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Twitter, News Aggegators & Co: Journalistic Gatekeeping in the Age of Digital Media Culture
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2014
BACHELOR THESIS
B.S. in Digital Culture

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2014-DK1410- Bachelor Thesis course

15-06-2014

1. **Introduction**

Web 1.0 and 2.0 inevitably changed the roles of both journalists as gatekeepers who filter information for dissemination through broadcast, publication or for the internet, but also the role of the audience. Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos defined gatekeeping in their book *Gatekeeping theory* as a process of filtering and selecting pieces of information into a limited number of messages, which then reach an audience and act as a center of the media's role in public life (Shoemaker and Vos 10). The process does not only determine which information will be selected, but also the content and nature of the messages. Theories about the agenda-setting role of mass media have been analyzed by Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring who examined how media content affects members of the public: They observed that the public's confidence in their local government strongly correlated with the critical news stories that appeared in the local newspapers and concluded that journalists therefore had a great influence on local communities in general. (23) This confidence in newspapers does not seem to have the same power anymore since many news consumers visit various pages and online sites that share different opinions and values.

Judging by the sheer variety online, you can conclude that readers are less loyal to their newspapers than they used to be. They often visit other portals – expecting online content to be not only free but also to be always immediately updated, otherwise they migrate

to other sources. Internet activist Ethan Zuckerman (2009) even calls online audiences

"narrative junkies." He compares a breaking news story to a few chapters of a novel, and

states that readers are reloading the page in the hope to hear the rest of the story. The role of

search engines, such as Google, and content aggregators are accelerating this process even

further, as they encourage a fragmented approach for consuming texts.

Increasingly, online audiences are reporting news themselves in the form of what is

currently referred to as "participatory journalism" (Hermida 14). This form of journalism can

be distinguished in four groups, in collaborative or rudimentary forms of journalism,

journalism which fulfills a democratic function and highly networked form of journalism.

(Fröhlich et al. 4) All types characterized by the distribution of content to wider audiences,

and they therefore ultimately challenge the "authority and expertocracy" (Goode 2) of

journalism, defying an elite league of experts who have a prevalent role in advising and

influencing political actors and informing the public. They further question "the priesthood

and punditocracy of corporate media organizations" (Kwon et al. 224)), as well as the

journalist's identity as a profession. (Goode 7). Kovach and Rosentiel present eight models

for contemporary journalism and argue that journalists need to empower a combination of

new and old traditions while adopting new forms of storytelling and facilitating a discussion.

Clay Shirkey states that it is important to save a society in which journalism plays a vital role.

"When we shift our attention from 'save newspapers' to 'save society', the imperative

changes from 'preserve the current institutions' to 'do whatever works.' And what works

today isn't the same as what used to work." (Shirkey, 2009) Lianne Chin-Fook and Heather

Simmonds identify increased opportunities for interactivity and two-way conversation, as

well as dialogue and interaction between businesses, institutions and newsmakers (7, 9). Sten

Steensen describes a new type of journalism, a form of "cozy journalism" drifting away from

previous journalistic norms such as objectivity and immediacy that result in "significant

changes to the professional ideology of journalism" (Steensen 700). These results lead to the conclusion that the theorists seem to agree upon that journalism itself is still an important and necessary practice, even though journalists might radically need to redefine and re-conceptualize their role for society, particularly in the age of digital media culture.

In my research I explore the role and responsibility of traditional gatekeepers for society. In addition, I reveal alternative types of gatekeepers have evolved in digital media and show how they interplay. It is a critical approach towards the concept of gatekeeping, adapted to a social media landscape. One factor to consider is how gatekeeping models have evolved over time and recognize their significance for contemporary gatekeepers. I am concerned with questions such as: Are the traditional models efficient enough and if not, which additional players should have to be included in the gatekeeping process? In addition, I study how Social Media platforms transform or appear as a substitution for some journalistic practices, as they stress highly personalized news diets, a defined need for some users. I also include a discussion of role of the influencers in an online network, those who are the center of the primary hubs of information with many of their followers that dictate, decision-making and maintain control over content. I will include a discussion about how different types of content aggregators fulfill gatekeeping functions. I question the definition and roles of contemporary journalists in the context of traditional gatekeeping practices to see how these functions are fulfilled. Research suggests that traditional, non-digital journalistic models with the journalist as the objective producer and the readers as a passive consumer are not sustainable anymore, because users are longing for a deeper level of democratic participation and personalized news (Kwon et al, 2012, Kovach et. al., 2010, McNair, 2009) This discussion leads to the conclusion that journalism is currently not threatened by extinction, but rather it has the opportunity to reconceptualize itself, particularly with the tools and

affordances of digital media. Alternative actors which will be explored in this essay have evolved which challenge the preeminent power position of journalists.

In the early 2000's and late 1990's media theorists argue that that mainstream media was extremely slow at adapting to new news practices that would fit in a digital environment, supposedly because of their "innate conservatism" (Gillmor114). The slow adoption of blogs and other social media sites coincides with the conversion from Web 1.0 with its static websites and one-way conversation to Web 2.0 which is described as highly interactive and offering everyone the possibility to "…go in and edit stuff…[…] and join the party" (Burton: 2004). Editors of the telegraph experimented with including an audience in the news-making process but the editors criticized the audience behavior claiming they were not listening to each other and critiquing their usage of language, spelling and grammar. The experiment was characterized by resistance and refusal on the side of the editors. (Thurman54) The slow adoption of news media is not surprising since journalism appears to have been deeply changed through the influence of digital media and has "gone from being a quasi-profession – it has no enforceable codes like doctors or lawyers – to an activity where anyone can participate" (Basen). It is, as Clay Shirkey stated in 2012, a situation now where the publishing industry has gone "from an industry to a button", stressing the low barrier that exist for publishing content. Previously publishing had to undergo a whole rigorous development, from research, writing, editing, selecting to printing and distribution, while nowadays virtually everyone can start a blog and publish content immediately by simply clicking to publish it. For many critics of new digital practices, journalism has lost its control and importance as a center of social and political influence, or in other words they have lost control over the status of their gatekeeping function (Basen).

2. Research Context

The research context serves as a theoretical fundament for the gatekeeping process, especially in the past as it will focus on what gatekeeping and media theorists have theorized about gatekeeping . The second part on the other hand, will give an overview of contemporary gatekeepers. Shoemaker and Vos' theories are formative when it comes to gatekeeping. They claim that the process of gatekeeping determines the way in which we define our lives and the world around us and that it is therefore strongly affecting us. The Internet concurrently also changes the relationship and power positions within networks (Chin-Fook et al. 15). Shoemaker and Vos's developed the unidirectional flow model which describes the flow in which information is passed on to various actors of society from institutions to everyday individuals. Chin-Fook, L & Simmonds, develop the model further in to the multi-directional model, since according to them the flow of information is multi-directional rather than one-way as "individuals and institutions/companies have an equal opportunity to be gatekeepers online" (Chin-Fook et al. 26). Goode argues that users now have greater choice, access and opportunities for participation, while the economic barriers are very low. Nevertheless, power distribution is not equal as there are still barriers for everyone to participate (Goode 13). Kwon,Oh, Agrawal and Rao observed that social media sites such as Twitter show a strong concentration with few prominent content providers and a large number of less-visible and powerful alternative actors (224). 10% of the Twitter users are posting 90% of tweets (Heil and Pikorski: 2009) which leads them to the conclusion that social networks are hierarchical. This, against the common belief that such networks are flat, shows that this network design is a reflection of wider social hierarchies. Bastos, Raimundo and Travitzki observed gatekeeping in Twitter political hashtags, showing that users with an intense activity of individuals with few connections can also generate highly replicated messages, aside from big hubs with many followers (268). There apparently is no "egalitarian nirvana […] where anyone can become newsmaker or opinion leader, where merit has truly triumphed over status" (Goode 13).

