the user feedback can be more or less intentionally given. Thus the feedback can be categorized into two classes, 1: *passive feedback* and 2: *active feedback*. Passive feedback denotes to media usage and choices in contents such as clicks to stories. However, this type of feedback may not be the most adequate indicator to describe audience interests (cf. Heikkilä et al. 2012). Active feedback, for its part, aims to be part of content production. This signifies 2.1: *audience as informant* and 2.2: *audience as content producers*. Audience as informant e.g. suggests issues for new stories while audience as content producer participates in the story making by writing or photographing. The main focus of this project was in the forms of active feedback.

Media companies have different strategies to re-channel the user feedback inside the media house. The direct feedback, like e-mail, is usually not sent forward, and thus it doesn't inform others in the newsroom. The indirect feedback is usually channeled through a moderating journalist - sometimes a moderating firm outside the media company - and some of this material is sent to the journalists concerned. Part of this feedback is also aggregated into a weekly feedback-report delivered to the journalists. This practice can be called a model of *centralizing and redirecting*. Some media companies use the *decentralizing* model, which is about directing feedback as e-mails straight from audience to different news sections like sport news or culture editors. which directs the feedback straight from audience into different news sections, like cultural or sport editors. The second method is less resource-consuming, but some of the misdirected feedback may be lost. Apart from the weekly report in some newsrooms, there are no established practices to filter useful feedback from the entire input coming from the audience.

2   What are the types of feedback?

All the journalists interviewed for this study seemed to appreciate the feedback, which tells them about the presence and the needs of their audience. Many of the journalists were also eager to utilize the knowledge of their audience more:

Some of the feedback is sent in anger, - - like "have you become insane?" Some readers remark us for our mistakes or for focusing only on sensations. - - Then some of the feedback is very analytical and thought over. - - Readers should have easier ways to influence the contents of the paper. The thoughts of groups like the youth or immigrants could be better integrated - - (M1)

The users' attention usually falls on the contents of news. Readers want to point out defects, insufficient facts, or they may disagree with the story. Readers' criticism mostly focuses on editorial choices or standpoints. Some pieces of the feedback are aimed at a certain journalist or the editor in chief, whose stories and comments are criticized. These criticisms can be very harsh and negative. Stories on certain topics such as political parties, some people in positions, and religious groups (Laestadians in Oulu) can provoke a torrent of feedback. Feedback will come for sure if the stories concern city planning, public services or school issues. This feedback is usually value-laden and it criticizes the approach or attitudes of the journalists. Some of the feedback diverges from the original story, and the discussion on the issue continues among the readers.

Some of the feedback is overheated, and it may have been quickly given. Some of the interviewed journalists estimated that the amount of overheated and hasty feedback has increased. Most journalists assessed that negative feedback is clearly more frequent than positive; even 80 per cent of the feedback can be negative. However, every journalist mentioned also the positive recognition they receive about their topics or aspects. Besides negative or positive expressions, the newsrooms also receive constructive criticism, which includes e.g. readers' suggestions for new aspects or fact corrections. Some of the feedback is considered very analytical and informed. A reader may suggest a journalist to investigate something or to write about something important. All interviewed journalists mentioned the story tips they receive from their active audience. These tip-offs bring about new stories quite often.

The attention may also fall on the layout of the newspaper or the technical functionality of the online media. This type of feedback can also be categorized as constructive. The feedback on technical functionality is usually directed to technical personnel, and the journalists may not be informed of it. However, some of the technical solutions, like an easy way to comment the stories, are paramount in the interaction between journalists and readers.

User feedback can be classified into following five categories. The named categories are based on the feedback material and the discussions among interviewed journalists. Apart from these five categories, we could add two more classes for participatory kinds of feedback, which can produce user-generated and

collaborative contents. These types of feedback were also discussed at the workshops.

The examples presented below in italics are picked from the Kaleva feedback data to give an idea of the types of feedback they have received. The examples are not direct quotations. Instead they have been generalized a bit and sometimes shortened to bring out the *typical* kinds of feedback. All the personalizing information has also been omitted.

1: Compliments – criticism
Positive or negative feedback can be given without analyzing or much explaining the reasons for the judgment. The form of feedback is usually short and simple. The tone of the critical message may be harsh, sometimes overheated. Compliments may influence journalists in selecting topics or aspects in the future.

Compliments: *Thanks for the column, thanks for the sport news!, your film editorial does a good job, thanks for making news about the oil accident.*
Criticism: *You resemble Seiska (sensational tabloid), only splash, old stories.*

2: Criticisms on the approach
The feedback is given to criticize the approach or standpoint, which is considered wrong or twisted. Sometimes the expertise and knowledge of the journalist is criticized. Sometimes the attitude of the journalist is questioned.

