ARTICLES

THE POTENT AUDIENCE AND CHANGES IN JOURNALISM:

a look at the Spanish lavanguardia.com and the Latin American diariodepernambuco.com

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ABSTRACT - The possible transformations in the way journalistic contents are being produced, consumed and distributed is the motivation for our graduate degree research. This article has the following objectives: to present our description of a potent audience; to analyze how it has been involved in and what changes it has brought forth in the news production for two reference vehicles, after what has been called WEB 2.0. It also has the relevance of relying on the findings of the participant observation carried out in one of the most important daily newspapers in Barcelona, the lavanguardia.com, and in the diariodepernambuco.com, the online version of the Diario de Pernambuco, the oldest newspaper still in circulation in Latin America. Both newspapers are pioneers in this new reference vehicle-potent audience relationship.
Keywords: Potent Audience. Journalism. Journalists. Changes. Routines.

A AUDIÊNCIA POTENTE E AS MUDANÇAS NO JORNALISMO:
um olhar para o espanhol lavanguardia.com e para o latino-americano diariodepernambuco.com

RESUMO - As possíveis tranformações na maneira como os conteúdos jornalísticos estão sendo produzidos, consumidos e distribuídos motivaram nossa pesquisa de doutorado. Parte da pesquisa, o artigo tem como objetivos apresentar o que denominamos audiência potente, analisar como ela vem sendo envolvida e que mudanças tem provocado na produção das notícias em dois veículos de referência, após o que se denomina WEB 2.0. Tem ainda a relevância de respaldar-se nos resultados da observação participante em um dos mais importantes diários de Barcelona, o lavanguardia.com, e no diariodepernambuco.com, a versão digital do jornal Diario de Pernambuco, o mais antigo em circulação da América Latina. Ambos pioneiros nessa nova relação veículo de referência-audiência potente.
Palavras-chave: Audiência Potente. Jornalismo. Jornalistas. Mudanças. Rotinas.

LA AUDIENCIA POTENTE Y LOS CAMBIOS EN EL PERIODISMO: una mirada al español lavanguardia.com y al latino americano Diario de Pernambuco

RESUMEN - Las posibles transformaciones en la manera como los contenidos periodísticos se producen, distribuyen y consumen motivaron nuestra investigación doctoral. Siendo parte de la investigación, el artículo tiene como objetivos presentar lo que llamamos audiencia potente, analizar cómo ésta está participando y qué cambios está generando en la producción de noticias en dos vehículos de referencia, después de lo que se denomina Web 2.0. Tiene aún la relevancia de respaldarse en los resultados de la observación participante en uno de los más importantes diarios de Barcelona, el lavanguardia.com, y en el diariodepernambuco.com, la versión digital del periódico Diario de Pernambuco, el más antiguo en circulación en Latinoamérica. Ambos pioneros en esta nueva relación vehículo de referencia - audiencia potente.
Palabras claves: Audiencia Potente. Periodismo. Periodistas. Cambios. Rutinas.

1 Introduction

Cell phones and other mobile devices capable of accessing the Internet have enabled many people to record, share and amplify contents about current events, even though they might not have even graduated from journalism or worked in media and communication. Since the nature of journalism is identified with present times, much of its content has become of interest and was even further incorporated by the field in sections beyond just Letters to the Editor.

Such an inclusion of alien agents into the journalistic field is changing production routines and journalism itself which, since the end of the twentieth century, has already been going through a series of transformations to its processes of production, distribution, news access and mainly audience relationship.

Even though restricted to well-defined roles in the past and after the WEB 2.0, audiences have involved themselves in and have been involved by journalism. This interaction resulted in new relationships established from an acquaintanceship facilitated by the convergence of traditional and digital media.

Possible changes in the way news content is being produced, consumed and distributed have motivated our doctoral research. This article presents what we call potent audience (MESQUITA, 2014) in order to analyze how this audience has been

involved in and what changes they have caused to the production of news in two reference vehicles, after Web 2.0. It also has the relevance of relying on the results of the participant observation carried out in one of the most important daily newspapers in Barcelona, lavanguardia.com, and in diariodepernambuco.com, the digital version of Diario de Pernambuco, the oldest newspaper still in circulation in Latin America.

