

Journalism in transition, on the verge of a ‘Total Journalism’ model*

DOI: 10.1590/1809-5844201614

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Abstract

Journalism is undergoing for a strong metamorphosis in the process of reconfiguration of the media scene. The impact of the internet on the news routines was a turning point in the professional practice. No one doubts the relevance of the recent changes. There have been changes both in the search for material and in the dissemination processes. The result has been a renewed set of steady routines that are living together with more experimental and under construction practices. An overview of the current Journalism, focused mainly on the Iberian Peninsula and in Europe in general, enables us to see that the essence remains. Journalists go on to tell non-fictional stories and they remain mediators who have decisive influence over the current societies.

Keywords: Journalism. Journalistic production. Professional profiles. Professional challenges.

Introduction

From its very beginning, Journalism has been linked to technological innovation (SALAVERRÍA, 2010, p.32). Technologies helped to shape modern Journalism and increased the impact of this technique on Communication developments in the 21st century – followed by the dotcom crises.

The spreading of internet has completely transformed the media ecosystem and created new ways of searching, producing, and disseminating information. Both traditional and digital natives media got on board – without finding alternative ways for their performance –, and encouraged the emergence of renewed professional profiles. The use of different technologies – as it has always happened throughout the history – has changed

* The translation to English was made by the PhD student Andrea Valencia-Bermúdez, member of Novos Medios Research Group and the International Network of Communication Management – XESCOM of the University of Santiago de Compostela.

the roles and professions linked to them (SCOLARI; MICÓ; NAVARRO/PARDO, 2008, p.40-43), because, at present, they are somehow the *lingua franca* (common language) of information workers in the 21st century.

The impact of digital technologies may be quantitatively assessed – since data provide information on use and consumption, internet penetration, accessibility, and use of mobiles -; while from a qualitative point of view, the issue is more complex. Nevertheless, both the uncritical inclusion and the few studies carried out in the early years make the effects of electronic tools remain unknown. What they have done visible is the opening to new possibilities, making easier for users to combine use, consumption and production tools – *prosumers* and active audiences.

Digital technologies, which facilitate work and are also a powerful tool for improving Journalism (GARCÍA AVILÉS, 2007, p.60), require a constant updating of its professional profiles, in order to beat the challenges of news performance within the networked digital society. Indeed, those technologies have quickly showed their productive potential but they have also created problems, which have caused many discussions between journalists, who went with the flow towards a constant updating of skills and abilities. But they have not always represented an advance for Journalism and high-quality news production.

Journalism is looking for new paths and partnerships, forced by digitisation, an evolving networking society and new uses and consumptions of news. One of these partnerships is a better citizen interaction through participatory services, tools, and new ways of making Journalism. Our question is how those changes are reflected in the Iberian zone, how that alliance with the citizenship is going on, and how that new direction has been put into action. For this purpose, this study includes a bibliographic review with the main findings of European and Iberian experts in this field, and a monitoring of journalistic practice of Iberian media – Spain and Portugal.

A large part of these works were carried out during the last ten years. In this way, it has also been included a summary of the monitoring research by Novos Medios in the last 12 years on the evolution of digital Journalism¹. All the results were reviewed and analysed by the discussion group on “Journalism Trends” from the University of Santiago, which involves scholars and media professionals from Galicia. Then, it was carried out a qualitative analysis of those results for a better understanding of changes in the Iberian Peninsula and Europe.

1 *Innovation and development of cybermedia in Spain* (Reference: CSO2012-38467-C03-03).

European studies working on changes

The changes in Journalism, triggered by current technologies and social developments, have attracted the attention of European researchers and professionals. Indeed, it has been the focus of many conferences held since the beginning of the third millennium – SOPCOM², AE-I³ and ECREA⁴, among others. Papers submitted were related to digital Journalism, changes in Journalism, and new techniques employed in news production. Many professional organizations also had their statement: the Association of European Journalists⁵, the Federation of Associations of Spanish Journalists⁶, the Journalists Union⁷ and the French Syndicat National des Journalistes⁸, as well as the initiatives promoted by global organizations – the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)⁹ and Reporters sans Frontières (RSF)¹⁰.

