We Love to Hate Each Other

Mediated Football Fan Culture

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Chapter 10

Conversing the Fans

"Coveritlive" and the Social Function of Journalism

Steen Steensen

They present themselves with nicknames such as "chealsefan", "gerrard", "Viking" and "Alien". They are sixty-four football fans, who have decided to participate in a live chat hosted by the leading Norwegian online newspaper *VG Nett* during a round of Norwegian premier league football. The practice they are about to take part in is a premier example of how live coverage of sports events in online newspapers is developing into an arena where audience participation flourishes, especially in the form of chats and discussion forums boosted by applications like "CoveritLive"[1] (CiL). The utilisation of such technology potentially changes journalism from being a disseminator of source-driven and framed bits of information to a public, to an event-driven, audience-involving and thus conversational practice of mass communication (Kunelius 2001; Livingston and Bennett 2003). Such a change promotes a different social function for journalism in line with the ideas of public/civic journalism and, later, participatory/interactive journalism. Public journalism is aimed at, amongst other things, engaging citizens and (re)connecting journalism with communities (Nip 2006: 214), thus promoting a social function for journalism implying a collaborative approach to information diffusion and knowledge production within a public sphere.

As technologies like CiL diffuse in online newsrooms, ideas of audience involvement and collaborative knowledge production gain increased significance in the shaping of journalism's social function. It is therefore important to analyse whether or not the way such technologies are socialised within the field of journalism bring about such changes. This chapter analyses one such example of event-driven and audience-involving practices of journalism: namely a *VG Nett* CiL chat that took place on 25 April 2010 during a round of Norwegian premier league football. The research question was: what characterises a live chat between a journalist and football fans in an online newspaper and what social function does this communicative space serve?

Given the conversational "nature" of the chat, the research question is investigated by utilising conversation analysis in order better to trace the social function served by the chat. The research aims at uncovering the structure of the chat, the different levels of participations, the norms and rules of interaction within the chat, and the roles played by the different participants – including the journalist, who moderates the chat. The findings will be analysed and discussed in terms of what kind of mediated, virtual community of football fans is constituted by the chat and what kind of social function this mediated community serves.

Participatory culture and the changing social function of journalism

Traditionally, the social function of journalism has been related to ideas of democracy and the formation of public opinion. As Rosenberry and St John III (2010: 1) put it: "The traditional view … held that journalists would report, citizens would read the reports, and some form of public opinion would develop that helped to connect the will of the people with public action". Ideas of journalism as "fourth estate" and critical "watchdog" are well embedded within this traditional social function of journalism, as is the notion of the journalist as a "gatekeeper" (White 1950) who controls the flow of information, the selection (and/or construction) of information and the framing of information. However, as journalism has become increasingly commercialised, critics argue that this traditional social function has been marginalised and replaced by a function of producing "entertainment and information that can be sold to individual consumers" (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 277). Franklin (1997) argues that instead of serving public interest, the social function of journalism has been diverted to merely interest the public.

Reflecting this development, a movement towards a more citizen-engaged journalism arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s – a type of journalism that would help newspapers to re-connect with their readers and revitalise communities. The movement was labelled "public journalism" (Glasser 1999; Rosen 2001), and it implied a re-negotiation of the power relations between journalists and their audiences. As Internet technology paved the way for a "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006), implying increased audience participation in mass mediated communication, ideas of public journalism and the like ("civic journalism", "participatory journalism", "wiki-journalism" and so on) diffused in online newsrooms and society at large. The diffusion of such ideas has pushed academics to argue that boundaries between journalists and their audiences, and thus between the production and consumptions of news, are blurring, because the people "formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006) are becoming amateur journalists as bloggers; they comment on online news

stories, they participate in online newspaper discussion forums, they contribute with pictures and videos to online news sites. And they do so on topics that have a history of generating public engagement, such as, for instance, politics – and, of course, sport.

Consequently, Gillmor (2004) argues that news should be more like a conversation than a lecture and should utilise the "collective intelligence" (Lévy 1999) of the audience. By treating the audience as intelligent contributors of knowledge within a news discourse, journalism could tap into "an alternative source of media power" (Jenkins 2006: 4), thus letting go of its gatekeeper role and adapting to a reality where information flows everywhere, at any time, through multiple "gates". This potentially changes the social function of journalism from being the fourth estate and a critical watchdog, forming public opinion through gatekeeping in order to boost democracy, to being a facilitator of a public sphere where knowledge is produced and reliable information disseminated through a process of public collaboration.

However, whether journalism's societal role is in fact changing in such a direction is an empirical rather than a theoretical question. Empirical research on the degree of audience participation in online newspapers reveals that professional journalistic institutions are not revolutionised by the participatory culture (see Steensen 2011 for an overview). Domingo et al. (2008) find that audiences are not allowed to participate in the selection and filtering of news in online newspapers, thus concluding that professional journalistic institutions tend to be rather protective of their traditional roles as gatekeepers. Alternative flows of information and knowledge production do not, in other words, influence practices of professional journalism to a great extent, and the clear divide between journalists and the audience remains intact.

That said, it seems that the recent diffusion of software such as CiL might contribute to the blurring of boundaries between journalists and the audience, and thus come closer to fulfilling the predicted changed social function of journalism. CiL creates a communicative space marked by collaboration and participation, and it is therefore of interest to investigate what this communicative space looks like when it appears in online newspapers, and what social function it promotes for journalism. What roles are the journalist and the audience allowed to take in this communicative space? To what degree are interactions marked by traditional power relations between the journalist and the audience? And to what degree does the communicative space resemble a community?