2. Methodological approach

In order to conduct the research we chose diariodepernambuco. com, the digital version of Diario of Pernambuco (DP), based in Recife (PE); and lavanguardia.com (LV), the digital edition of the daily newspaper La Vanguardia from Barcelona as our objects. Both are pioneer newspapers in their cities in online participation and creating new editorials, such as Social Media (SD) and Social Networks (LV), with the aim of involving the audience in news building. The choice to use an ethnographic approach for conducting the field research as a participant observation made it possible to systematically gather and obtain data and other types of information on production routines that take place in those media.

Following Casetti & Chio (1999), who consider it necessary for the analyst to observe reality live in order not to run the risk of having data contaminated by mediations, we spent two weeks in each one of the newsrooms. The observation period in the La Vanguardia newsroom was from February 4th to 13th, 2013, and in Diario de Pernambuco from October 24th to November 1st, 2013. We looked at understanding how the reference vehicles incorporate content coming from the potent audience into its production.

As stated by Travancas (2008, p. 103), while conducting a participant observation "the social scientist does not - or at least should not – position himself/herself naively with respect to his/her presence in the group. He/she must observe and know that they are also being observed and that the mere fact of being present can change the group's routine". During our time in the La Vanguardia newsroom we saw a change in the journalists' routines which was replacing the daily agenda meetings with private talks between Enric Sierra, editor the digital edition of La Vanguardia, and the editors of the daily news.

We have also noticed the discomfort both newspapers share for opening their doors to a "stranger". Although the newspapers we observed were always very kind and made themselves available to us, our presence particularly at the Diario de Pernambuco made them visibly uncomfortable. A journalist's statement showed just how that observed-observer relationship was perceived: After a full day in the newsroom, we confirmed that the observation would continue the next day as planned and this journalist nonchalantly said, "You can disturb at will".

This kind of discomfort is understandable. We were observing recently established newsrooms. The Brazilian newspaper's Editorial Board of Social Media had only been around for seven months. Thus, although the newspaper manager had allowed us into the newsroom, we realized that journalists were unsure about how far one could go watching what they were doing. One example was when the report on the newspaper's presence on social networks was being prepared. The journalist realized that we had seen her preparing the report and she made it clear that if we wanted any details we would have to ask the manager of the online version for them.

In addition to entering the "field" to observe the day-to-day ongoings in the newsroom, we also conducted 11 in-depth interviews with the executive editor of diariodepernambuco.com, Paula Losada; the vice director of lavanguardia.com, Enric Sierra; Participation editor of La Vanguardia, Tony Rubies; the publisher of the Citizen Reporter - Diario de Pernambuco, Carolina Santos; the editor of Social Media of Diario de Pernambuco, Fred Figuerôa; the *community manager* of La Vanguardia, Patricia Ventura; as well as reporters from both newspapers.

We hypothesized that change in news production comes from the new relationships that media vehicles were beginning to establish with the audience, mediated by social networks (Twitter and Facebook).

Soon after this step, we organized and systematized the material collected for further analysis and for the last stage of this process, which was the drafting of the text. A text of many voices, as Travancas (2008, p. 104) emphasizes: "Of the native voices, the voices of authors with whom it dialogues and the voice of the researcher".

3. The tools of "participation" in La Vanguardia and Diario de Pernambuco

We see that the audience for both newspapers is involved in different ways, but they have one thing in common: the economic interest behind the discourse of participation.

From the time it opened its comments section on the news in 2007 until the time it focused its attention on social networks, La Vanguardia has been changing its strategies to incorporate audience "participation" into its production.

The first initiative was to open up a space where comments could be made on the news. Since a large number of people want to leave their comments, lavanguardia.com invested in its Participation section of "receiving participation and channeling it according to both our readers' interest and our interest" (SIERRA, 2012, ORAL COMMUNICATION).