Previous research and traditional gatekeeping models strongly focus on the role of professional newsmakers as gatekeepers, and the factors of their decision making, while the audience has been excluded. (Kwon et al. 214). There even is a lack of a fitting term for the message recipients subjected to the gatekeeping effect and this omission reveals that their role has been neglected. Kwon,Oh, Agrawal and Rao observed the activity of online audiences and reflected on the power dynamics for gatekeeping, arguing that the audience is not the last stop of the gatekeeping process:

> Instead, they [the message receivers] do intervene in the gatekeeping process to varied degrees depending on their level of "political power," ability of "information production," "relationship" with traditional gatekeepers, and ability to find and choose "alternatives" as substitutes for elite news content. (214)

They therefore assumed that the audience's role in the gatekeeping process had been underestimated. Nevertheless, online users do not necessarily have an interest in fulfilling the roles of traditional gatekeepers. They still look at professional journalists to not only be informed, but also "to interpret analyse, sift fact from conjecture and opinion, dig beneath the surface, air different voices, and tell us interesting stories" (Goode 19). Nowadays, there exists a bigger possibility of tracking audience through audience metrics on websites. These preferences are shared among the newsroom, which puts journalists under pressure to conform more to audience demands. Even though online editors become increasingly aware of audience traffic statistics, it does not necessarily mean that they comply with these. As "the New York Times executive editor Bill Keller said, "We don't let metrics dictate our assignments and play, because we believe readers come to us for our judgment, not the judgment of the crowd. We're not 'American Idol'" (Lee, Powers &, Seth 510)

However, there is a clear trend towards the so-called *Daily Me*, a term that was coined by MIT lab founder Negroponte in 1995 describing a virtual daily newspaper that is tailored for one individual's taste. The presence of Google Newsfeed and RSS feeds reduces the role of the traditional newsmakers to someone who only supplies the ingredients rather than unfinished meals (Goode 2), expressing the notion that news is more scattered than it used to be and people reject articles that are longer and more detailed. Rosenstiel and Kovach note that the current situation is that of "news grazers who acquire information from multiple platforms at different times" and in addition that news is selected, today, in effect, by story rather than by news organization, which might be a more proactive experience than a passive one. (Rosenstiel and Kovach 174). In addition, audience gatekeeping describes the process of users passing along news items and stories after their own values of newsworthiness. They are continuously emailing news items and sharing them through social media channels such as Digg, Reddit, Newsvine, and Twitter. Goode coined the term "metajournalism" which describes the main purpose for audience gatekeeping to increase the circulation of already published information through using aggregation algorithms and public participation (Goode 1290).

Print and analogue broadcasting might be heading for extinction and marginalization, similar to the vinyl records in the age of CDs (McNair 347). But the practice of journalism itself, unlike music, will not go away anytime soon. US Commentator Clay Shirkey (2009) noted that journalists have the somewhat naïve impression that the old systems will be spared from dissolution at least as long as no new platforms have established. He denotes that print media still has an important position in society's heavy journalistic lifting, since many kinds of events, big or small, are covered. He further articulates that news coverage is used by many actors in society, from "politicians to district attorneys to talk radio hosts to bloggers. The newspaper people often note that newspapers benefit society as a whole" (Shirkey, 2009). But

how should they stay in their position if thousands of sources and voices are seemingly more trustworthy than only a few? Rosenstiel and Kovach note that there are benefits of new practices that allow collaboration:

> Outsiders of all kinds can probe more deeply into newsmakers' businesses and affairs. They can disseminate what they learn more widely and more quickly. And it's never been easier to organize like-minded people to support, or denounce, a person or cause. The communications-enabled grassroots is a formidable truth squad. (45)

Gillmor sees it as vital that journalists use a combination of old and new practices, adopting new forms of storytelling and are still acting as mediators between the public, politicians and institutions, but with more varied and complex roles. According to him, they have to change their role from mere producer to more dynamic actors, offering services, such as answering questions, publishing resources, providing tools and facilitating discussions and public dialogue. Goode also claims that mainstream media has to be complementary by identifying needs, despite people's personalized news diets and micro-conversation instead of delivering a readymade product. Additionally they might have to draw users out of their news bubbles through active engagement with citizen journalists, amateur bloggers and social media. Goode is of the opinion that increased audience participation does not mean that the whole concept of an audience has to be reconsidered, as music and theatre have shown, where they take other, more active roles, but do not disappear (Goode 19) .

It is particularly interesting that such a ubiquitous authority as mainstream journalism has such a struggle coping with a pro-active audience as well as the transformation in format from "a lecture into a conversation" (Gillmor, 2011). One potential reason might be that an effective conversation means listening before expressing an opinion, and an immediate

reaction might not be a healthy start for a conversation (Goode 14). This is accelerated by the fact that in the age of digital media, people expect certain immediacy and that content for example is updated every minute of the day. New media and especially search engines such as Google have been particularly perceived as scapegoats for the crisis of mainstream news and journalism since Google bypasses the front pages of newspapers online, deep links and supposedly supports a fragmented decontextualized approach of news consumption. (Goode: 2009: 16) Online audiences face a vastness of content from raw information sources, to governmental, newswire or media organization. (Kwon, Oh, Agrawa, Rao 214). Rosenstiel and Kovach argue that big media companies missed the opportunity to create and later buy the sites that are now taking away their "economic foundation", because they failed to understand the value that these technologies hold as they did not seem to be related or important enough to the old media systems (188). Goode argues that Google also enables the audience to deeply research a topic and compare sources, and that Google itself has an interest in high-quality standards in order to distinguish its own value as a news gateway (16). Others have observed an echo-chamber (Farrell and Drezner 7) effect which describes an egocentric news diet, with sources that "reinforce their own [the citizens'] views and prejudices without exposure to alternative or challenging perspectives". (Goode 18) Google's CEO Eric Schmidt describes that there is a "serendipity-principle" which theoretically ensures that citizens regularly get exposed to unexpected content, but as Goode notes, those are usually merely trending topics and therefore not the news with highest relevance or value but only those with the biggest popularity are present (16). Chinfook and Simmonds theorize that digital platforms do not "function as technological gatekeepers", but instead they use algorithms and structures that are reinforced by Web 2.0 which then determine the way content is generated and displayed. There is still a need for users and individuals to generate, input and update content (22)

As mentioned above both journalists and audience have been altered through the introduction of Web 2.0. In the first part of this thesis, I will therefore concentrate on the journalists' changing roles and their professional identity. Further on, I will discuss how gatekeeping is defined by various theorists in the past with a special focus on the flow model developed by Shoemaker and Vos in 2009. In addition, I aim to discuss the multidirectional model suggested by Chin-Fook and Simmonds in 2011. Gatekeeping theory is an essential basic module in understanding how the introduction of Social Media Sites has affected journalism as it identifies what factors distinguish journalistic practices from other ways of selecting and filtering information such as search engines.