Football fandom and virtual communities

The CiL chat to be analysed in this chapter represents a mediation of football fandom. To determine what kind of mediated community the chat establishes

and thereby what social function it serves, perspectives on football fandom and fan communities are important to the analysis. Virtual communities of football fans in online newspapers have emerged in line with the growing trend of participatory journalism and diffusion of software like CiL. As discussed by Hognestad in this volume, football fandom comes in multiple forms and is expressed in numerous ways across time and space. In order to determine the role of the participants in the CiL chat, Giulianotti's (2002) categorisation of four modern-day ideal types of football spectatorship (supporter, followers, fans and *flaneurs* – see Chapter 1 in this volume) will be applied. Of particular interest to the analysis is the *flaneur* ideal type, who is (in its most extreme form) detached from any specific club and the physical spaces it occupies, and "belongs only to a virtual community of strollers who window-shop around clubs" (Giulianotti 2002: 39). The *flaneur* is more likely to be engaged in football via communication technologies – he watches games on subscription television and his relationship to football is marked by what Giulianotti, building on McLuhan and Baudrillard, describes as "the cool social relations that structure the communicative processes involving the electronic media" (2002: 31).

The *flaneur's* "thin solidarity" with clubs and their spaces makes him more likely to be a participant in a chat/discussion forum on football with no affiliation to a specific club's fan base. He is more likely to be interested in football as such – the finesse of the game, individual skills, the looks and appearance of players, teams, spectators and stadiums – and does not shape a cultural and social identity as a member of a specific group of supporter. However, as Hognestad argues in Chapter 1, the boundaries between *flaneurs*, fans, supporters and followers are blurred, and the individual football spectator might present himself as any one of them, depending on the social context. In line with this argument, Stone argues that Giulianotti's description of the *flaneur* spectator is too rigid when limited to the cool and consumer oriented spectatorship. According to Stone, the ubiquity of football in our "liquid modern world" offers "almost unlimited levels of engagement which can be utilised in different ways, at different times, for different reasons" (Stone 2007: 178). It is therefore necessary to also include in this group of spectators those with a "hotter relationship" with football, argues Stone.

Even though the *flaneur*, as an ideal type, is more of an individual than a group member, it is impossible to discuss even this type of football fandom without some notion of a community shaping the spectatorship. Today, communities are no longer bound by time and space, they may have the temporary and random character of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991; Maffesoli 1996). Such communities are formed and sustained in informal friendship networks, and characterised "by the fluidity of occasional gatherings" (Stone 2007: 180). The participants in an online newspaper's match-day chat typically form such

an imagined community. The gathering of participants is occasional and the community is extremely fluid in that it suddenly appears, only to vanish after a few hours. The question, however, remains as to what further characterises such a community of football spectatorship. Are social bonds formed, and do the participants engage in interactions common in similar, non-virtual communities, like the random gathering of spectators in football pubs?

Conversation analysis

To answer such questions and the question of the potentially changing social function of journalism they relate to, this chapter will utilise the methodology of conversation analysis (CA). CA is a qualitative methodology rooted in discourse analysis and speech act theory, implying an understanding of language as linguistic action rather than linguistic form (Austin 1975). The subject of CA is to analyse interactions in social context; turns at talk in conversation, how for instance agreements and disagreements are articulated, how the opening and closing of conversations unfold, and how conversations are organised (Mazur 2004: 1077). Even though CA has not, to my knowledge, been used to analyse interactions between journalists and the audience in online newspapers, it is a core argument of this chapter that this methodology provides a suitable framework and analytical tool with which to understand the implications of the partcipatory turn in online journalism.

CA was initially utilised to analyse transcripts of telephone calls, but has also been widely used to analyse (transcripts of) face-to-face interactions. Such analysis is based on the notion that "talk is seen as organised and orderly" (Liddicoat 2007: 9), and the subject of CA has therefore been to understand how such order is established in interactions. Crucial to such an analysis is the notion of "recipient design" (op.cit.: 6) – conversational contributions are designed with a recipient in mind – and the understanding of talk as "context-shaped". Every turn at talk in an interaction is shaped by the context in which it occurs, and the context is renewed as each new fragment of talk "constrains and affects what follows and influences how further talk will be heard and understood" (Mazur 2004: 1077).

Within this classical tradition of CA, the unit of analysis is the *turn construction unit* (TCU) – a potentially complete unit of talk. A TCU may consist of a single word ("yes", "no", "hm?"), a full or incomplete period, or several consecutive periods (as is the case in story-telling). At the end of a TCU, speaker change may occur. The order of speaker change, or the system of turn-taking in conversations, is constrained by two techniques of *turn allocation,* according to Sacks et al. (1974): turn allocation may occur as either a "current speaker selects next" technique, or as a "next speaker may self-select" technique. How-

ever, if the current speaker in a conversation uses a "select next" technique and someone else self-selects as the next speaker, it is regarded as an "accountable action" which is "misplaced in this context" (Liddicoat, 2007: 67).

In group conversations it is quite common for participants to be ruled out and for turns at talk to be concentrated among only a few members of the group. Consequently, such conversations may split into several parallel conversations with their unique turn-taking system (Liddicoat 2007: 72). Furthermore, a conversation is normally also divided into clusters of turns at talk, or conversation sequences, where the relationship between turns at talk is coherent and orderly. Such sequences are often organised in what Schegloff has labelled *adjacency pairs* (like greetings and questions and answers). The first part of an adjacency pair (for example, "How are you?") is labelled *first pair part* (FPP), the second ("I'm fine, thanks"), *second pair part* (SPP). In addition, adjacency pairs have a "normative force" in the organisation of conversation, implying that they set up "expectations about how talk will proceed and if these are not met then the talk is seen as being problematic" (Herritage 1984, cited in Liddicoat 2007: 107). Analysing the occurrences of conversation sequences and adjacency pairs might therefore be a way of determining the coherence and thus meaningfulness of the conversation, which in turn relates to its social function.

Problems in conversation related to accountable actions concerning turn allocation, or failed expectations established by the lack of an appropriate SPP to a FPP, may be fixed by different conversation repair strategies. A turn at talk seeking to fix such problems is, in classical CA, referred to as a *repair turn*.