The researches in Europe has addressed various issues. In Spain, Javier Díaz Noci and Koldo Meso (1997), and Ramón Salaverría (1999) played a pioneer role in the studies on technological changes and Journalism in the networked society. Over time, many authors joined them: Pere Masip, Josep Lluís Micó, Ángeles Cabrera, Concha Edo, Elvira García, Juan Miguel Aguado, Jesús Miguel Flores Vivar, Xosé Pereira and Manuel Gago. In Portugal, Antonio Fidalgo (1999), Helder Bastos (2000) and Joao Canavilhas (2001) opened the way for this new topic, followed shortly thereafter by Fernando António Dias Zamith, Luís António Santos, and Pedro Jerónimo, among others.

As it may be seen, the list of authors working on Journalism, changes and new platforms is long. We refer below to the recent approaches of Carpentier et al. (2007), Deuze (2012), Picard (2011), Peters (2012), Westlund (2013), and to the monographic volume issued by Journalism Studies (2012) – The Future of Journalism. Then, there appeared many publication resulting from that research: “Changing Journalism” (2011); “Media Life” (2012), and “Rethinking Journalism. Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape” (2012). At the same time, many follow-up reports were drafted, such as Tracking the Future of News (2015), and publications including views of journalists and scholars (El futuro del periodismo, 2012).

2 Associação Portuguesa de Ciência da Comunicação (<http://www.sopcom.pt/page/home>).

3 Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación (<http://www.ae-ic.org/esp/home.asp>).

4 European Communication Research and Education Association (<http://www.ecrea.eu>).

5 <http://www.apeuropeos.org>.

6 <http://fape.es>.

7 <http://www.jornalistas.eu>.

8 <http://www.snj.fr>.

9 <http://www.ifj.org>.

10 <https://fr.rsff.org>.

The result is a set of theoretical and empiric works on topics related to things that are remaining, which is the essence of Journalism, what changes – tools, techniques, strategies, and platforms-, and the consequences of those transformations in professional profiles. Thus we have available many outcomes that help us to understand the state of the art of the new media ecosystem.

From these contributions, this paper seeks to identify and reflect on some aspects of these changes – Galicia, Spain, Portugal –, in order to verify or qualify the initial hypothesis. We can find the answer on the monitoring made by the research group Novos Medios, which focuses its studies on the Iberian space and makes both a media monitoring – five traditional media and five native digital media with the widest audience; and the pursuit of the profession – techniques and profiles –. That is why our critical reflection is based on the state of the art, the main research works in our field, and data extracted from our media monitoring. This insight will help us to carry out a qualitative analysis.

Updated profiles

The penetration of digital culture and online media requires a radical change in the exercise of Journalism, since citizens have changed news consumptions in last years. In Spain, data show that, there are 26.25 million people that regularly access the internet, 20 million are connected every day, and 1 million access via a mobile device¹¹.

In Spain, data have shown this trend and made Spain one of the leaders in multi-screen consumption.¹². This reflects a general trend, even if indicators of each country change.

Technological challenges mean, in the case of Journalism, the emergence of renewed profiles, which are gradually consolidating. The internet was the most important change factor of recent times, since it has not only created new platforms and channels for Journalism, but is also transforming production routines (ROST, 2012, p.1), which has increased the demand for journalists profiles with new skills.

Even though, a large part of academic literature introduces determinist bias on technologies, at present this apparently absolute power of technology over media companies and Journalism is being qualified (SALAVERRÍA; GARCÍA AVILÉS, 2008, p.33). These

11 Data from the Informe Sociedad de la Información en España 2014, produced by Fundación Telefónica España. Accessed at: http://www.fundaciontelefonica.com/arte_cultura/publicaciones-listado/pagina-item-publicaciones/?itempubli=323.

12 Data from the Consumer Barometer 2014, launched by por Google. Accessed at: <https://www.consumerbarometer.com/en/insights/?-countryCode=GL>.

efforts to analyse the dimensions of technologies have encouraged reflections on the information new professionals profiles – who have much more tasks than in the past – and have allowed a better understanding of changes and possibilities. The emergence of new profiles - community manager, content curator, social media analyst, chief data officer- has revealed many professional challenges of the new context.

These changes have encouraged a significant alteration of Iberian learning plans – also in Europe –, introducing specific internet training. The digital/online journalists should receive specific training beyond traditional aspects. Cyberjournalism calls for changes in news writing – adapted to online platforms-; in the stages of the productive process – adapted to the new routines; and the internal organization of digital media – with new structures and flows (TEJEDOR, 2007, p.7). Their training is essential to meet the present and future challenges.

Besides learning plans, it has emerged a great number of ongoing formation initiatives, help guides¹³, and Journalism specialized websites¹⁴. Many computer programmes and the large amount of online resources are essential supports for the daily work of journalists. The quality of their work can depend on making the most of online tools (CRUCIANELLI, 2010, p.8).

