

Interactivity and Neojournalism: A Professional Perspective¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the concepts that have become the central axis of reflection and research on Internet is the notion of “interactivity”. This term refers to the specific journalist-content-audience relationship and represents a relatively new theme in the literature on electronic mass media. Its novelty and relevance is explained by the evolution of these media, especially by the development of social networks and the possibilities of interaction that they have opened up. This interaction occurs not only with the news content proposed by journalists, but is also due to the position occupied by news professionals in the communication process: a transversal position that ranges from the emission to the distribution of the news story, as recent phenomena like the Arab spring illustrate.

All of this has meant a significant transformation in the traditional activity of the media, the dimensions and consequences of which in the media ecosystem are still taking shape. As a result of the incipient state of analysis and reflection, the bibliography, in digital and printed format, is scarce and has a tentative character.

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In fact, a more specific treatment of the role of social networks in the journalist-audience relationship did not start to become visible until 2010-2011, and it was from then onwards that the study of cases began and the focus of attention was broadened much further to include the consequences and implications, as a natural response to an evolving process. As Hermida indicates: “the relative newness of micro-blogging means there is limited academic literature on the impact of the phenomenon on journalism” (2010: 4).

In general terms, it is from 2011 onwards that concern with analyzing the real incidence of social networks in the journalistic profession begins to materialize in book form. Here we find important studies such as *Participatory Journalism*, by Singer, Hermida, Domingo, Heinonen, Paulussen, Quandt, Reich and Vujnovic (2011). Prior to this date, however, it is important to mention reports that deal with this reality in the international field, and more specifically in Germany and Great Britain. The first, *Navigating the New Media Landscape* (Mitchell, 2010), sponsored by the International Press Institute and the Poynter Institute, details, with the collaboration of different authors, the emergence of new forms of journalism and the influence on the evolution of news and the role of journalists, amongst other questions of a legal character.

The second, *Twitter und Journalismus: Der Einfluss des “Social Web” auf die Nachrichten* (Neuberger, vom Hofe & Nuernbergk, 2010) is an approach to the relation between the microblogging service and traditional journalism, based on interviews with journalists and a quantitative analysis of themes. According to this study, the majority of newsrooms used Twitter and, amongst the functions cited, the most outstanding were announcing content, interaction with the reader, information in real time and the search for sources. The authors concluded that Twitter has not contributed to establishing a new order of relevance in the themes of interest and they stress the complementarity of this medium in journalistic work. This leads them to state that the indications of a competition between professional journalists and citizens who tweet have yet to be seen.

This study is situated on the line of research led by Ebermann, Fleck, Meckel, Plotkowiak and Stanoevska-Slabeva, contained in the communication “Die Rolle von Journalisten in Sozialen Medien am Beispiel Twitter” (2010), which notes some keys to understanding questions like the efficacy of Twitter in diffusing and updating content, the leading role conceded to the journalist or the need to address training with regard to the relationship with sources and readers. The conclusions agree in pointing out that, far from becoming an alternative or a source of competition, Twitter broadens and enriches the possibilities of traditional journalism.

The third report, prepared by Newman (2011), not only considers the incidence of social media in the production, distribution and discovery of news stories, but

also points to their effects on the business models of conventional media. On the line of the German studies, it stresses how social media “have enabled individual journalists to strengthen their own brands and engage directly with audiences in new ways” (2011: 40). Through interviews with different journalists, the author observes different forms of conceiving the use of social networks and considers the challenges posed by the leading role of some tweeters facing the organizations (“new tools, new dilemmas for organisations” (2011). Newman underlines the concern over the influence of social media on the independence of journalism, as well as over the formulation of new business models found in an ecosystem in continuous evolution (2011: 57-58).