Conversation analysis and online talk

CA has been applied to the analysis of some forms of online talk, especially related to e-learning and online chats between teachers and students. In an overview of CA research related to such a digital speech exchange system, Mazur argues that:

> The chat window and the distance between client and server machines affect turn-taking and the sequential organisation of the on-line "typed" talk. These characteristics of the talk-in-interaction relate to the affordances of the technologies used and these affordances need to be considered as part of the context of the conversation. (2004: 1081)

Technology is, in other words, crucial as context for online communication, and as such it plays a significant part in the shaping of the communication. Hutchby (2001: 183-184) has identified four ways in which technology shapes online chat in a different way from spoken communication:

1. Participants can take a turn only by entering text in the text line box and pressing the enter key.
2. There is a temporal lag. The "turn" reaches others only when the sent message is accepted and distributed by the remote server.
3. The lag described in two results in disjointed sequential relationships between when talk is produced and when it is "enunciated" or displayed on the public talk space.
4. While all of the above is happening, the conversation is conducted in a scrolling window on the shared public space. Depending on the volume of traffic to the server, prior contributions tied to a specific response or turn may scroll off the screen by the time it reaches the public display.

All these four points are relevant for interactions in a CiL chat, and they illustrate the difficulties in tracing conversation sequences and thus coherence of turns in such a group conversation. It would, however, be a mistake to simply regard online chat as incoherent because of the disjointed sequential relationship between turns. Herring (1996) demonstrated as early as in the mid-1990s that participants in online chats develop conventions in order to overcome these conversational problems. One such convention is cross-references, or what Werry has labelled *addressivity* – for example, starting a turn with the user-name of the intended recipient (cited in Mazur 2004: 1094).

In spite of the visibility of such conventions for the researcher, it is a time-consuming task to analyse the coherence of live and synchronous online chats involving multiple participants, such as a CiL session in an online newspaper. The case to be analyzsd in this chapter is a CiL session that lasted two hours and thirteen minutes and included 283 turns at talk, or postings, from as many as sixty-four participants. The whole CiL-session was copied and imported for analysis into an Excel-file. The unit of analysis is the single posting, which is treated as a turn at talk. Each turn was attributed to the user-name of the "speaker" and the time of the posting. I have read all the turns over and over again in order to determine, for each and every one of them:

1. Whether it belongs to a conversation;
2. Whether it is part of a cluster of turns;
3. What the intention of the turn is (to *initiate* a conversation, to *agree/disagree* with a previous turn, to *follow up* on a conversation, to *repair* an accountable action or to *close* a conversation, or if the turn must be regarded as a *misplaced* turn (that is, it does not relate to a cluster of turns and it does not intend to initiate a new conversation);
4. If there are any turn allocation techniques involved (select next or self-select);

5. Whether the turn is part of an adjacency pair, and if so, if it is a FPP or a SPP;

6. Whether there are any conventions (such as addressivity and post-turn actions) involved to overcome the conversational problems caused by the technological affordances.

The aim of this analysis is to determine the coherence and thus meaningfulness of the group conversation; to find out who is talking to whom in what way; and how power is distributed among participants. This analysis is therefore suited to pinpointing the characteristics of the temporal and fluid community that emerges within the chat, and thereby its social function.

In addition to the CA, the analysis also draws upon content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) of the chat in order to determine what the football fans who participate in the chat present themselves as (*flaneurs* or something else?); the topic of each conversation found; and the dominant discourse mode of each turn (expressive, explorative, instructive, argumentative or descriptive), which is vital to gain insight into the overall purpose and function of the communication.

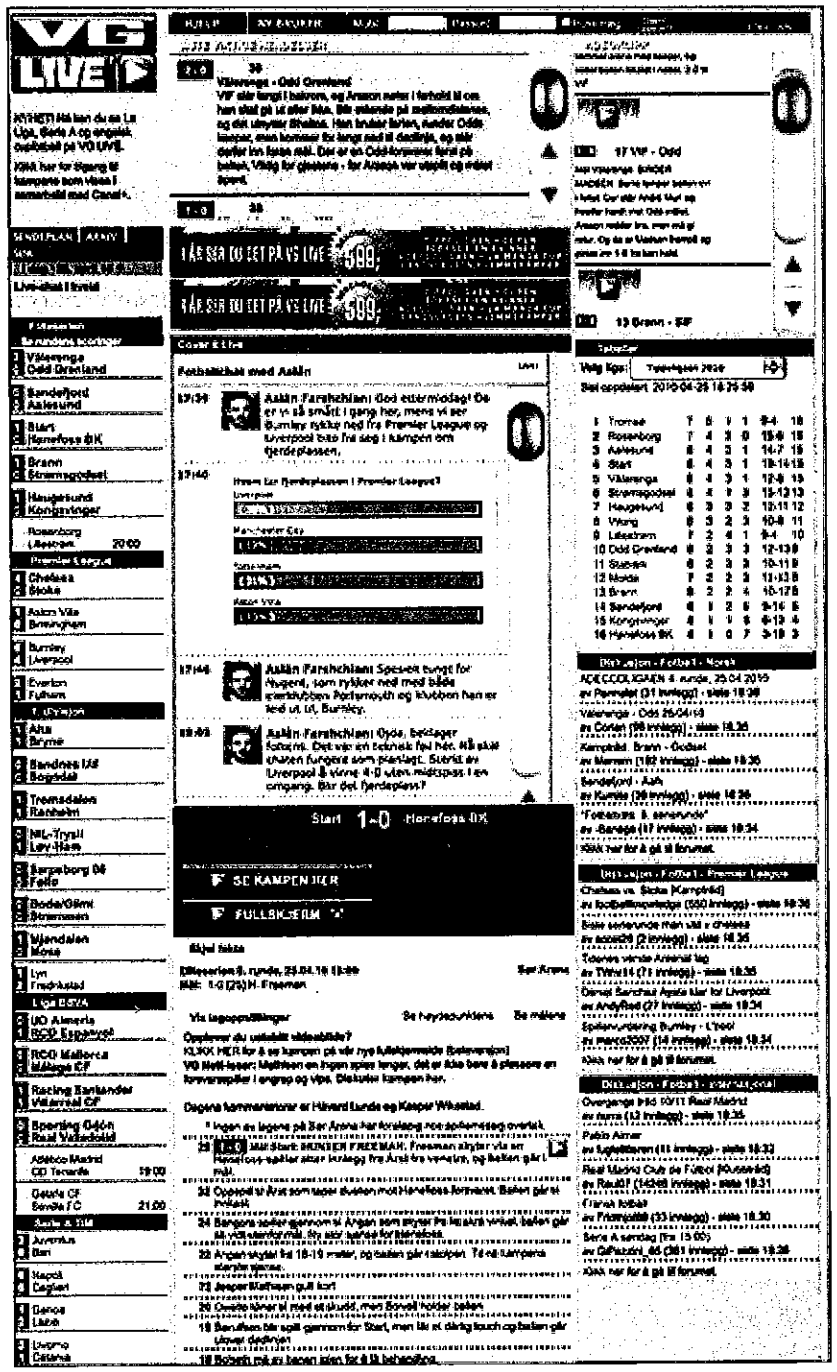
In order to gain more insight into the discursive practice, of which the CiL session is part, I was allowed to be present at the sports desk of the online newsroom of *VG Nett* on the evening the CiL session took place. I have also conducted a qualitative, semi-structured interview with the journalist hosting the session, in order to learn more about his intentions and experiences with such forms of communication, and to examine how he perceives his role as a journalist in such interactions.