Your stories are biased, your approach is not right, this is sensational journalism, you do not know the backgrounds of this issue, you should localize this issue, your aspects are very narrow, your tone is insulting, how do you moderate the stories (in the discussion forum)?

3: Constructive feedback
Constructive feedback can potentially improve the stories, which makes journalists most interested in receiving it. This type of feedback offers possibilities e.g. to correct mistakes or to utilize the suggestions from the audience.

How about this viewpoint? You should correct these facts; you have grammatical errors here, I could offer you better photographs of the flood, you should interview some locals for the story, you should consider the opinions of the youth, where are the game results?, why did you interview these people?

4: Proposed topics (tip-offs)
Audience may propose new topics or new perspectives for the stories. The newsrooms also request their readers to suggest new topics or send story ideas (tip-offs). This is usually made easy for the audience by online form or text message.

Could you find out about the speed limits in this area? Could you make a set of stories about utilization of uranium? I would like to add information for your dialectal section.

5: Layout and technique

Users pay attention to the technical solutions on the online pages or point out some dysfunctions. The layout of the newspaper may also be criticized.

This area is lacking in your weather map, is it possible to remove an old story from the story archive?, the readers counter is misleading, your online front-page is confusing, the marketing technique is disturbing in your new online pages, some of the links are not functioning.

In addition to the previous categories, we can name two more types of feedback based on user-generated and collaborative contents. These types of feedback were not identified in the sample feedback data, but they were discussed in the workshops.

6: User-generated contents

User-generated contents (or audience contents) are material from the audience, including eyewitness photos, videos, review-sites and reports. Mostly these contents are digitally produced and distributed. User-generated contents also cover the material outside professional journalism, like news weblogs or public discussion forums.

Examples: user-photos in most online newspapers; readers' reports on a cultural event in Kaleva; forms of citizen journalism.

7: Collaborative contents

Collaborations between journalists and the audience may produce user-generated contents, like photos, as part of the journalistic product. Journalists usually invite their readers to join collaborative work. This can be called pro-am journalism, and sometimes crowdsourced contents.

Examples: BBC´s *Video Nation, Oma Olivia* (part of the Olivia-magazine); Kaleva´s story on flight pricing with readers comments.

3   What are the current practices and their weaknesses?

Our research project clarified the current practices and their weaknesses by journalists' interviews and the first workshop. According to the interviews, newsrooms do not have established practices, like regular meetings about the feedback, but they are discussed randomly or when needed. This may occur when an editor-in-chief rises up a topic, which has received much attention. However, all the newsrooms encourage their journalists to interact with audience. Feedback should be replied, and the journalists are recommended to join further discussions in media company's websites.

Feedback is highly valued, because it reflects the relations between media houses and their audiences. Feedback, positive or negative, shows that the stories have

audience and readers. Journalists get new ideas or aspects for their stories, or they may receive new information from the feedback.

It would be sad not to receive any feedback. I don't mind even if it is negative. It shows that the story has touched someone. - - It is very valuable. I have replied the sender by e-mail and sometimes even called. Sometimes we have discussed for long - - I have got more contacts this way, and new ideas for stories - - but some of the anonymous ones I have not replied. (M2)

3.1 The current practices from tip-offs to collaboration

Based on the interviews and our first workshop in Oulu, we can list the following ten ways the feedback is (more or less) utilized today:

1: New stories from the users' ideas
2: New aspects for the stories
3: Learning from the mistakes
4: Errors are corrected in the newspaper
5: Users' ideas are led to follow-up stories about the issue
6: The reader (sending the feedback) is invited to participate as an eyewitness
7: The feedback serves as material for the next story
8: The feedback is part of the material for the story, and can be e.g. compared to other material
9: The real-time situation is reported by using readers' comments
10: The story is intentionally written by using aspects or perspectives asked from the audience

The first five of these practices are commonly known and used, but the last ones brought about more discussion in our workshop. The reader can be invited as an eyewitness when he/she has experienced something, and so may be the best expert in the situation (6). The feedback can serve as material for the story e.g. concerning city planning, and it can also be compared to other material, such as expert interviews (7 – 8):

Once we asked our readers to comment the plans of the new Travel Centre. The architect students had designed a plan B for the Centre, and we put these plans side by side for people to comment. - - We received plenty of comments and made a whole page story. - - then we also received experts' comments even without asking them. - - (F2)

The real-time situations such as power cuts after storms have been reported by using comments from the audience (9). The chat- or live-broadcasting systems have been used in most newsrooms in following up real-time news (Kaleva, AL) or to organize discussions between audience and experts or politicians (Hbl). The story can also be based on the aspects or opinions of the audience (10). Facebook has been used in this type of story to ask suggestions from the audience for interviewees about youth unemployment (HS).