Prominent amongst the Spanish bibliographical proposals that have appeared since 2012 are certain reflections on, and analyses of particular cases, rather than applied studies. Thus Cambroneró, together with a guide to the use of Twitter, includes an analysis of relevant cases in his *Manual imprescindible de Twitter* (2012). Noguera, on the other hand, focuses on blogs and Facebook to reflect on the identity of the journalist, the “improvement of the media by audiences”, fragmented consumption or the reformulation of the media based on journalists’ networks (*Redes y periodismo. Cuando las noticias se socializan*, 2012). The anthology edited by De Haro, Grandío and Hernández focuses on the incidence of social networks in different journalistic fields (*Historias en red: impacto de las redes sociales en los procesos de comunicación*, 2012).

Microblogging is the central subject of books like that by Murthy (*Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, 2013), who, after analyzing the context and theorizing on its projection, dedicates part of his work to studying the effects of Twitter on journalistic work on the basis of concrete experiences. In the text he underlines the coexistence of messages with a very banal character and others that are substantial, while he underscores that the experience of citizen journalism usually has an ephemeral and fleeting character, given that “the public follows stories of interest through professional news media outlets” (2013: 52).

In the evolution of studies on the role of social media, we find works like *The Social Media Industries* (Albarran, 2013), which present this phenomenon from its historical and economic aspect, but with attention to the use traditional media make of these new media, their content and the confidence they offer. We can also find more precise works, like that by Bennet (2013), which analyzes the role of blogs in the BBC’s coverage of war and terrorism on the basis of concrete experiences from the last decade. For its part, the work *Journalism and Media Convergence* (Nienstedt, Russ-Mohl and Wilczek, 2013) dedicates several chapters to reflecting on the challenges of social media and to lowering expectations on some of the dilemmas posed, like that of competition/complementarity, misunderstandings over the novelty and scope of crowdsourcing in “the oldest profession in the world”, as

well as the need for journalists to rethink their goal, given the editorial control of content in professional media and the costs involved in verifying and managing the quality of this content. Finally, we should not overlook the quantitative approaches, produced outside the academic field, which are interesting for learning about evolutions and tendencies. Here, we draw attention to the sixth annual report prepared by the Oriella Digital Journalism company in 2013, which offers up-to-date and relevant data on the use made of social networks by journalists from 14 countries, including Spain, as well as the influence of these networks on their work.

Prior to the years 2010-2011, the studies that focus on user content do so from the association with "citizen journalism": "Micro-blogging has been considered in the context of citizen journalism, where individuals perform some of the institutionalized communication functions of the professional journalist, often providing the first accounts, images or video of a news event" (Hermida, 2010: 4). Thus, we can find it in different publications dedicated to this phenomenon in the second half of the decade of the 2000s, which in their pages include the first references to social networks and the interaction with journalism. This is the case of *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Producership* (Bruns, 2008), which includes the chapter "News Blogs and Citizen Journalism", exploring forms of collaboration and the challenges posed by this new model of audience participation. Or the work by Noam and Pupillo *Peer-to-Peer Video: The Economics, Policy, and Culture of Today's New Mass Medium* (2008), which offers an approach to the generic framework of user-generated content, but also includes some interesting reflections on the economic repercussions or the interests of the audience when it comes to making its contributions.

In *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices*, Macnamara (2010) tackles the phenomenon of the emergent media, discusses how they should be called, and points to dynamics of change that are coinciding for the first time in history: the technologies of production and distribution, and the cultural practices of production and consumption (2010:212). Through different contributions, the *International Handbook of Internet Research* (Hunsinger, Allen & Klastrop, 2010) also approaches these practices. In summary, citizen journalism continues to occupy a central position in some of the works that have appeared from 2012 onwards, which evaluate the conditions and quality of its contributions, from complementing or threatening traditional journalism to the type of voices that have a public presence, as in the case of *Citizen Journalism Valuable, Useless, or Dangerous?* (Wall, 2012). However, it is the social media framework that arouses greater interest in publications like *The Global Impact of Social Media* (Bryfonski, 2012), which includes relevant aspects concerning the latter's role as sources of information, their credibility, the complementarity of Twitter or the impact on emergent democratic and political processes.