Characteristics of the CiL session

The analysed CiL session took place on Sunday 25 April 2010 between 17:39 and 19:52. During the session, a round of six Norwegian premier league football games was played out, and the CiL session was part of *VG Nett's* live coverage of these games. In addition, a couple of English premier league games were played out that afternoon, and the journalists also covered these games.

VG Nett is the largest online newspaper in Norway, and their live service[2] is the most popular of all such services in the country. Included in this live service is, *inter alia*, a minute-by-minute coverage of each and every game; video clips of major events of each game published within minutes of the event taking place (available only to subscribers); constantly updated statistics and tables on teams, players, games and standings in the two top divisions of Norwegian (male) football and the English premier league; links to discussion forums; and an integrated CiL chat hosted by one of the newspaper's most heavily profiled football journalists (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Web grab from VG Nett Live 25 April 2010. The CiL window is embedded in the Live interface, just above the minute-by-minute coverage of ongoing games.



The journalist hosting the CiL session explains the intention behind it like this:

> The idea was … that we had to involve the readers and engage them even more, and this is probably a good offer for them. I do not write to promote myself; I write for them to have … a cool experience when they follow games live. That's the point.[3]

Even though all CiL postings written by members of the audience must be approved by the journalist before they are published, he says he publishes everything except questions to him regarding his religious beliefs, and posts he describes as "pure idiocy", which he exemplifies with a post that typically reads "fucking cock".[4]

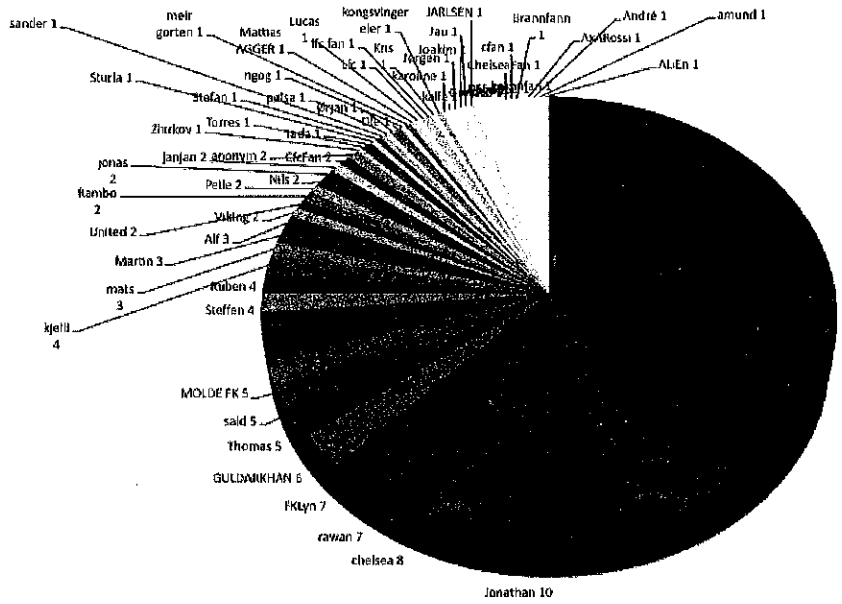
During the two-hour, thirteen-minute session, the sixty-four participants (including the journalist) produced 283 postings with an average length of 14,2 words. Each turn at talk is, in other words, rather short, often consisting of only one or two periods. Some participants use pseudonyms (such as "chelseafan" or "gerrard") as user-names, others use common Norwegian first names, which might be their real names – there is no way of knowing for sure. Deciding the age, race and sex of the participants is therefore impossible, but all but one of those who use common first names as their user -names, use male names, which indicates that the majority of participants are male.

An interesting feature of the CiL session is that more than half of the participants, thirty-six, take only one turn at talk during the whole session. The majority of participants are, in other words, rather passive. Based on the standard deviant, we may define an active participant as one who takes six or more turns at talk during the session. Only nine participants (in addition to the journalist) can be regarded as actively taking part in conversations. Two participants stand out as much more active than the average: the journalist contributes with eighty-three turns at talk (twenty-nine per cent of all turns), and one of the readers contributes with thirty-four turns at talk (twelve per cent). The journalist is, in other words, by far the most active participant. Disregarding these two contributors and the thirty-six participants who take only one turn at talk (the outliers), the other twenty-eight participants contribute on average 4,9 turns at talk to the chat (see Figure 2).