In the next section of the essay the main players that challenge the journalists' gatekeeping role will be discussed, thereby with a strong emphasis on the rising audience. I will focus on three main factors that seem to be having the biggest impact: influencers, the role of Social Media and the role of content aggregators in terms of gatekeeping. I would like to study Social Media Sites in general, and Twitter more specifically and to what level they influence contemporary journalistic practices. Twitter has been of big interest for many studies due to its immediacy, for example, during the Investigation of Tweets about the 2009 Gaza Conflict. In addition, I am going to study the role of influencers in a network and how they parallel original journalistic practices in filtering, selecting and distribution for example and their relationship towards gatekeepers. The role of news and blog aggregators, gates that select those stories, formats and also categorize, are another focus of this thesis, as there hasn't been a lot of research about their impact on journalistic practices. The editing process and collection can either happen automatically via algorithms or can be edited by hand by editors.

3. Gatekeeping Theory
3.1. Early gatekeeping models

The earliest mentions of the concept gatekeeping dates back to 1922 in the book "Immigrant Press and Its Control" by Robert Ezra Park, the author states

> Since the telegraph and the telephone have converted the world into a vast whispering gallery, there is no limit from which a newspaper can be made. Out of all of the events that happen and are recorded every day by correspondents, reporters, and the news agencies, the editor chooses certain items for publication which he regards as more important or more interesting than others. The remainder he condemns to oblivion and the wastebasket. There is an enormous amount of news 'killed' every day. (328)

The practice of gatekeeping was therefore recognized in the quite early stages of media and communication studies. But the term was not officially coined until the psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890 – 1947) studied in what way housewives would be influenced in their shopping behavior. The goal was to raise homeland consumption of secondary cuts of beef, so the better cuts could go to the military. While observing the behavior of the housewives, he identified them as the key gatekeepers who were deciding which food would enter through the channels, such as the garden or supermarket, and ultimately on to the plates of the family. The food undergoes several channels and can be rejected and therefore lost at various stages. The channels are subdivided in sections, and at each is a gate which controls the movement through the channel. On both sides there can be forces which restrain or support the passing of an item, such as the store manager refusing to have products in stock due to low demand or the housewives who pass the isles selecting a few items and ignoring others. In addition, the food gets altered through the process of moving down the channels through methods of preparation, such as cutting, stewing or steaming. The presentation of the food items such as

by candlelight, as well as the environment like in a kitchen vs. a dining room also effect whether they are eaten or rejected.

Lewis soon realized that his gatekeeping model goes far beyond food choices and can be applied for "the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group..." (Lewin 145) as well. According to Shoemaker and Vos, Lewin "understood gatekeeping to be the outcome of a web of interconnected gates and forces, within the social field. In other words, they are "the product of the interaction between the person and his environment. (Shellenberg 70)." A student of Lewin, David Manning White studied the "complex series of "gates" a newspaper story went through from the actual criterion event to the finished story in a newspaper" by observing in which way an editor at a small city daily newspaper was selecting stories. His outcomes were that the editor's selection was highly subjective. The small study he conducted was far too little to be representative. However, many researchers have taken interest in the concept in regards to the selection of news. One example is Walter Gieber, who observed the behavior of 16 wire editors and came to the conclusion that their selection was mainly based on deadlines, production requirements, and the number of competing news items. He describes the telegraph editors as "caught in a strait jacket of mechanical details" and "concerned with the immediate details of his work rather than the social arena in which news is made and given meaning" (Gieber 432), ultimately leaving them only a small scope of action. In addition, they observed that newspaper editors had rather little contact with the community. These findings lead him to the conclusion that the editors were rather passive. Nevertheless, Gieber's study considered a factor that White's study had completely ignored: there are many other gatekeepers involved in the process of news making, not just one single editor. Theodore M. Newcomb developed the idea of co-orientation in 1953, which explains that "Communication, in its essence, serves two ends, to establish a common orientation of two (or more) individuals with respect to each other and,

simultaneously, to link them to a shared object of concern". (Littlejohn & Foss 203) In detail, it describes the process when Person A is moving towards a Person B through Object X. Object X describes events, topics or ideas. Media theorists Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr expanded Person A from the individual to advocates, institutions that have something to share and B to audience members. They additionally introduced a player C –the gatekeeper, which is opening the gates for some Objects X or instead, is closing it for others. The Gatekeeper C might get their Objects X directly from the source of information, or through Person A. This model also concentrates on feedback which can be exchanged between A,B and C and thus express needs from the audience. C as the gatekeepers sees themselves as an extension of the needs of person B but at the same time also have economic interests, which manifests in getting returning customers and a big readership, viewership or audience. The model stems from the assumption that initiation of communication starts with receiving messages rather than the sender sending it and was one of the first to document the complex roles of gatekeeping.

The gatekeeping model was further developed by McNelly in 1959, expanding the model of one single editor into multiple gatekeeper, in different stages, as reporters for example serve as the first gatekeepers that decide if an event is published. Other gatekeepers that are involved are "foreign correspondents, editors, news service editors, copy editors and radio or television news editors". When the news item passes from gatekeeper to gatekeeper, each of them might "cut, reorganize, or merge it with another story before it ultimately reaches the receiver". (Shoemaker & Vos 18). This might be especially problematic when information about an event is supposed to reach foreign audiences. These problems include "reportorial errors or bias", "translation and transmission difficulties" as well as "suppression and censorship" (McNelly 23). McNelly, also introduced the idea of "subsequent gates" which describes the process of updating the news item that passes through the gates. Various other

theorists developed the gatekeeping model further, such as Abraham A. Bass who coined the term "double-action internal news flow" that describes the flow from the raw material into the completed product. Instead of focusing on multiple unbeknown gatekeepers, Bass clearly differentiated between two types of gatekeepers; the "news gatherers", in form of writers and reporters and "news processors", which includes editors and translators. This model was entitled to be too simplistic, as news gatherers are not "picking up stories as if they were fallen apples, he creates news stories by selecting fragments of information from the mass of the raw data he receives and organizing them in a conventional journalistic format". (Chibnall 6). Shoemaker and Vos present various theorists that discussed new actors and elements that had to be added to the traditional gatekeeping model. Gandy introduced public relation practitioners and representatives of interest groups as additional gatekeepers since they also contribute in producing material that is easily used in mass media. Hickey (1966) analyzed networks and studied the perceptions of the gatekeeper by others in the field as well as by themselves and he concluded that from the three types of organizational control, the communication handler who controls the movement of messages within an organization, the channel mediator, who determines the nature of channels through which information passes and the content manipulator, who shapes and forms the nature of the message, the content manipulator inherits the most power. Tuchman (1974) brought a new concept into the gatekeeping models, observing that journalists categorize news items in hard or soft news, making it easier to handle the flood of daily information bits. Chaffee describes that not all gatekeepers are equally powerful though, but those "who represent the mass media control the diffusion of information for millions of people, a fact that gives them extraordinary political and social power" (Shoemaker & Vos, 20, 21).