The increasing interaction in social media offers opportunities for journalists to meet their readers. Media companies have followed readers to social media platforms, and many journalists utilize Twitter, FB and other tools to widen their social networks. Some of the audience feedback seems to transform into forms of interaction in social media, and some of it transforms into crowd sourced contents. There is definitely more interaction and more options for social intercourse between journalists and audiences than before. However, the conventional feedback is also still there and requires attention. Journalists see their media brands as representing reliable news sources, which can be maintained only by professionally produced journalism. The stories may be hybrid including both professional and audience generated contents, but they are still clearly segregated to avoid the risk of mixing them up.

Many of the practices seem to treat audiences as sources of information, ideas, comments or other types of material, which can be potentially utilized in journalistic processes. This approach has been criticized by some scholars because it narrows down the relations between journalists and audiences (e.g. Robinson 2011). The journalists' different outlooks on the audience are discussed more in chapter 5.

3.2   Audience is untapped potential

The current practices were also critically evaluated in our first workshop in Kaleva. Basically, most journalists were quite accustomed to their conventional working methods, and may not recognize alternative options even though some routines could be easily modified. The journalists had more questions than solutions, for example:

Are we missing something relevant in current methods? How to meet our readers in the halfway? Are we taking the feedback seriously? Our audience is untapped potential. (comments in the group discussion)

We can utilize feedback in news reporting situations (e.g. newsflash of a fire), but if we look for deeper information and expertise, it is more difficult to receive audience contribution. (M5) - - On the other hand, we should not demand too much from the audience. They participate, when it is convenient for them, for their daily needs and rhythms. (F8)

We listed the following weaknesses in our first workshop:
– the system is disorganized and needs clarification
– some of the feedback may be lost
– there is no system that would reply to everyone
– it may not be clear enough that we really want feedback
– the feedback page (online) should be more user friendly
– the utilization is not systematic
– we should be more known and easier to approach for audience

Constructive audience contribution is clearly valued among journalists, but it seems difficult to figure out how to involve the readers. It is easier to invite readers to react to competitions or to provoking contents than to inspire them to provide their knowledge for additional information to the stories.

Many of the discussed weaknesses were related to the inadequate dialogue with audience. In spite of the increasing use of social media, it seemed for the journalists somewhat difficult to approach the audience. How to get closer to the audience seemed to be one of the most serious questions in our workshop.

3.3   Journalists are too distanced from their audience

The professional culture of mainstream journalism still favours top-down approach, which holds distance between journalists and the audience (e.g. Heinonen 2008; Heikkilä et al. 2012). This seems not to be a deliberate choice, but a consequence of old-established practices, which are challenged but still living. Many news organisations are looking for solutions to remove thresholds and to get closer to their readers. They may move their offices to city centres (AL) or have open newsrooms in cafés (e.g.California Watch or the Register Citizen – side café) (Vehkoo 2012). However, the adaptation to increased interactivity is slow. The established working routines and the tightening demands of cost efficiency do not give a chance to nurture relationships with the audience. At the same time journalists are forced to renew and develop new tricks to attract their audience.

The previous research on journalistic discourse and their relations with audience have identified two types of journalists: the so-called *traditionalists* – those who want to maintain hierarchical relationships, and *convergers* – those who feel users should be given more freedoms within news sites (Robinson 2010). The traditionalists emphasise the need to serve audiences better or the importance of writing stories about ordinary people. The convergers, for their part, stress the importance of audience in fact checking and even correcting their stories (INNO 2010).

The journalists involved in our project seemed to work in the crossroads of both types. Most of them did not have any interest to restrict the feedback activities of their audience, but the moderating role of the news media professionals was still important to be hold. Many researchers have repeated this notion: journalists and editors want to maintain their total control of the content (Heinonen 2008; Bruns 2011; Robinson 2011; Heikkilä et al. 2012). Today the roles of journalists and audiences are in a state of transition and somewhat conflicting. Audiences have got closer as content producers and distributors of news, and they can not be treated as a social unity but as fragmented groups and individuals. Thus we should focus on audience in their relations with media, which denotes to *what people do as audience* (cf. Heikkilä et al. 2012).