Because, in the final instance, what we are dealing with is the development of the exercise of journalism as a guarantee of the consolidation of democratic systems. This means that media interactivity is no more than an expression of political interactivity, expressed through the different channels of participation included in these systems. Thus, the different criteria of journalistic quality serve for testing whether the opening of new channels thanks to digital media has been strengthened by a firm commitment by the media in their vocation as an intermediary social agent, or whether this has been no more than an empty gesture. That is why in this article we set out from the state of the art regarding innovation and interactivity in the different orders of the journalistic profession in order to claim a theoretical framework that journalists can turn to in their fulfillment of such a sensitive task in a changeable political-media setting.

2. INNOVATION IN COMMUNICATION FORMULAS

Innovation –understood as the improvement of already existent processes, products or services or as the putting into practice of new formulas– has formed part of the history of Journalism since its origins, and has been approached from different perspectives and areas of research in Communication. In the current stage, marked moreover by the global economic crisis, several studies refer to the necessary adaptation of media companies to the context of digital culture and network society. Thus, authors like Pavlik conclude that innovation is “the key to the viability of news media”, in the sense that “news media that have begun to implement these innovation strategies are beginning to see increasing levels of paying subscribers to their digital products, and are seeing generally increasing advertising revenues from their digital products, both online and mobile” (2013: 190).

Among the bibliographical proposals of the last five years, the most notable are case analyses of innovation in company organization and management, as well as in the production and distribution of journalistic content, set underway by media in different geographical locations. Characterized by their particularism, as they focus on a single case or on the comparison of a reduced number, their main contribution consists in describing, from a qualitative perspective, the implementation of such innovations and analyzing their implications and impact on those media. The first ones dealt above all with strategies concerning, on one side, adaptations of organizational and newsroom models or improvements in production or content; and, on the other, the emergence of new tools, products, services or business lines in conventional media, such as central European news agencies (Meier, 2007 & Artero, 2008).

The redefinition of the profile of news professionals as a result of the innovations developed seems, at best, a secondary aspect. From the start, the majority of

the literature focuses on the technological aspect of these and other innovations. That is, the functions of participatory mechanisms of digital editions in the first phase (García de Torres *et al.*, 2009; Sánchez & Alonso, 2012), and, facing the subsequent flowering of so-called *Mobile Journalism* (Quinn, 2009; Espiritusanto, 2010), of media applications for mobile devices. These analyses make clear the potential for innovation of the latter and other technologies, for example in the form of “open content creation” by users (Tacchi, 2011), while at the same time they agree in indicating that media companies have as yet barely exploited them (Alonso del Barrio, 2013; Nozal & González, 2012; Costa, 2012). This is perhaps why the focus of other works is no longer on the tools but on the results of formulas that do indeed involve giving additional value to such tools.

As examples that also contribute methodological solutions for the qualitative analysis of user-generated content and its classification according to its format or nature, there are the works by Mendiquen and Canga on a pioneering case of the integral transfer of so-called citizen journalism to paper in Spain, the “enlaCE” project of *El Correo*; or that of Negredo on the contributions of witnesses and users on several programs of the *Al Jazeera English* television channel, as a strategy for “increasing the scope of the news” (2013). There are other analyses of innovations on the line of so-called *collaborative reporting* (Marchionni, 2013), which, with different degrees of openness, seek greater user interaction and participation in journalistic processes or products by already existing companies. These analyses include that by Schaffer (2012), which presents an x-ray and keys to the functioning of nine pilot projects of “networked journalism”; that by Muthukumaraswamy (2010), from the perspective of “crowdsourced journalism”, as one of the most recent “innovative ways to gather and deliver news so the audience finds novel ways to consume it”; or that by Aitamurto, which, focusing on “magazine journalism”, mentions *co-creation* as “a more challenging open journalistic practice than crowdsourcing” (2013: 243).