3.2. Gatkeeping Shoemaker & Vos

Gatekeeping as it was defined by Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos in 2009 describes the process of "culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day." (1). Reporters as well as editors are downsizing the millions of events into a smaller selection of media messages. But above the actual practice of selecting and distributing content, gatekeeping is the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (233). Journalists carry information about the event to people around the globe, […] survey the environment, and act as institutional surrogates for the rest of us. Journalists create social artifacts, the word and images that convey information". But they also have other responsibilities, for example "Journalists select and order the medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, and suspicion and transform them into news that is true and reliable." (Kovach & Rosenstiel 171) Their actions "determine the way people define their lives and the world around us and therefore gatekeeping ultimately affects the social reality of every person." (Shoemaker & Vos 3). Shoemaker and Vos stressed on the importance of the correct language and the right terminology when describing and developing the gatekeeping model. In their opinion, a lack of specific terminology easily causes confusion with other theories. Therefore, they called the material that is moved to the gates and beyond, *information*. The *information* that is shared is typically about *events*. Information which *the mass media* presents to the audience is called *messages*. These can include news, opinions, features or video material. A *news item* is content that has been published and distributed by a mass medium. *Mass media* describes all those media organizations which transmit information from few to many people through web pages, news portals, or online blogs, but also newspapers, radio and magazines. Vos and Shoemaker also differentiate between *mainstream media*, including all thoughts discussed in the usual scope of debate in contemporary American culture, and *alternative media*, where reach and centrality of topics do not necessarily cohere. They discuss the problematic

terminology of *new media vs. traditional media,* with online media being around for decades, calling online sites "new media" is outdated.

Figure 1.1 Traditional Gatekeeping Model – Unidirectional flow developed by Shoemaker and Vos
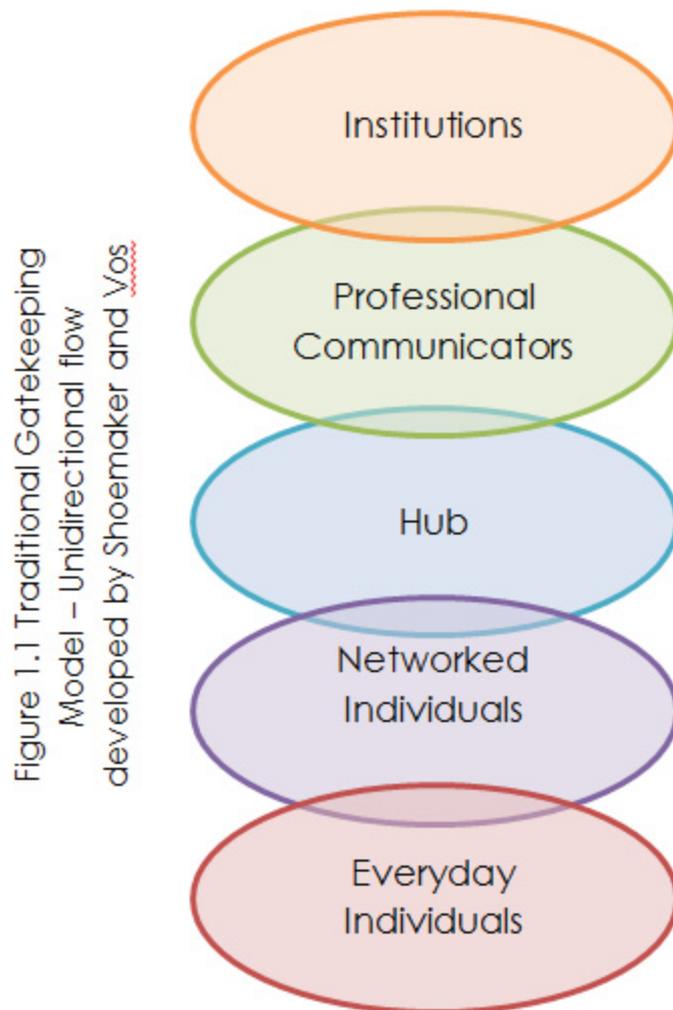
According to Shoemaker & Vos, there are several factors that determine if and how a news item passes through the gates. For example, there are great differences between different gates, some are rather low and easy to pass, such as a small town newspaper with a restricted selection of news items to cover, while big newspaper have bigger gates. There also are fluctuations when a news item has an easier time passing through a gate. Trivial events that take place under ordinary circumstances also have a small likelihood to be published, while "events happening outside of the boundaries are more likely to become published". Newsworthiness is determined by factors such as "timeliness; proximity; importance; impact;

or consequence; interest; conflict or controversy; sensationalism; prominence; and novelty, oddity, or the unusal". (Shoemaker & Vos 25). These categories can be further distinguished in four dimensions – political, economic, cultural and public welfare. Nevertheless, people are the determining factor who eventually decides which content is newsworthy since news event shape people's realities significantly. Messages of high quality or attractiveness, for example image material or text that creates a cognitive image through anecdotes or case studies, are much more likely to be published. "Every story should have a structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end." (Epstein 153). According to Bennett, events turn into news when they have dramatic dimensions that can be compared to "Freytag's pyramid", describing the theory of dramatic structure, with "rising action, sharply drawn characters, and of course plot resolution." (Bennet 41) While these observations are describing traditional newspapers, some of the factors might also apply to online news and newsrooms.