Journalistic culture, however, is not transforming fluently. The roles of journalists in relations to audiences, especially in online news spheres, are blurred. The

public is expected to add value to professional contents, and journalists are expected not only to gate-keep the contents, but also moderate conversations (Bergström & Wadbring 2012). The journalists are forced to prioritize their professional duties ahead of discussing with audiences: - - *if you sit around reading the comments on your story, you're not writing a story, and they want the stories written* (INNO 2010). The journalists in our workshop had similar concerns: *we could discuss about our new websites with audience - - but we don't really have time. - -* (M5) Many journalists feel internal conflict within their companies and among the readers (Robinson 2010). Media companies encourage interaction and collaboration with audiences, but they may have neither the instruments nor the resources to exercise it.

4   Suggested improvements

Our approach in this project was to appreciate the feedback in different forms, and to make the most of it. We organised our second workshop to brainstorm and finally collect some ideas to improve the utilisation of feedback.

Many of the proposed ideas were mainly clarifying the current working methods, which were not commonly known or not very explicit. The current methods seemed to require improvements, which were not necessarily demanding or costly. On the other hand, the participants of our workshop had some ideas, which could be realized with additional resources. Most proposals and ideas intended to improve the currently insufficient dialogue between audience and journalists.

4.1   Ideas to improve feedback utilization and audience relations

Some of the improvements suggested were *technical or technological.* The journalists desired to make it easier for readers to send feedback straight to the writer. This could be made possible by an online form attached to the story, which sends feedback to the writer. One of the most discussed suggestions was a database for storing and managing feedback. This database would be quite similar than the current story archive. It could be used for collecting feedback from different departments, like marketing and newsroom, and it would enable searching by subjects, themes, writers or time span. Oneother suggested idea was an online forum for open discussions concerning the media organisation. This would allow people to comment company's work in an open space. A ´readers editor´ (ombudsman) would reply and participate discussions. On the forum. readers' views would be both seen and responded. This could increase the interactivity and transparency of the company. Additionally, the journalists suggested live blog broadcasting or interviews. Here *"several journalists and members of the audience can participate simultaneously. We could follow topics like voting results and comment them, or have our editor-in-chief interviewed by the audience"* (M5)

Some of the proposed improvements were changes in *journalistic practices*. A weekly feedback-meeting could advance the utilization of feedback. This regular meeting would involve discussion on the current feedback and thinking up ways to involve readers in the stories to be written. The meeting would be held, for example, once a week. A reader-oriented story format was another idea, which denotes a clear format, that could be used, for example, on Sunday papers and it would become familiar for the readers. The journalists also wished the good practices like reader-oriented stories to be recycled among colleagues. These practices were used now and then in Kaleva, but they were not commonly known even inside the newsroom. One of these good and already utilized ideas was to have feedback material as a part of the story. This denotes that feedback, like comments on the issue, are used as contents of the story. However, the journalists wanted that these comments and feedback should be separated from the journalist's contents. It should be told in the story if contents are from the readers. The journalists also pondered if people could be rewarded for active feedback.

Some of the proposed improvements involved *attitudinal* change. A weekly meeting about feedback upgrading was this type of idea. The new rules or etiquette for interacting with audience could also be usefuland need some attitudinal changes to be accepted by the journalists. A kind of guidebook "how to interact with audience" was thought to be useful here. One member of the workshop suggested opening up a daily news desk for the audience. The daily news list could be published online for people to comment, or at least parts of it. In addition to the above mentioned ideas, the visibility of journalists suggested to be improved: *"their professional skills and expertise should be seen"* (F7).

Some of these ideas and proposals were quite easy to put into practice any time soon (e.g. attitudinal changes or improvements to current practices), and some of them require more resources and would possibly be carried out in future (e.g. a database).

The ideas of the workshop are categorised in a following table. The categories are simplified and can overlap:

The proposed ideas of the workshop	Technical	Practical	Attitudinal
1. feedback straight to the journalist	✓		
2. regular feedback meetings		✓	✓
3. reader-oriented story formats		✓	✓
4. feedback database	✓		
5. open forum for dialogue	✓	✓	
6. recycling good practices		✓	✓
7. open daily news desk			✓
8. etiquette rules with audience			✓
9. feedback as part of the story		✓	
10. rewards for feedback		✓	
11. live-blog broadcasting	✓		

Table 1: the workshops contributed ideas for technological, practical and attitudinal improvements, which could enhance feedback utilization and strengthen the audience relations.

4.2 Shared and circulated journalistic practices

One of the gains of our workshop was to circulate good practices in utilising user feedback. Some of the journalists presented their methods in a few empirical cases, where they had used audience comments as part of the story.