Some of these formulas, which can be considered “open innovation” in the sense that they promote a more open and social journalism, arise from the appropriation of social web tools, like the so-called “open APIs” (Aitamurto & Lewis, 2012), by conventional media companies. At the same time, many have been developed on *micromedia* that have emerged in recent years on and off the Net. These media, both because of their philosophy, more open to creativity, and because of their business structure, more flexible and distributed, have also been researched as innovative products that have in a certain way created a *school*, irrespective of their economic viability (González, 2010).

Concerning innovative tendencies in the search for new models of sustainable business in the journalism field, the work of Bakker is relevant. Under the title “Aggregation, Content Farms and Huffinization”, he presents the negative implications of “low-pay” and “no-pay” models like that of *The Huffington Post* for

journalism and its professionals, as well as their consequences in the form of other similar networked media (2012: 627). On the other hand, in the last two years there has been a proliferation of monographs that, based on testimonies or successful cases, both international (Briggs, 2012; Bruno & Kleis, 2012; Sirkkunen & Cook, 2012) and national (Domínguez & Pérez, 2012; Casero & Cullell, 2013), provide some keys to understanding business innovation and show that digital entrepreneurship can be a viable and profitable professional opportunity for journalists. With regard to enterprising and innovative journalism, we can mention the flowering of innovative models for funding journalistic initiatives, such as *crowdfunding*, whose essence is citizen participation, often online. Several recent articles agree that this formula involves a necessary redefinition of the role of companies and professionals (Aitamurto, 2011; Carvajal, García Avilés & González, 2012), towards a more transparent journalism adapted to user needs; but this has barely been approached from the perspective of the emitters, as a possible professional opportunity for journalists and future journalists.

Another recent innovative practice in the field of media companies, discussed by van Dalen (2012), is related to so-called “machine-written news” and the possibility of generating stories automatically “without interference from human journalism”, through algorithms. Amongst his conclusions is the fact that the “journalists see ‘robot journalism’ as an opportunity to make journalism more human [and not as a threat to their jobs]”, since, if routine tasks can be automatized, professionals will have more time available for a more in-depth journalism. It is on this line that so-called data journalism (or database journalism, Crucianelli, 2012) can be situated, which, while not itself a novel formula, has been growing over the last few years thanks to *open data* and systems for visualizing data online. Like those cited above, the job opportunities of this innovative form of journalism, or its consequences for journalistic profiles and skills, have been barely dealt with empirically, and much less with a prospective view.

3. THE DEMAND FOR SOCIALLY POLYVALENT JOURNALISTS

3.1. The evolution of professional profiles

Work opportunities and the application of innovations in the professional field are a constant concern that puts the viability of technological and communication advances to the test. Research on the professionals required in the present and future of journalism reveal a market characterized, in brief, by two great facts. On one side, the demand for and resulting emergence of new profiles of communicators who operate basically in the digital ecosystem, either freelance or in companies in different sectors,

not only the communication field. On the other, the new “multimedia” roles that are beginning to be taken up by those who today carry out their work in conventional media (media that are, moreover, beginning to incorporate new profiles), especially those where convergence phenomena are occurring, irrespective of their parent company and of whether their field of coverage is local or global. Besides, in many of the studies, and facing the new skills required of conventional profiles, there is a certain agreement in indicating training as a basic aspect, whether through university study plans in line with these profiles, or through retraining or adaptation programs.