Things remaining, things changing

In order to define what is changing and remaining in Journalism, we will analyse and compare some aspects of the Journalism elements, profiles, and characteristics of present tools and production systems. Applying an analytical methodology – comparing research studies and results made by *Novos Medios*, from the University of Santiago –, we will try to make an approach to the characterising aspects of the current Journalism and define what it could be referred to as the 21st century total Journalism; what is to say, the one that is looking for the highest quality.

With the goal of offering an Iberian perspective in the European context, our study will be focused on the bibliographic output in Spanish and Portuguese, while references will be made to some European and international works. In this way we will make an approach to the empirical studies and theoretical reflections on the evolution of Journalism in the European Union, the Iberian Peninsula and the Southern Europe.

13 The KnightCenter for Journalism in the Americas published a guide with a version in Portuguese and Spanish. Accessed at: <https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/es/ebook/herramientas-digitales-para-periodistas-es-0>.

14 One of the most known cases in Latin America is <http://www.clasesdeperiodismo.com/>.

In all events, we could not isolate reflections on the transformations of global Journalism and the exercise of the profession. We will try to pay attention to the singularities of this field, where the lack of job security has increased and the role of journalists gives rise to a wide variety of observations.

The essential outlines its strengths

The journalistic heritage, in particular that developed over the last century, maintains its influence on professional practices. The elements of Journalism, systematised by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel at the end of the 20th century – Pew Project for the Excellence in Journalism – are still valid as foundations of these Social Communication technique. Truth, loyalty, verification, independence; public forum, power independent control; suggestive and relevant; exhaustiveness and respect for individual conscience. These aspects remain as the basis of current Journalism, since otherwise it would be no longer Journalism.

The reflection and discussion on the materialization of these principles are not yet finished. In the American context, one of the programmes working on their analysis is the Project for the Excellence in Journalism¹⁵. In the Iberian area, a few years ago it was born the project *Jornalismo e Sociedade*. Inspired by the American initiative, it encourages discussions between scholars, professionals and the Portuguese civil society, who seeks to analyse the impact of digital revolution¹⁶. In Spain, research groups such as Novos Medios¹⁷, the network Infotendencias¹⁸ and many Communication groups are working on the same topic¹⁹.

At present, Journalism and the media, associated with various democratic societies, played almost a counterweight role. This watchdog role still remains since the tasks of Journalism are to inform, to tell, to explain and to convince, without attaching itself to please (MESQUITA, 2007, p.84-94). But that makes Journalism a centre of criticism, especially in times of crisis.

But the main commitment of Journalism is to produce and disseminate pieces of news, containing facts of social interest and public relevance (ARMENTIA; CAMINOS, 1998, p.19), so journalists must act diligently to make those goals a reality.

15 The Project has a constant activity, with a full programme of works and events. Accessed at: <http://www.journalism.org/>.

16 The project *Jornalismo e Sociedade* is coordinated by researchers Gustavo Cardoso and Susana Santos. Accessed at :<http://jornalismo.addition.pt/np4/home.html>.

17 www.novosmedios.gal.

18 <http://infotendencias.com>.

19 <http://www.novosmedios.gal/index.php/grupos-de-investigacion-en-comunicacion>.

What happens in present-day connected society, where Communication is ubiquitous, journalists are not the main actors of the Communication discourse, even though they participate (MESQUITA, 2007, p.89). In a place of Communication euphoria, where social networks are becoming the main channels, Journalism gets squeezed out, while it is essential for the functioning of democratic societies. And journalists, who defend their independence from political and economic powers, are living under a pressure that is endangering the achievement of their principles (ALSIUS et al., 2010, p.235).

Tools and processes are changing

Recent advances in technology have brought about important shifts within our daily lives and our working methods. As regards Communication and Information Technologies (TIC), the so-called digital revolution has obliged companies to move if they are to survive. And moving does not mean making noise, but investing in interaction and smart support (FIGUEIRAS, 2015, p.25). That leads journalists to know these technologies and to secure the greatest usefulness of them.

However, it seems necessary to reflect on new methods, strategies and ways, since digital societies are showing that nothing is permanent (NOSTY, 2015, p.61). Perhaps that is why the survival in the digital ecosystem implies constant updating, experimentation and innovation. This trend is confirmed by the recent data from Spain, Portugal, and Europe as a whole.