The first example was an online story about the increasing prices of flying. The journalist aimed to collect audience comments and experiences about the issue. He used the Facebook-wall of Kaleva to tell about his plan, and asked for comments by Facebook, Twitter and e-mail. The same call was presented in his online article. The outcome during a workday was two e-mails, five writings on Facebook, and over ten comments after the online story. The comments received by e-mail and Facebook were most useful. The journalist wrote his story partly based on the feedback. Information from the audience was found valuable for the story, and it would have been impossible to collect it with any other method in that time span. This example clearly generated collaborative contents with the audience.
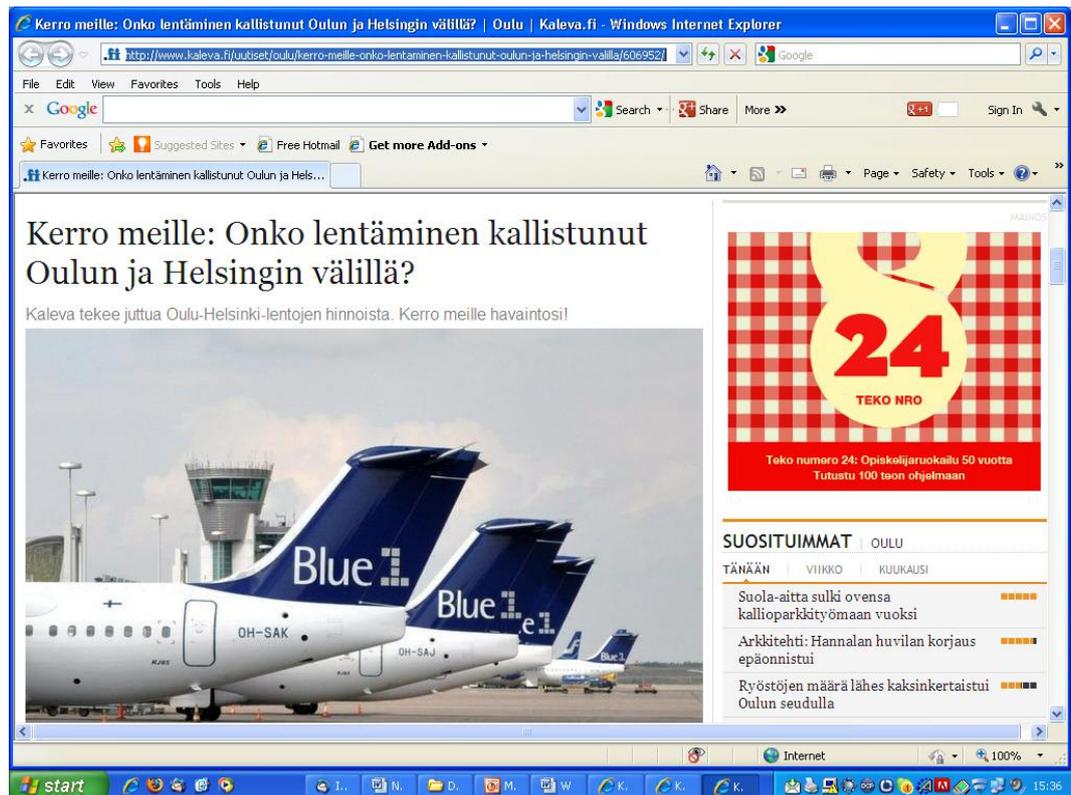
Fig 2: Audience was asked to comment on the increasing flying prices. The comments were received by FB, e-mail and Twitter in a workday (http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/oulu/kerro-meille-onko-lentaminen-kallistunut-oulun-ja-helsingin-valilla/606952/).

The second example presented was a story about a road accident (in Kaleva online news). The story brought about 208 comments attached after the story. The issue was clearly a conversational issue, and the journalist aimed at making some conclusions about it. He made a round-up of the comments, and wrote a story about the most serious problems at the scene (user-generated contents as part of the story). This second story brought about 232 comments.

The third example was about audience contribution in sending photographs about the consequences caused by a storm. The readers sent over a hundred photographs e.g. about flooding, and the loading number of the page increased enormously. The journalist used audience here as eyewitnesses, and the method can be named as crowd sourcing (the utilising of audiences as content contributors).

Additionally, some journalists shared examples where they asked alternative solutions or questions concerning city planning, like a parking cave or a bus terminal, and these comments were used as a part of the printed story. The audience contribution was also used as crowd sourced material in reporting on a cultural event.