Empirical investigations conducted in Spanish newsrooms led authors such as Masip et al. (2010), to conclude that companies had developed the participation spaces mainly with economic interests in mind (increasing audience loyalty and user traffic) but they also try to minimize their impact on the actual information production processes. Our research interviews with journalists such as vice director Enric Sierra at lavanguardia.com, who did not try to hide what the participation strategies are intended for, revealed how much this is emphasized:

> Out of this large volume of participation we were able to lay out more concrete ideas and liked them all, we do not want to give up any. Firstly, we want to build loyalty; let them participate, but not only participate but also help us make the news every day. And all formulas are good as well (SIERRA, 2012, ORAL COMMUNICATION).

If the Participation section of La Vanguardia was how the newspaper wished to publicize that it has "opened up" a space for the audience, there was another, not so obvious initiative that the paper used to attract an audience: the Social Networks editorial. Led by a journalist who acts as *community manager*, the new editorial was responsible for integrating audience participation into journalist information itself, serving as a bridge between the newsroom and the audience on Twitter and Facebook.

The *community manager's* role was to listen to the audience,

propagating and amplifying themes in these conversational spaces in order to use social networks as "thermometers" and monitor the audience's reaction to news coverage from reference media vehicles. If the audience were resistant to the news coverage in newspapers, this data would be provided to editors which could support decisions towards a new approach on the subject.

Besides investing in the *community manager*, La Vanguardia has created a manual called "Decalogue del prescriptor en las redes sociales - Manual para captarlos y relacionarse con ellos" (The Decalogue on social networks – a manual for reaching out and getting to know them), which is another indicator that the vehicle-audience relationship is not an amateur task. With guidelines for journalists ranging from "how to earn the confidence of the influencer" to the "suggestion" that journalists analyze what time and days the audience is more active on the networks, the manual shows that dealing with an audience is conditioned by economic relations.

As La Vanguardia, the Diario de Pernambuco has been modifying its strategies to incorporate audience "participation" into its production. It started this process by creating the Forum Citizen Reporter, a space that was opened up in 2007 to discuss issues on citizenship, transportation and traffic, culture, health, public safety and many others. Publishing photos and videos made by the audience was also discussed.

In 2013, with the creation of the Social Media editorial, newspapers paid more attention to audiences on Facebook. The editorial came up with two attributions: to spread the news produced by Diario on social networks and to look in conversational spaces, such as Facebook and Twitter, for content to be transformed into news.

The editorial Diario was also created in the same year and launched a Citizen Reporter application so audiences could send information to all company newsrooms.

In both media vehicles, the editorial work for Social Media or Social Networks is connected to the entire newsroom, and what emerges from this relationship between the newspaper and the social network audience can influence decisions throughout the news production process. Both the Social Media editor and the *community manager* interact all the time with other journalists in the newsroom, reporting on the discussions that are taking place on social networks,

and deciding on whether a particular subject should make the *Trending Topics* and if this subject is included in the newspaper's agenda. This leads to whether a particular issue should go on the homepage or be removed from it.

In order to attract and earn loyalty from this audience on the networks who increasingly consume less journalistic products in online media, the reference vehicles incorporate marketing strategies to the journalistic practice, but sometimes forgetting some important ethical questions. They change the routines of gathering, production and distribution of news and the way journalists carry out their activity on a whole.

4. The construction of the concept of potent audience

Before we reached the proposed conceptualisation of potent audience (2014), we referred to this citizen as a public mediator. Co-producers of news have been talking with journalists that work with various media (internet, radio, newspaper or television) and also with other citizens like them (VIZEU & MESQUITA, 2011).

In another study, we observed that audience-produced content is "more easily accepted" by the reference media vehicles when it comes to crisis events which, given their unpredictability, hamper coverage for teams of journalists (MESQUITA, 2010).

Further into the investigation it became more evident that the concept of audience drawn up by mass communication theories tends to lose a bit of its meaning in digital environments, marked by the dilution of the roles of consumers and producers, the personalization of content, the asynchronous consumption and the many-to-many exchange (SCOLARI, 2008).