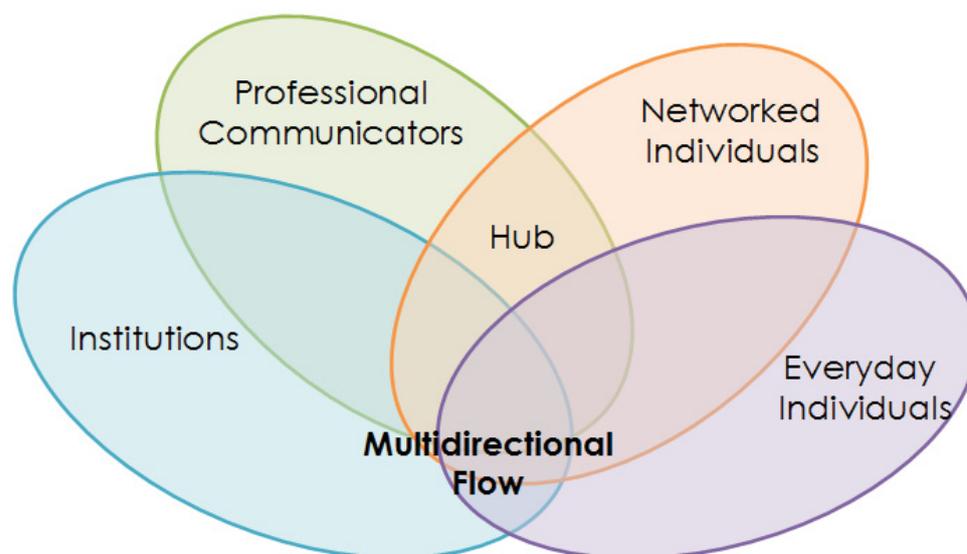### 3.3. Chin-Fook and Simmonds: multidirectional-flow model

Figure 1.2 Gatekeeping Model redefined –
Multidirectional Flow Validations developed
by Chin-Fook & Simmonds

Chin-Fook, Lianne and Simmonds, Heather, inspired by Shoemaker & Vos gatekeeping model identified that "increased opportunity for interactivity and two-way conversation" and the possibility for "audience members to participate in the dialogue, interacting directly with businesses, institutions, and newsmakers" (9) requires to develop a new gatekeeping model which "transforms Shoemaker and Vos (2009) unidirectional flow through the gates into a multidirectional flow by which everyday individuals, networked individuals, professional communicators, and institutions all have the potential to influence one another and the flow of information online." (23) They develop the model assuming that "anyone can post anything [online] and no one will fact check it, edit it or filter it in any way." (14) They lack evidence of their model. Other theorists have previously criticized the over-simplification of the changing power structures from few to many. Power distribution is never equal, especially from a supply-side, as infrastructure does not allow all users to participate to the same level. In addition, there is not only a distinction between the time-rich and time-poor but also in motivation. "An abundance of news sources to navigate and opportunities to "join the conversation" […] scarcely democratizes news for citizen who work double shifts or have round-the-clock care responsibilities." (Goode 9). Goode also argues that audiences not necessarily have an interest in fulfilling the same role as professional gatekeepers. "Despite the rhetoric of 'democratising news', citizens do not routinely aspire to be the professional journalist's 'equal' in matters of newscraft, even among those busily blogging and tweeting on a daily basis." (19)

4. Audience Gatekeeping

Some theorist (Kovach & Rosenstiel) argue that gatekeeping does not apply to digital media, but on the other hand more audience activity, the audience participates as secondary gatekeepers online. The definition of the audience has been drastically redefined as they are gatekeepers themselves and it is difficult to predict targeted audiences because of the global

influence of the Internet. Bastos, Raimundo and Travitzki summarize this problematic

scenario quite well:

> The concept of gatekeeping was sufficient to describe the control–
>
> communication infrastructure based upon sender–receiver roles and source–
>
> destination directions. But when digital networks superseded centralized wired
>
> networks, it became possible to communicate with millions of users at little or
>
> no cost. The previous sender-to-receiver role became increasingly obsolete, as
>
> the gated could also act as the source of information. Even information filtered
>
> by gatekeepers could be later redistributed or changed as it moved through the
>
> gateways. Hence, the traditional notion of source–destination was no longer a
>
> meaningful way to describe information control in information networks. (261)

Shoemaker and Vos already recognized that the flow of items passing through gates might not

be unidirectional as Lewin (1951) had theorized, with the forces in front of the gate affecting

those behind it, but not the other way around. Bruns coined the term "gatewatcher", meaning

those that are engaged "primarily in publicizing particular bits of available information that

seem interesting, a role greatly enhanced by the advent of social media" (Singer 56, 57) and to

describe the relationship between "the audience" and "the media". But the audience is no

longer passive (Gillmor, 2004) and traditional journalists are in direct competition with

amateuer or citizen journalists in a convergence culture model (Deuze, 2007). There is a lot of

first person-reporting about stories and events online. As networks grow, gatekeepers take the

roles of "gateways", and reporters, editors, witnesses, archives and readers add different

elements. Thus it remains unclear who is in charge of gatekeeping the final product.

Nevertheless, gatekeeping remains "a key mechanism in digital networks", only with the

inclusion of many senders and receivers, instead of individual editors: "What was before an

internal decision-making process carried out by the media, which relayed to or withheld information from the public, is currently a decentralized process of following up on a story." (Bastos, Raimundo, Travitzki 262).

4.1.Influencer

Studies – especiallyof the microblogging service Twitter - have identified a totally new form of gatekeeper. "As previous studies have shown […] elite users act as hubs in the network and they tend to generate more retweets than ordinary users. The difference is significant enough to qualify these users as new gatekeepers […]." (Bastos, Raimundo, Travitzki 7). These gatekeepers can be called influencers since they often "think in a way they would not have otherwise thought" or when individuals "do something that they would not have otherwise done". These influencers are categorized as "key influencers" and even though there only is a minimal number of influencers. They have the power to reach the whole network. He distinguishes between three types of influencers, the "key influencer", the "social influencer" and the "known peer influencers". Key influencer "have an influence on specific brands, product, service, and purchasing, decisions" and have a presence on digital platforms such as on a blog, Facebook or Twitter profiles, where they share information with users they not necessarily know in person. These types of influencers are the closest to the traditional gatekeepers considering their reach and impact on a network, however since they are mostly influencing purchasing decisions, they cannot be compared to journalistic gatekeepers. Social influencers on the other hand "are everyday people" who are influencing others purchasing decisions by publishing reviews about a product or service on social media platforms. Often, there is a personal relationship between influencer and individuals in the network. Peer influencers are closely connected to the individuals in their network, and therefore have the greatest impact on the peers purchasing decisions. "An influencer

professional's key role and responsibility is in helping an organization situate itself for

influence and success" (Sheldrake 52, 53).

4.2. Gatejumpers

Brogan and Smith coined the term "gatejumpers", describing "marketing talents

on the Web" who find "a better way to do things while everyone else is too busy to notice." or

"who skip past useless middle steps (ie, gates) to get to their goals faster." (Brogan et al. 34)

The process of "gatejumping", it is if one juxtaposes a television channel with platforms such

as Vimeo, or Elle magazine with a fashion blogger. This finding would suggest that

influencers differ from the journalistic gatekeeper, those players in society who differentiate

between truth and rumor and ultimately construct a social reality, as they are solely

influencing people's buying decisions. "Gatejumpers" on the other hand, might actually hold

similar functions as the traditional journalist. But does an influencer not also need to be a

gatejumper in order to actually influence people? And can't journalists also be gatejumpers as

well, for example when they are having their private blog? Sten Steensen suggests that online

journalists tend to use more personal remarks, especially in live reporting, and they "use a lof

of humour, a lot of personality […] are a bit more self-exposed than if we were just to do

sober reporting" Objectivity to Steensen is a very difficult value in online journalism which

requires one to immediately engage with an audiences. Objectivity therefore seems to be

impossible to sustain. On the other hand, he also sees the danger of an "alienation" of the

majority of the audience, if journalists interact with only the participating part of the audience.