The journalist also writes the most extensive postings, with an average word length of 19,4. The other participants' turns at talk are on average thirteen words long. The longest posting comprises fifty-one words (written by the journalist); the shortest only one character.

The nature of audience participation in this chat can therefore be characterised as rather detached and cautious, since the majority participate only a few times, with short turns at talk. Such detached participation is a characteristic of the *flaneur* spectator. Moreover, the majority of participants, thirty-eight, express no strong solidarity with a specific club, which is typical of the *flaneur's*

Figure 2. Turns at talk per participant in the CiL session on VG Nett 25 April 2010



"cool" relationship to football. Nine of the participants express sympathies for more than one team during the chat, thus mimicking the window-shopping mentality towards club support by which the *flaneur* is marked. However, the chat also includes participants with strong bonds to single clubs. Twenty-five of the participants stick to writing comments on their favourite team alone, thus expressing a "hotter" relationship to that club. Two participants express characteristics which are more common among what Giulianotti (2002) labels *the supporters* in that in their posts they are preoccupied by the atmosphere at the stadium and brag about how many times they have been there.

Conversation analysis of the CiL session

In order to pinpoint what is a conversation or not in the CiL session, I employ the following criteria: a) someone must initiate a conversation in a turn at talk that has a recipient design relevant to the context; b) consecutive turns at talk that relate thematically to this initiation belong to the same conversation.

Guided by these criteria, I was able to identify thirty-eight different conversations containing two or more turns at talk, and six attempts at establishing conversations that were not followed up in consecutive turns (these six are included in the analysis, since attempts at conversations that fail are as interesting for the analysis as "successful" conversations). The topics of these conversations fall in two large groups. Twenty-two of the conversations are related

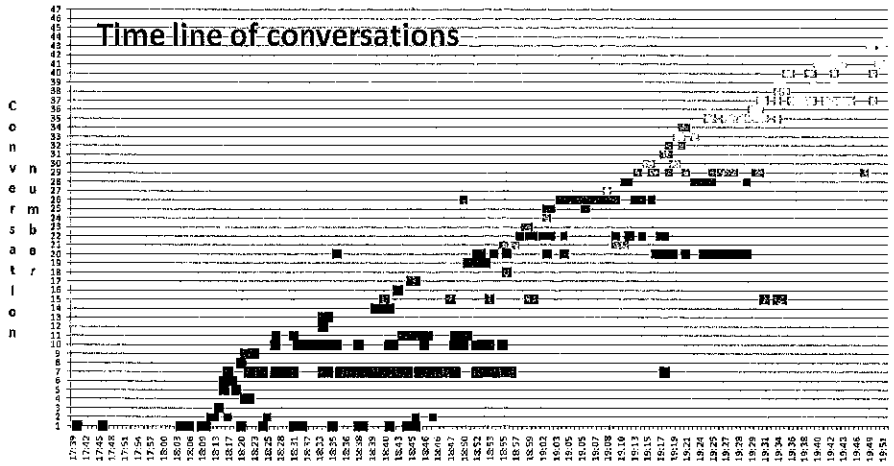
to Norwegian football, out of which seventeen are related to the Norwegian premier league and the on-going round of Norwegian premier league games. However, as many as fourteen of the conversations are related to English football and out of these fourteen, eleven conversations are related to Liverpool, Manchester United and/or Chelsea. Furthermore, these conversations about English football are generally longer and involve more participants than the conversations about Norwegian football. Altogether, they comprise 138 turns at talk and they have on average 4,6 participants. The twenty-two conversations on Norwegian football, on the other hand, comprise 108 turns at talk and involve on average 2,9 participants. In other words, it seems as if the audience is more engaged in English than in Norwegian football.[5]

A "messy" discourse

The majority of all conversations are marked by disjointed sequential relationships. The different conversations are woven together, and what in ordinary spoken conversations would have been tightly joined adjacency pairs are, in these conversations, split up by intervening turns at talk belonging to other conversations.

As is visible in the conversation time-line in Figure 3, all conversations are interrupted by other conversations, resulting in a seemingly chaotic choir of several conversations. Conversation number eleven in Figure 3, for instance is initiated by turn number thirty-four in the whole chat and ends with turn number 107. This conversation comprises thirteen turns at talk that are mixed in-between fifty-eight other turns that belong to thirteen different conversations.

Figure 3. Conversation time line of the CiL chat, VG Nett 25 April 2010. The chart is not completely accurate, since several posts occur within the same minute



This disjointed nature of the conversations is a potential threat to the coherence and meaningfulness of the chat as a whole, as it makes it difficult to follow single conversations. The journalist is, however, well aware of this problem:

> [I] try not to make it too messy … but maybe I approve too much, because it can become like … if I pose a question to the readers, and then they suddenly write ten posts on something else, and the reply comes as number eleven, you know, then it becomes very messy. But… that's the way it looks, so there is not much to do about it. I want everyone to be allowed to participate, it is important that people contribute over and over.[6]

The journalist suggests that he may overcome the lack of coherence (due to the disjointed nature of the conversations) by approving fewer posts, but this compromises another important value, namely the democratic ideal of letting everyone participate. In other words, coherence is sacrificed at the altar of democracy.

On average, each conversation comprises 6,4 turns at talk involving 3,4 participants. There is however a strong correlation (0,94) between number of participants and length of conversations, implying that the longer a conversation becomes, the more people who will join in. The chat is therefore not dominated by long, one-to-one conversations.