Due to their special interest, we focus on the academic works referring to the new profiles of digital communicators. That is, those that appear as a consequence of the progress of ICT and the evolution of the forms and tools of online communication, as set out by Pérez Martínez (2011) in the monograph that the journal *Telos* dedicated to this question in 2011. In the last five years, there are several that have explored their nature, often under the label of “Professionals 2.0” (Aced, 2010), or their implantation in companies. Thus, based on the cases of media that have been pioneers in incorporating these profiles, Flores and Salinas (2009) analyze “the typical profile” of the *MoJo* (*mobile journalist*), the *data delivery editor* or the social media manager, as well as the consolidation and expansion of these roles in the media. Other authors take as a basis surveys aimed at the professionals of Spanish companies themselves in order to contribute an x-ray of the work situation and training of those who are performing certain roles. This is the case of Almansa and Godoy (2012), who focus on the role of the so-called *community managers* from the perspective of public relations. Finally, in relation to the possible gap between the training offer and the labor market, Sánchez and Méndez (2013), employing different techniques, conclude that there is no correlation in Spain between the demand for new profiles and the official master’s degrees offered by universities.

Following an analysis of this and other literature, it seems that for the time being no agreement exists on the way to refer to these new profiles, or regarding the functions that they are either assigned by academics, or in fact perform in companies. Nor, except for some general non-academic approaches (Torzuko, 2010), are there any taxonomies that, classified according to basic areas or fields of activity and drawn up on the basis of a theoretical and empirical analysis of the new tendencies, offer a complete catalogue of these new profiles in media companies. That is, a catalogue that would include, on one side, those directly related to the production of journalistic content, to which could be added figures on the rise like data journalists (Ferrerías, 2013), experts in visual narrative and data visualization (Esteban, s.d.) and others related to content curation (Rosenbaum, 2011). And on the other, those responsible for energizing participation and managing user-generated content and other key questions for the medium’s survival in the digital ecosystem. Amongst the latter: user experience, the user’s digital brand, or watching the envi-

ronment and following-up its online visibility and reputation, considering that this is partly the result of the activity of these audiences. Other important aims for research in communication thus include: gaining a deeper understanding, in prospective terms, of the definition and skills required by these more transversal and not strictly journalistic roles, such as, together with the *community managers* cited above, online marketing specialists or SEO experts (Muñoz, 2011; Dick, 2011); determining to what extent and why they can (or should) be taken up by journalism professionals; or defining how institutions like universities should respond. The contributions of reports like the “Perfiles profesionales más demandados de la industria de Contenidos Digitales en España 2012-2017 [Professional Profiles in Greatest Demand by the Digital Content Industry in Spain 2012-2017]” (FTI and AMETIC, 2012), which categorize and analyzes different profiles, associating them with possible sectors and areas of work, related training, experience and other desirable skills, and which precisely situates those three profiles as the ones in greatest demand in coming years, can be useful in this respect.

Beyond this, it is relevant to refer, as is done by Domínguez and Pérez Colomé in their monograph *Microperiodismos: aventuras digitales en tiempos de crisis*, to the idea that “it is online where one can see more new ideas from journalists who think there is still space for doing (and selling!) their work” (2012: 9). This work thus focuses on analyzing thirteen successful *micromedia* cases set up by journalists or other professionals with a vocation for communication, which indicate the relevance of the journalist as a digital entrepreneur. Similarly, there are several studies of the figure of the journalist *blogger*, one of the first profiles to emerge in the digital ecosystem, from its beginnings to the most recent period, which, as Antonio Ortiz (2011) points out, has ended up acquiring professional status. Content publishing is today a source of income for many people (nearly always a complementary one) and opens up channels for micro-local or specialist journalism (Meso & Palomo, 2009). Analyzing the form in which young people employ these and other formulas, like videoblogging, in order to cultivate their digital brand as journalists or seek new job opportunities in sectors like technology or fashion, as well as their profiles, are interesting and less explored fields of research.

