Exploring the Integration of User–Generated Content in Media Organizations Through Participatory Journalism

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of user engagement in news production process has evolved during the last centuries to extend from early forms of participation in printed matters to wholly participatory platforms hosted by mainstream online media outlets. The initial steps of the 17th century (Boczkowski, 2005) were followed by practices like letters to the editor, newspaper ombudsmen and reader representatives, before Internet and World Wide Web (Web) spread made it possible for message boards and chat rooms to be implemented on news websites (Deuze, 2006; Gillmor, 2004; Singer et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it was the predominance of Web 2.0 that led to the radical transformation of the journalist-audience relationship (Reader, 2018; Sinton, 2018).

Remarkable quantities of user-generated content (UGC), basically in the form of text, photos, videos and graphics (Anderson, 2007), are produced and uploaded thanks to easy-to-use publishing tools, always-on connections and powerful mobile devices (Bowman & Willis, 2003). Meanwhile, citizen journalism activity through social media such as Facebook and Twitter is becoming increasingly relevant and important (Kim & Lowrey, 2015, p. 298) and anyone with something engaging to share can be a potential mass communicator (Moore & Hatcher, 2018). As Newman (2009) states, social media and UGC have fundamentally changed the nature of breaking news by contributing to the compression of the "news cycle", putting more pressure on editors over what and when to report and creating an important extra layer of information and diverse opinion.

Technological developments, along with social and economic transitions (Moretzsohn, 2006), declined audience's confidence in mainstream journalism (Hirst, 2011) and loss of advertising revenues (Franklin, 2014) provoke strategic redesign in media, challenging traditional concepts such as gatekeeping (Bruns, 2005). Thus, online media adopt tools and applications of participatory journalism, where users can -among others- comment on published stories, send their own digital material, discuss several issues and share articles in social networking sites. However, users' involvement in making and disseminating news raises a variety of ethical, legal and responsibility issues, which force organizations to use quality assurance methods (Saridou & Veglis, 2016, p. 88).

This chapter aims to offer an in-depth description of the concept of participatory journalism, by providing a deep approach to the conceptual sense of this phenomenon, presenting an analytical framework of the audience engagement in online news production. The chapter seeks better understanding

of the adoption of UGC in media via different forms, tools and applications and during different stages of journalistic process. The problems organizations have to deal with when amateur content is involved with the professional content and the solutions chosen are investigated as well. Finally, future research perspectives are discussed.

BACKGROUND

Very early stages of audience's participation in news production process are rooted in the 17th century, when readers can write on the intentionally blank last page of *"Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick",* before passing it to someone else (Boczkowski, 2005, p. 141). During the next century, newspapers publish readers' letters to the editor, while later, in the 20th century, more active contact with the community takes place, via newspaper ombudsmen, reader representatives, focus groups and polls (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Deuze, 2006). Apart from press, both in radio and in television broadcasting, presenters receive phone-ins and text messages from audience members who provide information about breaking news or discuss on air (Gillmor, 2004). According to Nip (2006, p. 214), it is the public journalism movement in 1990's that aims to help democracy by connecting to the community, engaging individuals as citizens and helping public deliberation in search for solutions. At the same time, newspapers, which have already launched their online media counterparts, invite users to take part in discussion board and chat room conversations (Beyers, 2004). What's more, journalists' emails are often provided next to the stories and readers use them to indicate errors or make suggestions for further research.

With the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), technology determines the functional definition of a new form of journalism (Deuze, 2003). As Siapera and Veglis (2012) note, online journalism causes such fundamental and permanent changes on the face of journalism that it is difficult to imagine journalism being practiced exclusively outside Internet. Journalistic practice moves towards interactivity (Stovall, 2004), individuals look for and produce additional information (Singer et al., 2011) and the way they communicate with each other is revolutionized (Hess, 2013). Ward (2002) distinguishes three levels of interactivity at which consumers interact both with the news provider and with each other, while they also have the ability to become providers.

Except for constantly evolving technological developments, broader citizens' engagement in news production process is also favored by the conditions of the economic and social environment (Domingo et al., 2008; Paulussen, Heinonen, Domingo, & Quandt, 2007). As Hirst (2011, p. 15) notices, society believes that journalists fail in their duty to promote and protect public interest and, in such a context, part of the audience seeks for alternative forms of information outside traditional media and without professional mediation (Turner, 2010). In the years that followed, breaking events, such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States of America and the 7/7 attacks in London, triggered citizen journalism activities, motivating eye-witness amateurs to collect and upload photos and personal narratives from the places of interest on blogs and forums. Instead of being primarily journalistic-centered, online news is increasingly user-centered, so that citizens have a much greater input on it, with a qualitative leap in the presentation of their own stories, opinions and audiovisual material (García-Avilés, 2010, p. 251).

Gradually, media landscape faces a catalytic transformation under the prevalence of Web 2.0 as the average citizen can now create media content (Meraz, 2009, p. 123), in many forms, using quite plain portable devices, tools and applications. Audience members acquire the opportunity to take actively part in the production and dissemination of news. Literature shapes new concepts in order to describe professionals' and non-professionals' changing role in news process. Deuze (2003) argues that users

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