One conversation, number seven in Figure 3 above, is much longer than any of the others (forty-five turns at talk involving sixteen participants), and the median value of conversation length (3,0 turns at talk) and participants in a conversation (2,0) is therefore a more accurate description of the typical conversation. One such typical conversation is what appears in Figure 3 as conversation number fourteen, which consists of the following three turns:

18:38 "Martin":	How, in fact, was the Liverpool game? Was it as the result suggests? Didn't catch the game, unfortunately.
18:40 The journalist:	Hi Martin. No, Burnley impressed me at least and created plenty. 0-1 was a big blow since Gerrard's shot deflected off a centre half. 0-2 was world class from Gerrard. 4-0 does not reflect the play of the game, but after the first goal it became difficult for Burnley to retaliate.
	(Four intervening posts)
18:40 "Alien":	Neither did I. I know that Gerrard scored two goals and Maxi one and Babel one.

Extract from Chat One, Conversation Fourteen. This conversation relates thematically to the English premier league game Burnley-Liverpool, which was played earlier the same day. The game ended 0-4. (Translation by author.)

"Martin's" initial turn in Conversation Fourteen consists of two questions and one comment – three periods in all. Each of these three periods is a single TCU, which, if they were part of a spoken conversation, would have marked a transition point where next speakers might have taken a turn at talk. In a chat, however, there are no possibilities for other participants to take turns at talk at such transition points within turns, and TCUs therefore play an insignificant role as markers of potential speaker change. This is a vital difference between spoken conversations and chat, since a turn becomes part of a conversation only when it is published, regardless of any TCUs within the turn.

Lack of pre-sequences and *the rule of efficiency*

The insignificance of TCUs becomes even more evident in the second turn in conversation fourteen written by the journalist. He starts the turn with a TCU ("Hi Martin"), which in spoken conversation is known as a part of a "generic pre-sequence" (Liddicoat 2007: 127). The aim of such pre-sequences in spoken conversations is to establish contact and make sure there is a recipient available for conversation. Such pre-sequences in spoken conversation therefore take the form of an adjacency pair, where a FPP ("Hi Martin") is followed up with a SPP (typically "Hi [name of recipient]"), before the conversation proceeds. If no such follow-up SPP occurs, then the conversation is likely to be compromised. In a chat, however, no such SPPs are required, and pre-sequences are quite uncommon. In fact, those who try to initiate a conversation with a generic pre-sequence FPP turn do not succeed, as is shown in the following sequence of turns:

19:02 "Sander":	hi
19:02 "Mathias":	New poll? Most people think Jan Jønsson. More than 50 per cent! Impressive!
19:03 The journalist:	[New poll] Who will become the PL top goal scorer?

Extract from Chat Two: unsuccessful attempt at conversation with the use of a generic pre-sequence FPP. (Turn number two from "Mathias" refers to a previous poll on who is most likely to become the new coach of the Norwegian premier league club Rosenborg.)

"Sander's" generic pre-sequence FPP turn ("hi") does not receive a reply, and his attempt at conversation thus fails. Instead, the journalist chooses to follow up on "Mathias's" concrete request for a new poll, which allows the journalist to reply in a single turn, while it would require him to write a SPP turn, followed up by a new turn by "Sander" and then a new turn by the journalist, if he was to interact with "Sander" in a meaningful conversation. The turn-taking

system of the chat is, in other words, marked by a *rule of efficiency*. If a turn is not an immediate contribution that pushes a conversation forward, it is likely to be ignored. This deprives the chat of what in spoken conversations might be interpreted as a discourse of politeness, since pre-sequences often function as polite requests. It seems that such a discourse of politeness is considered a waste of time in the chat. It is not part of the conventions for such interactions. "Sander" is probably a newcomer to the CiL chat, and he does not possess the (tacit) knowledge of these conventions. Alas, his short attempt at participation is the only contribution he makes to the chat.

Turn allocation techniques and the *rule of preferred recipient*

Conversation Fourteen (se *Extract fromChat One* above) is initiated by a participant in the form of two direct questions ("How, in fact, was the Liverpool game? Was it as the result suggests? Didn't catch the game, unfortunately"), which form a potential FPP-turn of an adjacency pair. This initial FPP turn does not have an explicit recipient (and no pre-sequence turns have established a recipient). So anyone may self-select to give "Martin" a reply. The one who self-selects is the journalist, and he does so immediately (there are no intervening turns at talk belonging to other conversations in between the initial turn and the journalist's reply). This is a common feature of the chat. The journalist immediately self-selects to answer all questions posted by readers, whether or not he is selected as next speaker by the one posting the question. In line with the increased emphasis on opinion and evaluation in sports journalism found by Roksvold in Chapter 4, the journalist moderating the chat assumes the role of an expert, and the audience treats him like an expert.

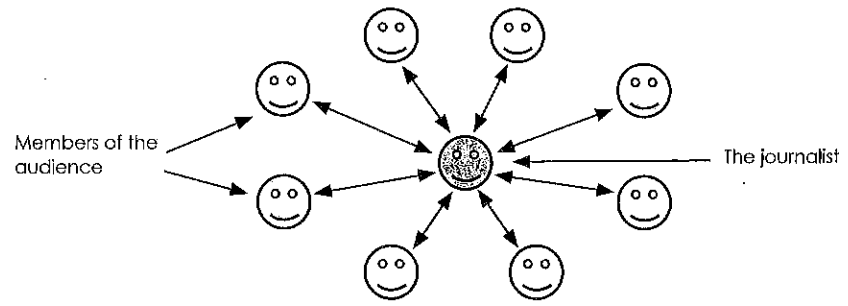
It seems as if the participants have the journalist in mind as the selected next speaker even if this is not explicitly articulated in their turns. Almost all conversations are structured in a similar fashion: initiated by an explorative turn (mostly questions) either by the journalist or by a member of the audience, in which case the journalist is the intended recipient (whether or not it is explicitly articulated). This is therefore another convention of the chat, which might be formulated as the *rule of preferred recipient*. The audience clearly prefers the journalist to give them replies, rather than other members of the audience, even though they do not explicitly determine that the journalist will be the next speaker. Many turns do, however, indirectly assign the journalist as recipient and next speaker by using the personal pronoun "you", which in theory could relate to any participant, but which, given the rule of preferred recipient, is clearly related to the journalist. However, only twenty-five per cent of all turns in the chat allocate a next speaker, either explicitly (by using the user name of the intended recipient) or indirectly (by

using "you"). Without the *rule of preferred recipient*, the chat would therefore have been even messier and deprived of a functioning turn-taking system. This rule establishes the convention that *if no next speaker is assigned in a turn written by a member of the audience, the journalist/moderator is the preferred next speaker.*