The presented examples tell about the state of change in journalistic practices in relations with audience. The journalists recognise the need for new types of dialogue with their audience, and the audience seems to be involved in issues, which they find problematic, interesting or in need of discussing. Possibly they even expect to be invited in journalistic discussions to remain subscribers. This state of change is not trouble-free, and many media companies are looking for ways to strengthen audience relations in the middle of financial difficulties and personnel cuts.

5 From transition to future scenarios: challenges and possibilities of feedback utilization

The present turning point in audience relations is largely due to cultural changes in communication environment. Audience is not only a receiving object of information. Instead, it has taken various roles as contributors, distributors and also providers of information – mainly by using the possibilities of the social media. Consequently, the role of professional journalism has transformed from mass media type of information distributor towards an interpreter or describer of information, and a kind of moderator in discursive (online) public spheres. However, the changes in journalistic working culture are slow and the mission of journalism is not clear in this transforming news media environment.

The present roles of audiences vary from receiving customers to conversationalists, gate watchers and contributors of information. The roles are not stable, but changeable and discursive depending on the needs and motives of the audiences. In the roles of *receiving customers* (1), the type of interaction between journalists and audiences is typically one-way. Audiences as *conversationalists* (2) or *gatewatchers* - audience as observing news accuracy (3) represent two-way interaction with journalists. Audiences as *contributors* and creators of information (4) represent multi-way interaction with (or without) journalists. The last two are the most obscure types of interaction for professional journalism to engage in, and the journalistic practices are still embryonic.

Audience	Journalist	Type of interaction
readers, customers	producer, gatekeeper	One-way
conversationalists	producer, moderator	Two-way
assistant, gatewatchers	producer, generator	Two-way
contributors, creators	Media worker, gate opener	Multi-way

Table 2: The roles of audiences vary from receiving customers to contributing participants. The table is a modification from Sirkkunen (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, p. 153).

The active feedback comes from audience in roles of conversationalists, assistants, gate watchers or contributors in two-way or multi-way interaction. Audience acting as conversationalists, assistants and gate watchers are likely to provide informative feedback in their interaction with journalists. Audience as contributors refer to e.g. crowd sourced contents as a result of multi-way interaction.

Audience as informants or contributors appear like *a supplier of source material* to journalism. This conventional approach in professional journalism has been criticized by some scholars. Robinson argues that journalists have traditionally interacted with *sources* and not, necessarily, with audiences (Robinson 2011). This demonstrates the top-down newsgathering techniques of traditional journalism, which may obstruct development of other approaches. The term user-generated content refers to the same setting, where audience generates material to journalists, who process it back to audience to consume. This setting is not maintained to consciously undermine audience, but the long-established reporting practices and today's economical stress inevitably have their impact on news making practices. However, if the interaction appears to be dominated by journalists outsourcing their work to audience, the interaction may be called two-ways, but it is still hierarchical.

5.1   Reassessing the relations with audience

Media organizations have high interest to audience participation, which is not new. Letters to editor, radio phone-ins, television talk shows and vox pop interviews have always been part of the broadcasting schedule (Williams et al. 2011). Feedback or comments from audience testify that news have readers and consumers. This is an increasingly important signal to today's journalists. However, the rise of grassroots, open and civic journalism (Rosen; Gillmor 2004) has challenged the professionals into a new type of news environment, where journalism is not only about broadcasting; but distributing, sharing and communicating. In this news environment the forms of audience-journalists - interaction call for new innovations.

Our workshop also pondered the relevance of online interaction with audience. Some journalists strive for improved interaction by using social media tools like Facebook and Twitter. In Facebook, journalists can make "friends" with audience, and in Twitter readers may become "followers". In many cases, however, this means only journalists´ presence in social media, and it rarely concretizes in forms of participation or collaboration. On the other hand, some journalists are excited about interacting and also collaborating in novel ways, and social media is a useful tool for that. The benefits of online interaction were discussed in our first workshop:

It is helpful in creating (social) networks, new contacts or tip-offs, - - to strengthen the relations with readers and receive inside information. The ones who send feedback usually have contacts. - - Once I read criticisms on my story in a discussion forum where people told that my story was fucked up. I had to admit

that they were quite right. I felt that something was missing when the story got published. - - (M6)

The aim to strengthen the dialogical relationships with audience seems to leave more options for the interaction than the audience-as-a-source approach. Improving this dialogue was also one of the goals of our second workshop. The journalists recognized the need to *reassess and strengthen their conversational relation* with the audience. The journalists seem to have distanced too much from their audience, and both sides have difficulties to approach the other one. This was discussed in our second workshop:

- - Should we make ourselves more visible and better known among the audience? Are we still too difficult to approach? (M6) *And how should we approach people to get their comments - - should we force them or bribe them?* (F7). *Should we reward people for their feedback? - - (F5) All feedback is not replied, even if it should be - - (M6)*

5.2   From interpretation to processing and open access

The journalism scholars have classified five stages of audience participation (Domingo et al 2008; Singer 2009). The participatory practices go hand in hand with the roles of journalists. The traditionalist types of journalists are likely to see audience in less participatory positions (e.g. as sources and customers) than the ones closer to so-called convergers.