Bowman & Willis (2005) point out that the idea of including the audience into the news production process as an attempt to search for fresh perspectives or converting readers into reporters or commentators is not new. In the early 1990s, especially in the United States, newspapers experienced Civic Journalism, which was readers and communities participating in group sessions, polls and reacting to daily news stories.

By the late 1990s, the ideas of having citizens cooperate by reporting on topics that traditional media usually ignore were taking shape. This was understood as a new form of journalism,

one performed by non-professionals and which is opposed to the traditional and analogic journalism which journalists regularly do. Thus, the term Citizen Journalism (BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003) was born.

Although there is no consensus, there is recognition that reports of crises, consolidated by the immediate consequences of the tsunami in South Asia in December 2004, have made for the term Citizen Journalism to be included in the world of Journalism, as noted by Allan (2009).

The involvement of the audience in the communication environment after Web 2.0 varies greatly depending on its basic needs and motivations. In the role of producing and receiving information, according to some theorists, the audience threatened journalism by gaining access to production processes and participating in the actuality setting. But despite the many discussions at the time, the authors could only converge on the understanding that there is a change in relations between the communication vehicles and the audience. The latter, in addition to being active (BARKER 1999), now has access to the means of content production. It is worth highlighting the theoretical contributions of Singer; Hermida; Sunday; Heinonen; Paulussen; Quandt; Reich; and Vujnovic (2011) on the participation topics in the media and the role of social networks.

Authors such as Bowman & Willis (2003), Bruns (2005), Madureira (2010) and Espiritusanto (2011) cataloged some levels of audience involvement in the information ecosystem, and some of them are relevant our characterization of what is a potent audience.

Following Bowman & Willis (2003), there are different possibilities for the audience to be involved in making news. They believe that the audience "participates" by checking facts, recording an event as it happens, providing the complement of journalistic information and making open source news under peer review. Bowman & Willis (2003) also include the live broadcasting models of audio and video, collaborative advertising and knowledge management in that audience engagement process.

Espiritusanto (2011) highlights some levels of "participation" in the information ecosystem relevant to the construction of our concept of potent audience. One of these first levels, considered by Espiritusanto (2011, p.15), concerns the audience action on social networks:

> Users can "like" a news story and then they are participating; they can make comments and this participation increases and expands. But they can also vote in different ways for ranking the news (Digg, Menéame...). If we consider that the ranking of information is (or was) one of the functions of media and journalists, here we find what users nowadays are performing the job that traditional journalists had been doing up until now.

The audience, to Espiritusanto (2011, p.15-16), can also "bring material to a medium, create its own content or share it with others"; moreover, it can be converted into "citizen journalists". Espiritusanto (2011) states, in what he considers to be a greater degree of involvement, that the audience is able to keep an eye on government and media. Finally, in his typology of "participation", Espiritusanto (2011, p. 16) believes that there are some "citizen journalists who know how to take the information from a concrete situation and bring it to an international stage" and those who "decide to report on small and large everyday events within the community and among their neighbors" (ESPIRITUSANTO 2011, p.16).

We share Espiritusanto's (2011) idea that the audience can - thanks to the technology at hand and what can be done with it - do photography, video, text or audio records as well as offer a huge contribution to democracy to the extent that it acts as a watchdog of the power or the media. Nevertheless, we do not think it will play the role of a journalist. So, one of the first statements referring to potent audience is that although it integrates itself more and more to the journalistic field and contributes to journalism, it is not a journalist. This is only a brief review on the involvement of the audience, and falls far short from exhausting the thoughts on the subject. It aims to explain why previous studies, although having brought forward important contributions, do not include our hypothesis of the potent audience.

5. The potent audience

We give the name potent audience to this new agent that involves itself or is involved in the journalistic processes, practices and routines, having: capability for transformation; force for information spreading; capability for action; and capability for amplification (MESQUITA, 2014).