3.2. Training participatory journalists

The dynamics of the communication sector have always influenced the training of journalists, which already justified the launch in 1969 of the scientific journal *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* and the regular appearance of scientific articles dealing with the question (Deuze, 2001). It is thus not surprising that the emergence of active audiences, which have altered news consumption and professional routines, should also have altered the study plans in Communication facul-

ties. But what is the ideal formula for preparing future generations of journalists at university? The answer is a complex one, since insecurity and the uncertain future of the media system prevent the design of study plans that are valid for the medium-term, which simultaneously accentuates the disconnection between the university and the company (Du & Thornburg, 2011). There does appear to be agreement on establishing training itineraries based on convergence, on multiplatform flexibility that would prepare polyvalent journalists (Micó, Masip & Ballano, 2012). The isolated model of teaching, whose structure separates press from radio, television and Internet, is not viable (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011: 450) and such adaptation is proving essential because the current job market demands multitask journalists who are also experts in social media – a reality the university cannot afford to ignore. Thus, one of the handicaps to accelerating the change is proving significant: while students are digital natives, the majority of professors are digital immigrants.

Geographically, this concern about the understanding between the university and the job market knows no frontiers, and the phenomenon has been addressed in places as far apart as New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland and Spain. These studies basically concentrate on offering recommendations for the faculties to adapt to the new scenario (Molina, 2008); describing how the new professional profiles are integrated into the classroom (Núñez, Teixeira & García, 2012); monitoring the use of Facebook and Twitter as educational tools (García, De la Morena & Melendo, 2012; Túniz & Sixto, 2011); analyzing the technical knowledge of students (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011) and their habits in using social networks (Monge & Olabbari, 2011); compiling what skills are required by the industry in new contracting, what expectations are held regarding graduates and what weaknesses are detected in the new generations of journalists (Brown & Collins, 2010); analyzing the job offers sought by professionals 2.0 (Wenger & Owens, 2012), the previous experience required, and comparing this with the postgraduate courses offered by the universities (Sánchez & Méndez, 2013), or even proposing formulas for implanting innovation in the journalist's training (Lassila-Merisalo & Uskali, 2011).

The methodologies employed in dealing with the impact that the new professional routines are having on the training of new generations of journalists are basically four in number: 1) Content analysis applied to teaching guides and job offers; 2) Descriptive case studies, which basically recount the experience of the researchers themselves; 3) In-depth interviews; and 4) Surveys. This latter technique is the most widespread, as it has been applied in determining the use students give to social media, why they open an account and how they evaluate these tools in the professional context, the dissonance existing between the knowledge of journalists and students, and so that those in charge of media can determine the multimedia skills required in new contracting. There has been a preference for using online questionnaires, based on platforms like Survey Monkey or Qualtrics.

Amongst other questions, these analyses note that, in spite of the commitment of young people to social media, they still do not feel altogether comfortable applying these techniques in the professional terrain by creating content for a blog, for example, or posting a video on Youtube (Hirst & Treadwell, 2011). Journalism students identify more with the consumer than the producer; their passive, receptive attitude prevails over the proactive opportunity of the new communicational ecosystem, and their audience is reduced to family and friends, which shows the gap between professional practices and those of Journalism students.

4. SKILLS ON NETWORKS AND OTHER SOCIAL SPACES

Reality shows that the mass media have incorporated into professional practice models and formats that have had an outstanding relevance in the user setting. Blogs, microblogs and social networks have won a prominent place in news production routines, especially in information gathering (information sources) and in distribution (instant and personalized diffusion channels), two moments when journalists contact their sources and readers. The utilization of these virtual spaces in their work requires that they have a set of skills to maximize their potentials.

At present, some of the mainstream media are aware that journalists' efforts to participate in online communities have a direct impact on their company. To safeguard journalistic excellence and the medium's reputation, companies like Reuters, Efe, Prisa, Unidad Editorial, Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* or the BBC have begun to set limits on this culture of participation by developing an editorial policy on this question, and non-fulfillment of these internal regulations can on some occasions be punished by dismissal. Although it is a recent object of study, exploratory research has been done in Spain and Brazil, based on content analysis, which compares traditional deontological codes with the new ethical challenges and editorial policies on use of the new media (Christofoletti, 2011), contrasts Spanish cases with others abroad (Tascón, 2012) or focuses on the Anglophone case (Herrera, 2013). Employing a more theoretical perspective, the typology of social network management practiced in the media has been addressed (Rost, 2012).