The first stage of participation is *1) the interpretation stage*, which happens when the audience gives feedback and discusses journalists' stories after their publication. The second is *2) the distribution stage*, which denotes to users disseminating stories typically in social media. The third stage of participation, *3) the processing or editing stage,* includes users' contribution. Readers may correct errors and assist journalists to improve their stories. The fourth stage is *4) the selection or filtering stage*, which means that the readers may decide what journalists are to cover. The fifth stage of participation, *5) the access or observation stage,* refers to the audience reporting stories themselves inside or outside the media organization. The role of audiences vary in these stages from customers (1-2 stages) towards more contributing assistants (stages 3-4) or creators of information (stage 5).(cp. Table 2)

Based on the findings of our project, all these stages of participation are essential in a successful dialogue between journalists and the audience. The first two can strengthen the producer-customer-relationships. The feedback is valued, recognized and replied. The third and fourth stages enable audience participation in a process of writing. The fifth stage of participation happens in cases of crowd sourced stories. The ideas of crowd sourcing have been experimented in the Finnish projects such as: *HS-Näkökulmat, Oma Olivia* (part of the magazine) and *Huuhkaja* (crowd sourced material from online page to magazines). They have asked their audiences to suggest story ideas, sources and story making methods, and they have also had stories published.

To find new ideas in utilizing audience feedback already during a writing process, our workshop discussed also *an idea of process journalism.* Journalism as a process describes story as a fluid productive process opposed to a discrete newspaper article (Robinson 2011). Jeff Jarvis has positioned the news story at the center of information flow, surrounded by the ideas, discussions, questions, interviews, corrections, comments and follow-ups. This makes story writing a collaborative and developing "mutualized" process (fig. below). Open, data driven and data based journalism are examples of process type of thinking, where the process is based on analyzing data sets for the purpose of creating a new story. This data is freely available online and it is analyzed by open source tools. The Guardian magazine have used data journalism e.g. in stories about national debt, Gaza-Israel crisis and happiness index in UK (www.guardian.co.uk/data). The journalists in our workshop were familiar with the idea of process journalism, and there were also some plans to add databases, such as interactive maps, to crowd sourced stories.
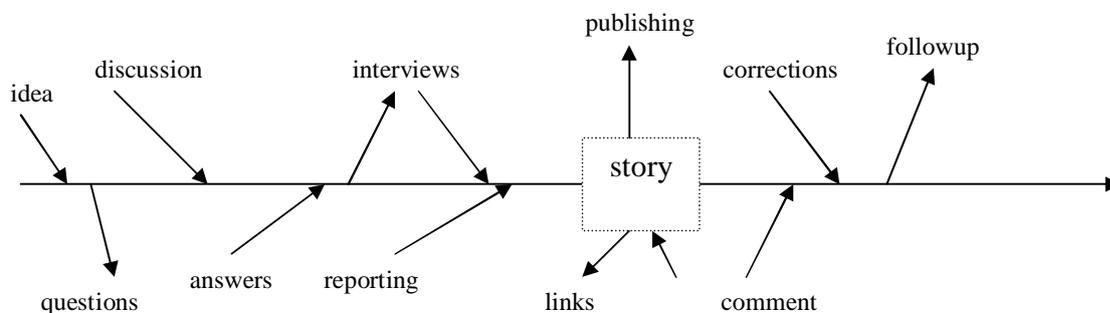

Figure 1: The news process described by Robinson 2009 (originally Jarvis 2009)

The interaction between journalists and the audience is obviously changing towards more participatory practices. One of our interviewees commented: *feedback is going to transform into interaction, and interaction into crowd sourced contents, which is interesting. - - But all feedback is not going to change, there will be conventional feedback too.* (M4) The different forms of feedback discussed in our workshops are important to acknowledge, because audience holds differing roles in their relations with the media, which can not be simplified into receiving or participating roles, but all the variations between.