The capability for transformation can be observed in the performance of the potent audience when it brings new agents to the media universe in a clash for other viewpoints to be conveyed by reference media. Put in another way, the potent audience is not only changing the agenda of newspapers, radio and television stations and placing new subjects in the mediatic sphere, breaking the hegemony of the institutionalized voices that are sources for journalism and changing some news values but it is also changing media vehicles news/consumer relationships. The capability for transformation can still be observed when the audience changes its mode of action and their behavior over time. It is important to note that the audience can always use one or more of its capabilities. An audience can be reactive in one situation and in another, it can be amplifying or even a combination of all its features. However, the potent audience may change its characteristics and capabilities over time depending on economic and social technological conditions, among others.

But all this change that potent audience has been driving in the media relationship is only relevant because of three aspects which we considered for our conceptualization: the capability for spreading information (which is not the same as spreading news); the capability for action, made possible by access to means of production; and its capability for amplification.

With the internet, new technological devices (smartphones, tablets), and social networks the potent audience is able to propagate larger amounts of information in a shorter period of time without having to judge that information. What once meant years now depends on a click of the send key from a computer or mobile device connected to the internet.

Most social networks, as highlighted by Telles (2010), contain the concept of a group - a collection of people joined together by a common interest. Group members interact by sharing information, discussing or sending private messages to a particular member. They may also promote demonstrations physically (in person) as well as in the sense of forming a pressure group, which is not necessarily going to the streets but which in the network itself exerts an influence on institutions or companies. Our second argument for the concept of potent audience is its capability for amplification.

Essentially conversational spaces, social networks have the ability to amplify the voices of the audience. Therefore, when using

its amplification capability, the audience gives content new meanings through comments, opinions and new perspectives on the subject which is then reverberated in networks, offering a sample of what those citizens who engage with the media want and think about. The audience capability for amplification may be established as an expression of collective intelligence and conscience.

Finally, the capability for action can be understood as the characteristic the potent audience has for witnessing events and co-producing content as well as being watchful (reporting any illegal, abusive or unsatisfactory public or private activities) and reacting (to news that violates social or cultural values). There is, in this capacity, a mixture of public interest with the interest of the audience.

6. Potent audience and changes in journalism

The incorporation of social networks like Twitter and Facebook to newsroom routines led the media organizations, at the beginning, to tread two tracks: the reproduction of the massive transmission model, using profiles to spread information through automated systems; and the search for a closer contact with the audience. Vehicles that bet on this interaction with the audience are suitable for what is the essence of social networks, that is, the conversation stimulation (BAMBRILLA, 2011).

For Brambilla (2011), social networks and journalism should walk together on three aspects: activation (posts), production of content and relationship. She explained that relationship, which should be more transparent and human, cannot be thought of as only seeking the participation of the audience; it must engage in and involve it.

The involvement of the audience in news production processes, after Web 2.0, is a major change happening in journalism. With internet access and mobile devices, audience reports, photographs, films and places in Trending Topics (TTs) the issues it considers important and it ends up involving itself or being involved in the production of news by the reference media vehicles.

An important point to note is that the potent audience does not participate in the entire process (checking, verification, writing, editing and publishing), which is, in the case of the reference vehicles, the responsibility of journalists. The potent audience, which is on

Facebook and Twitter and engages with the reference vehicles, can bring to the newsroom photographic, video or text records. The latter are appropriate in different ways, such as a story pitch, responses to polls showing what the audience thinks about a certain subject, questioning and criticizing of the lack of certain subjects in the news, opinions about certain conveyed topics.

The audience's voice also redefines how a journalist chooses what will be reported and what environment will be privileged. If, before Web 2.0, the journalist presumed an audience while bringing content that he understood to be of interest, nowadays companies rely on the movement on social networks like Twitter and Facebook to produce news. That was the case of 'Keep Calm and speak Catalan", a large demonstration across social networks that took place in October 2012 which was fueled by a statement from the Spanish Minister of Culture, José Ignacio Wert, in which he said: "Es preciso españolizar a los niños catalanes" (It is necessary to *Spanish-ize* Catalan children).