This would imply, that if journalists are thriving towards being "gatejumpers", they might be

at risk of losing their "hierarchy of ideals that constitute the professional ideology of

journalism" and might lead to an "alienation of the majority of the audience". (Steensen 13)

5. Twitter

To determine the significance of gate jumpers and influencers, it is also important to look at the social media sites that enable users to reach certain popularity. On Twitter, a "digital media platform which provides a mechanism by which over 100 million active users [218 million active users in June, 2013) worldwide (Bosker, 2011, para. 3) users are able to communicate and stay connected with friends, family and co-workers. (Chin-Fook et al. 11) by sharing links to articles, videos or other type of media. "User *A* can follow *B* or any other user on the system, thus creating a social network in which user *A* receives the messages from the users he or she follows. Twitter being a large network of users, it is the network of followers and followees that structures the channel through which messages are passed on to users." (Bastos et al. 262). It has been contrasted to gatekeeping studies as it "is a privileged system when it comes to analyzing gatekeeping in digital networks, as it better resembles an information-sharing network than a social network" (5).

Twitter also offers the possibility to "not only consume incoming information from within their own [the user's] Twitter network and/or outside of the system, but also broadcast the consumed information to their own network of followers" (Kwon et al. 224). Kwon, Oh, Agrawal and Rao studied Twitter on the basis of the Isreal-Gaza conflict, and collected a large set of Tweets by monitoring news about the conflict via Google's search engine with keywords such as Gaza Attack, Gaza Ceasefire or Gaza Conflict. They specifically collected tweets about the Gaza conflict because it is a significant, international political issue, and mainstream news providers took interest in it and were reporting on the conflict over a longer period of time. They eventually observed that only a smaller percentage, 30% of tweets, actually referred to traditional news organization websites, while the biggest amount was referred to organization websites (23%), social media sites (17%) and online journalism (15%). Interestingly, a big proportion of 43,18% of all tweets were generated by traditional

channels, showing that even though, media organizations are tweeting extensively, Twitter

users much more prefer alternative news sources and providers (219- 220). Even more

significant is the fact that the posts "are restricted to 140 characters or less" (Chin-Fook et al.

11). How can a service that only allows its users to use such a limited scale, be an actual

threat to online gatekeepers who publish long and coherent texts, carefully selected and

researched? The reason why Twitter might challenge the hegemony of traditional

organization lies behind its immediacy. Content can be published almost immediately and is

therefore skipping potential gatekeepers, as it "operates in real-time based on user-generated

content." (Chin-Fook et al. 12) News reach the public through tweets often even earlier as

through mainstream media. When US Airways jet crashed into the Hudson River, news

reached the public with a tweet and image 15 minutes earlier than broadcast media spread the

news. (*Telegraph*, 2009). Kwon,Oh, Agrawal and Rao concluded the following argument in

their study on how online news items re-circulating in Twitter:

> In this study, we conclude that Twitter users' gatekeeping process may
>
> diminish the authority of traditional organizations at least as a primary
>
> information delivery system. However, that does not mean that the audience
>
> gatekeeping in Twitter is free from existing systems. […]While the popular
>
> perception is that social reporting through new technologies such as Twitter
>
> may lead to media fragmentation, our results suggest that audience
>
> gatekeeping may in fact lead to media concentration […]." (224)

They observed that the users share items from alternative channels to a high degree, so that

traditional news actors are not the "predominant agenda-setter." Chin-Fook and Simmonds

argue that "authenticity anticipated from a Twitter user depends on the number of followers

that individual has and their relationship to their followers. Research on the micro-blogging

platform has however revealed strong concentrations in both active and inactive users. Attention on Twitter is fragmented and those users who are most followed are not necessarily big media organizations, but instead the "most prominent channels were social media sites, such as youtube.com, blogspot.com, and wordpress.com, rather than traditional media actors." (Kwon et al. 224) The aspect of gatekeeping remains critical as 0,05% of users attract 50% of all attention on Twitter. According to Kwon,Oh, Agrawal and Rao this small percentage consists of few prominent content providers and a large number of less visible alternative actors. "If gatekeeping was previously identified with mass media channels, it is now shared among a number of unidentified elites who ensure that information flows have not become egalitarian (Bastos et al. 5). They also examined the ways that "user activity and mention network seem to be the prevailing forces in message diffusion" instead of having a large number of followers. The top ten followers were not mass media channels, but instead, individuals communicating with their audience in a more direct way. "Twitter has revealed a new class of individuals who often become more prominent than traditional public figures, such as entertainers or official gatekeepers. The function of such individuals is neither of broadcasting nor narrowcasting, but rather a form of directed-casting." (Bastos et al. 9) Twitter might be a special case where high intensity correlates with the generation of highly replicable messages, other social media sites work through different mechanisms and the premise of the multidirectional flow model suggested by Chin-Fook and Simmonds remains questionable.

6. Search Engines

Another source of information that developed, when news distribution got more and more fragmented, are search engines. In a discussion between Associated Press General Counsel Srinandan Kasi and CUNY journalism school professor Jeff Jarvis, Kasi argues that most of the source of revenue online was invested in search engines "like Google that filtered,

sorted, and highlighted digital content. Meanwhile, […] the original creators of that content were left out in the cold." (Anderson 1013)   Jarvis however believes Google indeed holds value and that one needs to distinguish between two types of creations of value such as "the creation of the content and the creation of the audience for that content. Each bring value ... It's up to [publishers] to decide whether you can create a relationship and value out of that." Nevertheless, it "is not the case that Google exercises the same kinds of gatekeeping powers as news providers, its influence is at the level of information architecture, not content." As search engines, just as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are "man-made systems designed to sift, rank, and filter", it is rather problematic to argue "that the software driving Google's search and news engines are neutral gateways to information." The "fragmented and "decontextualized approach to news consumption encouraging […] less scrutiny of the sources behind the content" (Goode 8), which means that users of search engines take information serious and perceive it as credible which weren't published following the same guidelines as content published on journalistic news outlets. Due to their fragmented and also personalized approach, search engines therefore don't seem to hold the same gatekeeping power as news outlets, but how do content aggregators are fit for that, which curate and categorize content after certain criteria?