6   Conclusions

Even though our approach was to clarify how the active user feedback could be better integrated into editorial processes, it was also useful to recognize the wider frame of reference. This frame goes back to represent the audience not only as users, customers or passionate participants, but as actors in differing roles and situations. Thus the audience-journalists relations are not only about integration,

but also about respect and consideration, closer relations and better conversations, possibly collaboration and participation.

Our project indicated that the amount of feedback coming through increasing number of channels is unmanageable and thus its´ utilization is not systematic. Some of the feedback may be lost and some may not be replied. Many of the current weaknesses are related to inadequate dialogue with the audience, which needs to be strengthened.

Our workshops proved that there are many ways to improve the utilization of feedback when it is deliberately pondered in the newsrooms. The workshops brought about concrete ideas and suggestions to improve both audience relations and feedback utilization. Some of the ideas were technical improvements like *a feedback database*, which would facilitate the collection and management of feedback. *An open forum for dialogue* was another technical idea, which would improve the interactivity and transparency of the company.

Besides technical improvements, the workshops brought about ideas to journalistic practices like *a regular editorial meeting* to discuss feedback and its further use, and an *audience-oriented story format*, which should be further developed and circulated in journalistic work. This story format could involve e.g. feedback as part of the stories or have another kind of audience contribution. Some of the ideas were mainly attitudinal, like *an open daily news desk* for audience to comment, and *an etiquette guidebook* for interacting with audience.

The long-established journalistic practices may prevent journalists from creative solutions and innovations. In the case of feedback, the conventional approach is to interact with audience mainly recognized as customers or sources and not to perceive other benefits for interaction. Thus it is useful to question the established practices while trying to find new ideas. The preconceived ideas about audience may also bother newsrooms in trying to assess their expectations. This is why it is essential to strengthen the dialogue and consider all types of feedback seriously. The forms of peer-to-peer learning among journalists, such as our workshops, could be useful methods to brainstorm and develop new ideas and practices. In the case of Kaleva newsroom the work will be carried on.

The conversational relations can advance the transparency and openness of journalism. The rise of open-source and participatory dialogue could lead to fruitful and creative collaborations and partnerships between journalists and the audience. The open and networked online sphere is also favorable to processual story writing and collective actions. Since professional news journalism has difficulties when competing in speed with the social media, it has to find its strengths elsewhere like in investigative journalism and quality coverage. Audience contribution can be useful here in news commentary and news curation (gathering, sorting, categorizing, presenting). This "wisdom of the crowd" could be generated into the contents of investigative and quality coverage, but it is much more demanding than utilizing ad-hoc feedback.

The discussions and workshops with journalists in this project showed that there are emerging signals of practices, which aim to integrate audience feedback and involve audience as participatory members in news production. These practices are still experimental and in an evolutional stage, but journalists seem to be eager to listen to audience and try new methods and practices to improve their dialogue. The main issues to carry on are to have user friendly interfaces for both submitting and managing feedback, and to further develop and recycle good practices in utilizing feedback. This project revealed the journalists aspects, but additional research would be useful to include also the viewpoints of the audience.

References

The Interviews

(F1-F6) and (M1-M4) The project conducted ten interviews of journalists in June 2012. The journalists hold different positions both from print and digital media. They work for the four regional media companies: Kaleva (4), Aamulehti (2), Hufvudstadsbladet (2) and Helsingin Sanomat (2). The interviews were conducted as anonymous and half structured.

The Workshops

(F7-F9) and (M5-M10) The project coordinated two workshops in Kaleva newsroom, Oulu. The first one conducted in 24th of September and the second one in 16th of October. The participants were mainly the personnel of the Kaleva newsroom, and two represented the customer services of Kaleva Oy.

(INNO) The Interviews for the previous project *Challenges of Global Innovation Journalism* (2009-2010). The research conducted interviews in three countries. The reference is based on 10 journalists' interviews in the US by Maarit Mäkinen. The research was conducted by the universities of Tampere, Turku and Jyväskylä, and it was funded by TEKES.

The feedback material

The feedback material of about one month (April – May 2012) was received from Kaleva. This material includes: 1) feedback from the online form (23.4. – 20.5.12), 2) some feedback received from journalists in Kaleva, 3) the amounts of clicks per story, 4) the comments (about 27 000) after the stories (openly readable online), 5) some documented results from the three readers panels, 6) Juttutupa-discussion forum, which is open to read online, 7) some documented feedback from the trade show (20. – 22.4.12), 8) some collected feedback from marketing department (23.4. – 20.5.12), and 9) feedback concerning the delivery services.

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