Since this rule applies only to turns at talk by members of the audience (and not to turns at talk by the journalist), the journalist depends much more heavily on the use of turn allocation techniques. This is reflected by the fact that he explicitly allocates a recipient in forty-three per cent of his turns – a much higher percentage than for the other participants (twenty per cent). Such turn allocations from the journalist occur as seen in the second turn in Conversation Fourteen (see *Extract from Chat One* above), where the journalist starts his turn with the TCU "Hi Martin". This looks similar to a generic pre-sequence in spoken conversations, but the function of this TCU is not primarily to politely establish contact with a recipient – it is to address a specific recipient, the technique described above as *addressivity*, which in previous research is found to be a common convention of online talk. Furthermore, when the journalist makes use of such a turn allocation technique, it is in responses to questions or comments from members of the audience. The coherence of the conversations is thereby strengthened, since the technique constructs explicit adjacency pairs, as seen in conversation 14 (see *Extract from Chat One* above), where "Martin's" turn form an FPP of an adjacency pair with the journalist's turn as the follow-up SPP. The third and last turn in this conversation ("Alien": "Neither did I. I know that Gerrard scored two goals and Maxi one and Babel one.") does also form an adjacency pair with "Martin's" initial FPP, but the coherence between these two turns is much weaker because of the lack of addressivity in "Alien's" turn. Note also that the coherence is even more weakened owing to the four intervening posts of different conversations that "split" the pair.

One other aspect of addressivity as a turn allocation technique is of interest: all but one of the turns where this technique is used, have the journalist as either sender or intended recipient. In other words, there is only one occurrence in the whole chat where one member of the audience addresses another member of the audience. As illustrated in Figure 4, the journalist, as the only participant in the chat, is involved in all conversations. He is the one that the others would like to talk to – they are not interested in talking to each other. The power of speech is thereby centralised and only to a minimal extent is it distributed among the audience.

Figure 4. An illustration of power distribution in the CiL session on VG Nett, 25 April 2010



The rule of multiple SPPs and delayed recontextualisation

The centralised power structure of the chat's turn-taking system, as illustrated in Figure 4 above, is also reflected in how adjacency pairs are constructed in the conversations. The following extract from Conversation Ten (see the conversation map in Figure 3 above) illustrates how such pairs normally are constructed in the chat.

18:27 The journalist:	The United fans are happy that Liverpool won today and still has fourth position within reach, it will be a very exciting match against Chelsea. If they didn't have anything to play for, do you think Liverpool could lose on purpose to Chelsea, just to spoil things for United?
	[Five intervening turns]
18:31"Kris":	Liverpool is not a team that bail out, they will fight to the bitter end to win fourth position!
18:32"United":	I doubt Liverpool would lose to Chelsea on purpose, they have quite an important position to fight for! If they don't achieve place four I wonder what's gonna happen with Torres and Benitez among others!
18:32"DFEADSD":	Doubt that Liverpool would lie down and lose, no teams are like that in premier league, in addition would the fans go crazy if they chicken out?
18:32"Chelsea":	It will be a tough game against Liverpool in the end. but believe that Chelsea wins :)
18:32"ChelseaFan":	As long as Chelsea wins I don't care what Liverpool does.
18:32"Sturla":	Yes, they would have played worse on purpose.

Extract from Chat Three. These turns are part of Conversation Ten in the analysed chat. The first turn by the journalist is a FPP turn of an adjacency pair, while the following turns all are different SPP turns responding to the initial FPP turn. (Translated by author.)

As the *Extract from Chat Three* shows, this sequence of Conversation Ten is initiated by a question the journalist poses to the readers. Six readers respond to this question, and each and every one of these responses qualifies as a SPP turn to the journalist's FPP. Each of the responses therefore forms an individual, coherent adjacency pair with the journalist's FPP. This is a type of conversation sequence that is not unique to online interactions; it is also found in spoken interactions. Think of, for instance, a classroom situation where a teacher poses a question to the students without allocating a specific next speaker. Several students may then raise their hands and have turns at talk that function as SPPs to the teachers FPP. But in such a situation, the context is changed each time a student replies with an SPP, and the next speaker might therefore adjust his or her turn to the previous speaker's turn and the conversation is therefore more likely to construct new, sub-adjacency pairs in which the students interact as much with each other as with the teacher. What is different in the chat is that the readers probably write their SPP responses more or less simultaneously, thus talking turns at talk without any knowledge of a changed context. A conversation like the chat is therefore more likely to consist of multiple SPPs to a single FPP, as is seen *Extract from Chat Three* above. This feature of the chat might be articulated as the *rule of multiple SPPs and delayed recontextualisation*.

The role of the journalist

In the final part of this analysis, I will take a closer look at the role of the journalist. So far, the analysis has revealed that the journalist takes the role of an expert, and that he is recognised as such by the readers. He controls the conversation and is empowered in the turn-taking system, and not only because he moderates the chat. He is the prime initiator of conversations (eleven of the conversations are initiated by him), and he is the preferred recipient of reader-initiated conversations.