7. Content Aggegators

Content aggregators have the advantage that they can reach billions in only weeks or even days with potential viral content. In the print era this process took decades to reach similar numbers of audience. Jarvis defined "aggregation" as a process of "fragmentation, excerption, and indexing" which is a very general definition and could also apply to search engines. Furthermore, "aggregation sites actually enjoy the benefit of the traffic flow. Over half the surveyed audience got the news from aggregation sites' rather than the original content producers, Kasi concluded." (Anderson 1013) Anderson furthermore defines

aggregators "as hierarchizers, interlinkers, bundlers, rewriters, and illustrators of web content". A primary role of an aggregator is to organize between different institutional or non-institutional content creators, and then ultimately build links between individual news stories, to evaluate these "bundled news stories according to rapidly shifting criteria of importance, popularity, and newsworthiness". (Anderson 1015). Anderson derived the information from an interview that a journalist needs to know networks and neighborhood, or should be able to rewrite stories in an unexpected way; an aggregator on the other hand, has to have a good judgment of what a good story is. Some examples of this include the German content aggregation services *Storyfilter and Rivva*, which differ significantly in the way they aggregate news. While Storyfilter's news are selected by a group of editors that pick stories after personal criteria as traditional aggregator used to, Rivva works entirely autonomous through an algorithm in selecting stories after their popularity and mention online. To understand the examples on a deeper level, a short portrait of both portals will follow.

7.1. Example: Storyfilter

Storyfilter is a portal that went online in 2013 and it presents stories and videos selected from news outlets as well as the Social Web. It can be compared to the American news portals Buzzfeed and Upworthy, with the difference that those also produce original content on their own, while Storyfilter simply shares finds. Another comparable example is the Swedish blog Hyllat, which generated 1,5 billion site visitors in only one week and according to its creator Daniel West has been set up in only 2 days. It shows that the trend for content aggregators is universal. The content on Storyfilter is not selected by complex algorithms, but instead by editorial stuff and a network of curators. Users can also contribute via the social media sites. They advertise themselves and their services on their website as follows:

>The web can be exhausting. It costs a lot of time, to look through all channels
>
>and then click on a story, which isn't as good as the headline promised. If you
>
>do not put the effort in this, you might miss very great content. Storyfilter is
>
>aiming to take this hard work off your shoulders. Like gold washer, we face
>
>the content-flood and find the nuggets for you. (Storyfilter, 2014)

Further on, they promise to scan news sources and the social web to find the "best content" of today and offer to distribute it via a mail in the afternoon as a "Storyletter".

As mentioned above the process of gatekeeping is defined as the "culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day." (Shoemaker & Vos 1). If one reads the description what Storyfilter has to offer, there is a strong resemblance to what traditional gatekeeping has been understood by media theorists. However when observing the front page from the 5th May 2014, the first topics that are displayed are "Look Up – if you stare at your display, you won't see the chances you miss", a video urging the native digitals to step back from their phones and other digital devices and start communication which each other again. Another post is "a Brazilian which wanted to look like Barbie's boyfriend Ken – he went under the knife 20 times". This features a story of a man who had face surgery and implants made to conform to beauty ideal. A third post is called "The tweet-trick: Thanks to this App your kids are finally looking in the camera when you are taking a photo" presenting the app "Look birdy" that blinks and makes sounds when someone is trying to shoot a photo. All the posts provide a link to the video or original article and summarize the content in short bulletpoints outlining what the content is about.

The posts on Storyfilter are representing popular and viral content, rather than ones that may have meaningful social significance. Berger and Milkman studied viral content on

the New York Times and observed a pattern in the content that was shared most frequently. They concluded that emotion and arousal inducing content as well as positive content was most popular. Anything that would activate people, such as useful and surprising content was shared frequently as well as topics that awaked awe, positivity, anger and anxiety Any posts that were placed on top of the page was naturally more popular. Content with a lot of sadness on the other hand, was much less likely to be shared. They theorized about the social impact of shared content. They argued for example, that people share awe inducing stories through which they want to "bolster their own sense of self", or anxiety inducing content in order to "calm themselves or reduce uncertainty" and might therefore influence the "social reality" of individuals. However the posts that are shared on Story Filter seem to be part of a "popularity contest" (Goode 11) and they are rather non-transparent and often influenced by seeding or marketing agencies that want to interfere and control the popularity of certain pieces of content. Therefore, I would argue that Storyfilter does not have sufficient functions to call the service a gatekeeping one, especially as it has a strong focus on emotion inducing content, which is very subjective. I would argue that journalists, defined as those who "select and order the medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, and suspicion and transform them into news that is true and reliable." (Kovach et al.171) fulfill more responsible functions. However, in an interview with the magazine Vice, one of the founder of Upworthy, which can be compared to Storyfilter, said that it is a fact that hard news might have to compete with all the exciting entertainment content as news has been increasingly "lazy and dispiriting and you […] read the news every morning and you end up wanting to go back to bed rather than to start your day". In addition to that observation, many people are not active consumers of news but instead they are rather semi-passive, since they have a busy life and it is therefore not part of their constitution to actively learn and search out the latest things. Luka Goode also differentiated between the "time-rich and the time-poor" which creates difficulties for some to

"join the conversation" but also to research content above a certain level. While they can't cover all topics, they are trying to draw massive attentions to the most important topics. Sometimes that also happens through gateway drugs or click-bait, which describes content that is rather shallow, but still might, - or maybe especially because of it, attract a lot of users. The founders of Upworthy aim to make people care about other more deep topics, not only to feature celebrity slideshows in order to generate traffic to their page. While they argue that people should rather be persuaded by facts and bullet points that are presented in good arguments, psychology over the last few years has shown that this is not the way people internalize or understand complex topics. According to Upworthy's founder, that is the reason, why good storytelling is extremely important in the age of digital media, as it has to be emotionally compelling and not to fact dense for people to stay on a topic or page. But they still see it as problematic that people seemingly enjoy entertaining content, rather than engaging in political ideas or debates on topics such as income inequality or racial injustice. However, judging just by its popularity, especially on social media networks, the aggregators Upworthy, Buzzfeed and Storyfilter appear to fulfill a need for emotional and compelling content, so even though it's short-lived, they do seem to hit a certain Zeitgeist.

7.2. Example: Rivva

Rivva is a content aggregator founded by Frank Westphal in 2007 and is conceptually influenced by a classic newspaper. Instead of a handful of editors who are writing the front page or, as in the case of Storyfilter, from curators with different backgrounds, the content is generated from thousands of editors' posts who are discussing the recent and relevant topics on their website. From that selection, Rivva is categorizing, sorting and filtering the content autonomously through links and mentions on social media sites and displays them on the front page as a form of self-curation, Rivva creates an overview about just those articles from blogs and online newspaper outlets that are discussed strongly or that are recommended often. They

are sorted after top stories, new articles, tech news, media, politics, economy, culture/life, science, law, and four videos. On the 11th of May 2014, the first three topics that were discussed are the action of the Ukrainian army against the separatists in the Ukraine, the plan of the nuclear energy companies to let the German state pay for the demolition of the old reactors and the third post is centered around the Eurovision Song Contest winner Conchita Wurst. Those topics seem to have a high significance for at least the German audience as they are part of the current public discussion, and therefore have the power to shape individuals social reality. Rivva has a strong focus on how individual stories are developing over time, creating a fluid process, more than one finished product. The creator of Rivva calls the blog sphere "cannibalistic", in terms that the weaker blogs perish while bigger blogs get most of the attention. It happens frequently that topics which are imitated by smaller blogs are picked up by bigger ones and those eventually come more popular than the original. This process is unfair but yet democratic, as authors that have been working for years to build up a reputation, are receiving the attention they have earned. In February 2011 the founder Frank Westphal had to take down the page, due to lack of financial funding. In June 2011 the founder received support from a sub brand of *BMW* and later from the German newspaper *Sueddeutsche*, which enabled Westphal to pay for server costs, to revive the page and to develop a better algorithm. One comment on the closure of the service was: "In spite of Twitter and Co, without any central entrance page, the hermetical blogosphere is losing its orientation about what is currently debated, it's "most important connecting element" (Kuhn, 2011). This statement reveals that many bloggers feel that apart from the variety of news, RSS feeds and online newspaper sources, many users feel lost facing the sheer variety of events happening and topics that are discussed.