The journalists and the media have to respond this challenge with training in the use of tools with a critical view, since the appropriate use of technologies is very useful to check and verify information. Advances in fact-checking like the Emergent tool, developed in the Tow Center for Digital Journalism from the University of Columbia, are becoming driving forces to the verification of information (DIEZHANDINO, 2015, p.64). The technological capacity is at service of a high-quality Journalism. The monitoring of Spanish and Portuguese media, as well as Europe as a whole, confirm this trend (NEWMAN; LEVY; NIELSEN, 2015).

At present, journalists know many of these tools and make use of general social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest), and specialized networks (quora.com – social network specialized Q&A –, Academia.edu, frontiersin.org, Researchgate). These networks provide data of trends, social activities, and give clues of how to produce news and sources. Social networks have become a new working tool (HERRERO, 2013, p.18) and so many media already have rules of use and style manuals. They are widely used in European media (NEWMAN; LEVY; NIELSEN, 2015).

As was clear from the observations made above, the net is increasingly offering tools for creating, publishing, and sharing content, which are usually employed by journalists. It enjoys great popularity among journalists the use of low-cost processors, filming apps, and all those tools that increase contact with active audiences – from Whatsapp to Twitter. On the whole, any new tool may be useful in processes of searching, producing, disseminating and managing information. The opinion of European journalists is favourable, since they think these tools are useful for news production.

Discussion

The journalism has come in for a lot of criticism in present-day societies in a context of major changes and economic and value crisis. There are a lot of social actors that, according to their interests, have questioned aspects of the media and Journalism both for the mistakes of journalists and the pressure of private powers. Hence there is reason to complain, but also a social need to review specific critical issues.

With regard to the Journalism situation, we share the view of Kovach and Rosenstiel when they say that the elements of Journalism are part of the present-day Journalism, since it is still based on a discipline of verification and independence (KOVACH; ROSENSTIEL, 2003, p.265). The reinvention of Journalism must be carried out on the basis of traditional Journalism, since otherwise it would become something different, a new technique of Social Communication or the confluence of the existing ones.

Current technologies should help journalists to increase the value of news. If media companies and Journalism are willing and able to change and increase their value, then they will have a future (PICARD, 2012, p.147). Value has become a driving force in news production processes, providing truthful information on innovative platforms. Only in that way Journalism will continue to be relevant in present and future societies.

New tools and operative, functional and intellectual strategies are progressively becoming involved in the journalistic practice. Journalism itself is in a transitional phase from a model based on the principles of surveillance, explanation and social utility, and where information was lacking, to another one that cannot compromise the principles but should employ the new available tools, techniques and strategies.

Conclusion

Journalism is undergoing a profound restructuring. The present transitional phase it is another step to its reinvention. Journalism is changing in the midst of a profound transformation of the complex societies of the third millennium.

At the present stage, it is evident that the essence remains. The elements of Journalism are still present both in theory and in practice, as reflected in self-regulation codes and daily practice. Codes established by Unesco, the European Council, and others published by various countries demonstrate this.

The social debates also do not question the essence of this Social Communication technique called Journalism, but they do doubt some news practices and the weight of commercial Journalism. Hence there is agreement between professionals, media actors and civil society sectors.

But what have changed are the tools for searching, producing, disseminating, and managing information. Also, there are different processes of news uses and consumptions, raised by the emergence and internet and the social web evolution. The journalistic practice is using these new tools while active audiences are looking for their own space in the new processes. Journalists are trying to use the most useful tools for performing their tasks and for detecting concealments through verification processes – fact checking and visualization and displaying processes – infographics and audio-visual content with renewed narratives.

This transition Journalism, which is being monitored in the Iberian space, is the precedent of what we should refer to as “Total Journalism”, which makes better use of social research techniques, technologies, and automation models for a high quality Journalism – watchdog and accurate, offering a public service, added value, and socially useful tools.

This model has strengths and weaknesses, but it is showing a clear tendency to preserve the essence – regulation and updated codes –, and to change techniques – tools, social networks, new multimedia narratives, attention and mobile Communication.

In short, the monitoring data and the results of our analysis show that Journalism is in a transitional phase to a more complex model, with many techniques, visions, and forms of social intervention. In this regard, we see it as “total”, with many and renewed techniques to take action within a networked society, marked by mobility, connectivity and news ubiquity. That does not however imply more quality. It is only different to that Journalism inherited from the 20th century.

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Received on: 04.30. 2015

Accepted on: 12.31.2015