4.1. From the blogosphere to social networks

The concept of "blog" was used for the first time in December 1997 by Jorn Barger, months after the publication of what is considered to be his first post². The

² <http://archive.scripting.com/1997/04/01>

birth of Blogger in August 1999 and the launch of Blogspot accelerated the success of the blogosphere by offering a simple way of creating blogs and a free server for hosting them. From its first years, the blogosphere maintained a close connection with journalism, either because many journalists created their own blogs, or because these professionals found a source of information here. The greatest difficulty faced by journalists when it came to using the information from blogs in their research work was how to gauge the credibility of the information found there.

For Metzger (2007), there are five criteria that should be considered when evaluating the credibility of information found on Internet: its accuracy, authority, objectivity, periodic updating and coverage/scope. These criteria, which can be applied to the blogosphere, are no more than an emulation of the form of evaluating traditional sources. In the first place, seeking sources that provide information that is free of mistakes; in the second place, the source should be recognized in his or her community; in the third place, the information should not have persuasive aims; in the fourth place, there should be a certain periodicity in the information flow; and, finally, the information should be an additional value due to the quality of its argument and facts. Based on these five criteria the journalist can evaluate the credibility of information originating from blogs, although confirmation by other channels should not be dispensed with, as it is possible to have recourse to tools like Technorati that enable the blog's legitimacy in the blogging community to be evaluated. In the case of social networks, the first of these also emerged in 1997. Sixdegrees made it possible to create profiles and associate friends in a public form. Others emerged in the following years, but it was in 2003, with LinkedIn, MySpace and Hi5, that the great boom occurred, accelerating in 2004 with the arrival of Facebook.

For journalism, social networks function as a source and a distribution channel. In the first case, the information circulating has a social capital, that is, an evaluation attributed by users according to their interests. The use of this information by journalists involves having the skills for evaluating whether the information's social capital is sufficient for it to be used as a source in their news stories. Moreover, it is not sufficient that the information should be shared by many users for it to be taken as accurate. Journalists must follow the same steps that they follow with traditional sources, verifying the identity and friendship circles of the user who published the information, in order to have multiple sources and achieve a certain credibility (Fogg, 2003).

In the case of social networks as a distribution channel, it should be stressed that "there are people with needs, opinions and desires on social network platforms. And the media want to –and should– provide them with these" (Flores & Salinas, 2009). That is why the media are including professionals described as *social media editor* or *community manager* on their staffs, who seek to exploit the potential power

of social networks in favor of their publications. These new professionals must be skilled at understanding how these spaces work and have the ability to select the most important information, the so-called *gatewatchers* (Bruns, 2003), that is, super-users with many followers who can represent as much as a 26% increase in the number of readers (Canavilhas, 2011).

4.2. Twitter: the most journalistic network

Twitter is the social network most used by journalists and, since the end of the last decade, it is the one that has attracted the most interest in the academic field through a wide range of studies, which include some theoretical contributions (Hermida, 2010, 2012; Burns, 2010), literature reviews (Piccolotto & Da Silva, 2013), methodological reviews (Bruns & Burgess, 2012), or deontological reflections (Requejo, 2007; Christofolletti, 2011). A significant part of this research has so-called *ambient journalism* as its framework, a term coined by Hermida to refer to how “broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on communication systems are creating new kinds of interactions around the news, and are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them” (2010: 298), and in this research the role of the professional media is redefined in the figure of the “curator” (2012: 666). Different authors have used content analysis to approach the behavior of journalists on Twitter as aggregators (*linking and retweeting*), transmitters of breaking news (*live tweeting*), channels for alternative sources (*empowerer*) or discussions (*forum organizer*). While a tendency towards openness and participation can be observed, it is necessary to consider certain aspects, such as the weight of official sources or links to the medium itself (Artwick, 2013); the high number of messages without a retweet (77%) or a link (68%); and the presence of personal content (55%) (Noguera, 2013). Nor should one forget that journalists of elite media in the USA are less inclined to share their opinions, converse or include external links (Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton, 2012).