Minister Wert's statement caused a massive reaction on social networks. The tag #EspañolizarEs became Trending Topics in Spain. In the La Vanguardia newsroom, the *community manager* followed all audience interactions on this subject, and once he detected a strong movement on Twitter, he insisted on reporting on the subject immediately:

> I saw that something important was moving with this image and said: let's make this news. And I did the news: "The reform Wert goes viral on social networks". This news turned out to be in all the media's agenda in Catalonia. In the end, the minister was responding to "Keep Calm and speak Catalan," that is, it came out from the agenda of the network, went to the newspaper's agenda and ultimately got to the political agenda. This is brutal!! The Congress saying "Keep Calm and speak Catalan". There are pictures. Congressmen with banners in full session. Then, they made "bambas" shoes with the logo (VENTURA, 2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION).

The article cited by the *community manager*, "El 'keep calm and speak catalan' llega al Congreso" ('keep calm and speak Catalan' reaches congress) was published on October 2012 and is an example of an issue emerged in a conversational network that made its way to the media agenda and then on to the political agenda.

The *community manager* of La Vanguardia points out that the idea "is to establish a dialogue with the reader through social networks, which supply value to our content, which

makes moves towards listening to the reader. We also seek ways to integrate their participation and their contributions to our web, and even to the printed version (VENTURA, 2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION).

In addition to talking with the audience, newspapers listen to the powerful voice of social networks when deciding what should or should not be published. Enric Sierra (2012, ORAL COMMUNICATION), the vice director of lavanguardia.com, highlights how the agendas are reached from listening to social networks:

> On the web there are four types of people. They are either providing information, participation, come from multimedia and social networks. They meet and follow how the information is flowing, if there is anything newsworthy, if readers are concerned about one subject or another, if they have more interest in one subject than the other. I also take part in these meetings. And from there we make decisions, constantly. And that temperature we constantly take of the web is passed to the paper. And then it is said: attention, there is a topic that is hot and perhaps we should print it.

The monitoring of social networks to "pan" the most prominent themes in the audience so that it results in news is complemented by analyzing the extent to which the communication company gets the "right" framing for a particular topic. The vice director of lavanguardia.com, Enric Sierra (2012, ORAL COMMUNICATION), states that "if we have an approach that our audience does not like, we reflect on it and say: Our audience is right! We change and make new content but always with forethought, not on impulse. We first reflect on it domestically and then we rectify, we change the orientation".

In Diario de Pernambuco, the voice of the audience also redefines how the journalist chooses what will be published and what framing will be privileged. As the editor of Social Media of Diario de Pernambuco, Fred Figuerôa (2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION) reports:

> If there is anything that we don't have, that has just surfaced, then we will go after it and ask: "Look, do we have it on the site? We don't?" So I'll call my team here, if I'm at home, and the team will ask the site to do it. And it happens a lot. [...] By the way, we recently had a situation that even today is still producing consequences. Sony had launched the Playstation console at a price of four thousand reais. This came from social networks and went on to hit the newspaper's first page.

This explicit manifestation of what interests the audience allows the newsroom to know which topics are the best to "bet" on.

Fred Figuerôa (2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION) explains that Diario de Pernambuco "has decided to provide much more coverage of adoption issues, violence against animals, and stories related to animals because of social networks". He explains that these issues guarantee a "good audience" and, moreover, are good for the newspaper's image.

On the other hand, the potent audience's dissatisfaction with the newspaper coverage forces it to review its position on the issue. The editor of Social Media, Fred Figuerôa (2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION) analyzes coverage of the "beijaço" (a kissing demonstration) by artists of the same sex in repudiation of Congressman Marcos Feliciano. It was so controversial that it resulted in a decreased number of Diario de Pernambuco "followers" on social networks, forcing the paper to stop and give no more attention to that subject.