But how does he write his posts? What norms does he follow, what best characterises the discourse mode of his turns at talk? The most common discourse mode he uses (in forty-three per cent of his posts) is argumentative, implying that it is important to him to state his opinion. He thus takes the role of the commentator more than the role of the neutral reporter, which he normally takes in his "ordinary" sports reporting. However, he is not quite comfortable with this role as commentator

> What bugs me the most with the chat, ... is that ... all stories in *VG* and *VG Nett* are extremely dependent upon front page visibility. This means that I have to produce typically tabloid opinions, or else the chat won't be given any attention on the front-page, you know. I think it's *wrong*. I have to sit and produce opinions *and* let [the front page editor] know that now I have made a really tabloid-type statement. It's a difficult thing, you know.

Being a highly profiled sports journalist for both *VG* and *VG Nett*, the journalist has a position that allows him to be opinionated. Furthermore, his position makes it attractive for the front page editor to pay attention to his opinions, if they are "tabloid" (controversial) enough. He feels an obligation to produce such opinions, even though he doesn't want to, in order to attract an audience to the chat. This gives him an unintended role as a provoker of debate.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to analyse some implications of the participatory culture for journalism's social function, and to what degree a match-day CoveritLive (CiL) chat in an online newspaper functions as a community of football fans. The analysis of the CiL session reveals that it produces a rather "messy" discourse, with many simultaneously on-going conversations. An ideal of democratic participation prevails over coherence of conversation. However, reducing the noise caused by the disjointed nature of the conversation's turn-taking system reveals conversations that establish coherence by utilising a set of rules; *the rule of efficiency*; *the rule of preferred recipient*; and *the rule of multiple Second Pair Parts (SPPs) and delayed recontextualisation*. These rules allow for coherent conversations if participants adhere to the conventions they establish. As a consequence, the chat is dominated by a powerful moderator – the journalist – who takes the slightly unwanted role of an opinionated expert with whom the participants prefer to talk. There is a touch of irony hidden in this consequence, as the ideal of democratic participation that initially created the "messiness" of the discourse, and thus made it important to establish the rules of the turn-taking system, thereby results in a highly undemocratic distribution of power. The journalist is in control – he is the undisputed king of conversations, the gatekeeper.

How does this relate to interactions in non-virtual football fans' communities? If we picture a group of fans watching a football game from the stand, or on television in a pub, or in a private home, there are both similarities and differences. A centralisation of power in the actions of one person to such a degree as is the case in the chat would be unlikely, even though powerful leadership and uneven distribution of speech power is not uncommon in such

face-to-face group interactions. The kind of "imagined community" the chat establishes is, however, in a way quite similar to the communities that are shaped in urban football pubs during match-days. In such temporal, fluid and occasional communities, it is not unheard of to interact with strangers without any initial pre-sequences belonging to a discourse of politeness (like "hi", or "may I ask you a question?"), as was also the case in the CiL chat. Furthermore, the way the participants in the CiL chat present themselves in the mediated community bear many similarities to what Giulianotti (2002) labels the *flaneur* spectator. They majority of them express a "cool" relationship to football marked by thin solidarity to clubs. However, the community allows for multiple types of spectators to participate, as more traditional supporters with an expressed "hot" relationship to clubs were also found.

The CiL chat analysed in this chapter does therefore come close to form a mediated community of football fans that are quite similar to other informal football fans' communities, with the exception of the uneven distribution of speech power, although the power hierarchy established by the participants does reflect an important insight into the nature of the participatory turn in journalism. As discussed by Domingo et al. (2008), journalists (and editors) are reluctant to give up their power of speech, and thus their hegemony as gatekeepers, when they encourage audience participation. When audience participation is allowed to enter into the production of content that is close to core editorial activities, the editorial staff maintains control. The analysis provided in this chapter does, however, support a view that members of the audience who participate in such activities *also* prefer the editorial staff to be in control.

This is an important finding, considering to what degree such a practice promotes a changed social function for journalism. Undoubtedly, the practice relies heavily on audience engagement and constructs a community depended upon this engagement, thus tapping into the prophesised social function of public journalism. However, the power relations between the journalist and the audience is the one of the "old regime", where the journalist functions as the one who selects and partly also frames the information to be dismantled. The rules of interaction are greatly depended upon the journalist, thus minimising the influence of other participants. The fact that the audience prefers it to be so might suggest that audiences are comfortable with the traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers.

There is one last point which has not yet been considered in the analysis. There were only sixty-four participants in the chat, out of which the majority were rather passive. Lacking from this description is the role of what Burnett (2000) has called non-interactive behaviour – participants who are not contributing with talk. Given the popularity of *VG Nett's* live coverage of football matches (the most popular online service for live sport in Norway), this type of behaviour is by far the most common to all who take part in the

CiL chat. The CiL chat in *VG Nett* thereby attracts two sets of audiences: the passive, non-interactive audience (the majority) and the active, contributing audience (the minority). Given the insignificance, in quantitative terms, of the latter group compared to the former, it would be a mistake to argue that such a practice fundamentally changes the social function of journalism. A more plausible conclusion would be that by integrating such practices in its overall news coverage, online journalism opens up to the simultaneous co-existence of multiple social functions suited to attract different audiences.

Notes

1. Launched in 2007, CiL provides online newspapers (and other online publishers) with an interface that allows for easy and immediate integration of journalistic reporting with user-generated content (UGC) in the form of a live conversation between reporters and the audience. Leading sports channels, like ESPN, were early adopters of this technology and the application has gained immense popularity especially as an integrated part of online newspapers' sports sections.
2. http://vglive.no
3. Interview with journalist 28 April 2010. Quote translated by author.
4. Interview with journalist 28 April 2010. Quote translated by author. In Norwegian: "jævla kuk".
5. English football has, ever since the national public broadcaster NRK in 1969 started to transmit English football every week, always been extremely popular in Norway.
6. Interview with journalist 28 April 2010.

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