I would therefore argue that the content aggregation system Rivva holds the position of a gatekeeper. Anderson summarizes that aggregators acting as gatekeepers "raises a much deeper conflict, as reporters " and aggregators, under this more agonistic model, can thus be expected to battle over the jurisdiction of journalism". This is caused by the fact that both are "making particular rhetorical claims about what they do and why they do it in public settings or in 'inter-professional venues such as conventions and trade publications' (Anderson, 1009). Rivva - even though autonomously operating - is still a "man-made artifact" but is at the same time "subject to less critical scrutiny or public awareness than even the relatively mystified domain of the newsroom." (Goode 8). The algorithm with which Rivva is constructing news is therefore also object of censorship, as for example a law in Germany forbade excerpts from online journalism, so called snippets, to be published without the explicit approval of the publishers. Due to the legal uncertainty, over 650 online news pages, blogs or magazines were banned. Even though the algorithm works for itself, it has its constraints and the creator of the algorithm can easily spike it and put focus on certain news more than others. It is therefore not an objective news coverage, and it is more complex to understand the mechanism behind how news is aggregated. However, Rivva succeeds in publishing meaningful content, and can be perceived as a point of intersection between news aggregation and digital media and might be even called a network "of *journalistic expertise*, with both human agents [in the case of Rivva through the programming process] and non-human objects networked together in complex strands of material practice and knowledge production."

News aggregators do "make sense of this other World" (Anderson 1018) to varying degrees, as Rivva succeeds more with it than Storyfilter or Upworthy. Storyfilter seems to be more about self-glorification while Rivva is about information transmission as well. People are trying to understand the "human psyche as it gets put on the internet … so aggregation

isn't about journalism, at least the way we've always thought of journalism up until now. It's about understanding the web." (Anderson, 2013, interview 1021). However reporters feel the need to defend their professional boundaries "against the encroachment of outsiders" even though they themselves could start aggregating new websites as well.

> Aggregators are thus *both jealous and generous i*n the deployment of their expertise, rather than possessive of it. The primary discrepancy between the two networks stems, once again, from notions of what 'original reporting' is and how it should be carried out. (1020)

Anderson argues that the line between aggregation and original reporting is not entirely clear, even though there have been attempts to clarify. "Aggregators and journalists both compile shards of facts, quotes, documents, and links together in order to create narrative-driven news stories." Anderson states, the conflict lies behind their work as "each defines the other as a sort of pathological doppelganger" and also behind the "criteria of evidence" (1021), ways in which they acquire transparency and authenticity. While aggregators have accepted website and link structure as options to process information through the network, journalists as part of journalistic culture, still prefer analogue evidence such as "quotes, official government sources, first-person observations, analog documents and files" (1022) as material to construct their articles. Based on a different understanding, both parties have developed different ways to "validate their professional identity". One problem however is that content aggregators want to appear as a as a one-stop shop. While many traditional news organizations have built trust and a regular readership over decades, the aggregators as the shooting stars might be very quickly at risk of a losing in their importance, just like a viral video loses its significance and power after it has shared on various Social media sites. A number of flops or a change in Facebook's algorithms might already result in a loss of users. They therefore need to turn

those users that they lured onto their pages, into frequent readers. Both online journalists therefore can expect a fight over the readership. But this might even evolve hybrid versions that connect the advantages of content aggregators such as immediacy and the understanding for popular content, with the authenticity and thoroughness that journalism wants to portray.

8. Conclusion

In my research I have outlined, the relationship between traditional journalistic gatekeepers, audience members and newly arising gatekeepers in the age of digital media. I have discussed how audience members can create their own news streams by using search engines, RSS and news feeds as well as through social media sites such as Twitter, which eventually creates a *Daily Me* of news coverage, a customized platform for receiving information online. However, audiences do not necessarily aspire to fulfill the roles of gatekeepers; many of them lack the motivation or just simply the time frame for it. Therefore journalism remains an important factor to shape everyone's social reality and the way we perceive our world, no matter if offline or online. There is however, a trend towards individuals or even algorithms taking over gatekeeping functions, acting similarly to how traditional gatekeepers used to select, edit, produce and share news items. While it obviously seems easier for individuals to reach not only a wider audience but also institutions and politicians directly through social media, as visualized in the multidirectional flow model, there are obviously still constraints. Manz individuals do not aspire to take on the roles of gatekeepers. Rivva's founder Frank Westphal called the blogger scene cannibalistic as smaller blogs even though they initiate ideas, often go under, facing the popularity of the bigger ones. Therefore, Burton's premise that everyone suddenly has the possibility to join cannot be fully supported.

Twitter though is a special case of an information-sharing network rather than a social network. As such, the individuals need for sharing highly personal items is less important,

than, for example, on Facebook or Instagram. One's activity seems to be a more prevalent factor than one's follower, which enables individuals to reach a big audience.

It is also problematical as there is the tendency of online news to be spectacularized and merged with entertainment news (such as recent stories about an eight-legged goat or the fact that Macaulay Culkin is wearing a shirt with Ryan Gosling wearing a T-Shirt of Macaulay Culkin via Mashable). These kinds of trivial stories seem to reach a wider audience than political elections or even the events during the Ukrainian conflict. The success of these trivial matters and their wide distribution shows that the online audience often seems to lack a focused central entrance point that helps them make sense of the chaotic and sheer endless digital sphere of new items, especially the more serious ones. With so much information circulating online, people seem to be overburdened with the task to stay informed and therefore they prefer entertaining topics that are easier to understand and to remember. Psychology has shown that material targeted to result in an emotional response is in fact easier to internalize. The popularity of this content reveals that journalistic gatekeepers have not yet figured out in which way to represent news to an online audience that seems to be permanently on the go. This is a gap, where content aggregators can be helpful, but not those that only focus on overly popular content, but also on important political or social issues. The popular content is often manipulated by seeding and marketing agencies that want to reach high click numbers instead of informing the audience about cultural issues with a deeper content level. New models of narrative storytelling that combine the emotional aspect as well as hard facts need to evolve to help people make sense of the fast-paced world. Gatekeeping, even though an old concept, remains important in assessing how new actors such as Twitter users, computer-operated aggregators and individuals execute power over their follower- or readership. Digital Gatekeepers help people understand, prioritize and control all the content that is published online, making them an essential cornerstone of digital media culture.

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