The establishment of the potent audience in a network also has an influence on its peers and may change public opinion formation processes. We had just arrived at the Diario de Pernambuco on October 28, 2013, and the Social Media team was already aware of the audience on Facebook following the partial collapse of the Gate d'Uchoa station in Recife, built in 1865 for the first trams. The first approach that the Social Media team editors gave to the accident was emphasizing "the complicated traffic on site".

But what the Social Media team happened to observe was that the audience interest expressed on the networks was not about the complicated traffic, but about the damage to the town's heritage. So at the end of the day the coverage, which began reporting on the traffic, ended with the following headline on the front page of the printed newspaper: "car overturns and partially destroys a town heritage" (PERNAMBUCO DIARIO, 2013).

The possibility of measuring the real-time "movement" of an audience is another change that has been incorporated into journalistic routines. All the involvement of the potent audience can and has been measured by tools like Google Analytics to show how many people downloaded a report, where those people live, which spaces on the sites are being visited, which ads are doing better, who clicks on the ads and who pauses, advances or stops a video show.

The bet is that all strategies used in the communication vehicles-audience relationship will also result in a recommender effect as made clear by the *community manager* of La Vanguardia (2013, ORAL COMMUNICATION):

> We make a story with only the most interesting statements (arising from the provocation of the audience by the media). So, when readers see that we listen to them, they feel integrated into the information, they experience satisfaction, which is good. Then they share the information and switche to the role of a recommender, which is also marketing. My role here is not only that of a journalist but also that of a marketing guy. It interests me that they will recommend my brand. So I achieve many objectives: to improve the journalistic product; to make readers feel like they have a voice; I get the recommender effect and therefore increase my community among the quality followers, because it is not just the number of followers but the quality of them that matters.

Final considerations

Journalism has been going through a series of changes since the late twentieth century and we think the strongest one is its relationship with the audience. With the presence of this new agent, which is incorporated into the journalistic field, the news on both observed vehicles are no longer built only from the image that journalists have of the audience.

At the workplace, we observed that the production of news - which involves a series of professional paradigms and practices given as natural, together with the professional culture and restrictions related to production organization - is augmented by the viewpoints from that potent audience. Having sites on social networks, media companies now have real-time access to the concerns from the potent audience and this data is conditioning decisions of the reference vehicles.

We cannot look at this process with complete naivety or an exaggerated sense of euphoria without reflecting on the implicit interests in this relationship waved as loyalty mechanism by the media companies "interested" to incorporate amateur content in a very superficial way or as a practice to expand advertising in other ways and formats.

Another aspect that cannot stay without a deeper analysis of this communication vehicle-audience relationship is about the types of content that is coming out of social networks and incorporated by media companies to their journalistic production. Looking to increase traffic on their pages, companies run the risk of being "contaminated" by the audience, incorporating more entertainment content than information, or appealing to the grotesque and even leaving aside the journalists' function as gatekeepers and creators of the agenda.

There are many questions that arise with this new agent, the potent audience, that are challenges for journalism. There is the ethical issue, the need to make sure both the public agenda is not impaired and the boundary between journalism and advertising is not blurred, so that journalism does not get stuck to the "dictatorship" of numbers (traffic on the site, shares on Facebook, followers, among others).

On the other hand, one cannot fail to look at this audience and be hopeful of the potential to bring important issues to the media sphere that would otherwise never have had space in reference vehicles; at the possibility that its action encourages public debate and contributes towards citizens - that journalism labels as non-institutionalized sources – become active in this proposal of topics with a plurality of views about reality and start to act on behalf of an effective citizenship.

In such a relationship it is important to be aware of what the roles of journalism are and what the roles of the audience are. Although the collaboration of the potent audience can contribute to democratic improvements in society, journalism - a major act of democracy - cannot be the result of chance, of an eventual participation that is not necessarily concerned with the contextualization and interpretation of facts.

We are very clear on the fact that news production is still an activity performed by a specialist called a journalist who holds a degree in journalism from an accredited university. In this Journalism Course he will have learned the complex process of news production which, far from being intuitive or a matter of chance, embodies an educational background that ensures the quality of news and ethics when dealing with information.

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