Cozma and Chen (2013) observe a greater tendency to use Twitter for informative purposes amongst the U. S. correspondents of big media, although this tendency is more pronounced in audiovisuals, which are committed to up-to-the minute news, while the written press tends more to express opinions. Armstrong and Gao (2010) point to the influence of the medium’s area of coverage (local, regional or national) on the type of tweets and emphasize that, as a whole, the most popular ones are those that deal with current events, questions of general interest and lifestyles. The questions analyzed include the promotion of political diversity, underlined by studies like that of An *et al.* (2011), referring to the USA; while others, like that by Harris, Ríos and Páez (2011) in Venezuela, draw attention to the high level of politicization of journalists on Twitter and their affiliation to positions in oppo-

sition to the government. For his part, Lasorsa (2012) notes that the gender variable has an influence in the greater transparency of women journalists on Twitter, facing their male colleagues.

Some studies have focused attention on the use made of Twitter by leading journalists or media editors, to emphasize, in the case of Spanish editors, its promotional character or the scarcity of conversation with the audience (Collado, 2011). Rodríguez and García (2013), on the basis of following the twenty leading journalists on Twitter, emphasize their leading role with respect to the medium (only 8% cite it in their profile) and the abundance of comments of a personal type (45% of tweets) compared to informative tweets (26.7%). The work of Vis (2013), in spite of only focusing on two journalists, those most followed during the London riots of 2011, provides relevant data on the use of the social network in covering breaking news, and stresses the information offered as eyewitnesses (nearly half the tweets), links to media and, with unequal weight, the request for data and opinion. With an emphasis on breaking news, Petrovic *et al.* (2013) conclude, from an analysis of 800,000 messages (produced over 77 days), that Twitter covers the great majority of issues dealt with by the media, while the inverse is not the case, and they express skepticism about the possibility of it replacing the latter on big issues. Messner, Linke and Eford (2011) criticize the fact that, in spite of the massive incorporation of micromedia in newsrooms, the media are not using Twitter to create community.

The theory of uses and gratifications is another of the frameworks for analyzing how Twitter is employed, through surveys of professionals, who emphasize its contribution in obtaining audience feedback, information or prestige, achieving greater freedom of style or developing a more personal journalism (Carrera *et al.*, 2012). Radio journalists hold that these networks have changed their concept of the public (55%), increased interactivity (46%) and brought them closer to the audience (59%), as well as linking the latter to the medium and generating new agenda issues (Carrera *et al.*, 2012a). The surveys of those in charge of local televisions in the United States have revealed the use of social networks both as sources (81% believe that it has enriched the coverage of local news and 55% that it influences the choice of topics) and for improving interaction with the user (86%) (Lysak, Cremedas & Wolf, 2012).

The relation between politicians and journalists is another question of interest, both during and outside electoral periods. In a study carried out on the accounts of 150 users from both professions in Holland, Verweij (2012) observed the different levels of activity, the formation of *clusters* and the role they play (*source, gatherer or networker*) on the social network. Broersma and Graham (2012), through a qualitative analysis comparing the weight of tweets as a source of news in the British and Dutch elections of 2010, underscore the active role of the Dutch and how this

activity favored the spread of the message, since the great majority of them are reproduced completely. In subsequent research, comparing uses in the popular and quality press, they reaffirm these theses and emphasize that such practices alter the balance of power between journalists and sources (Broersma & Graham, 2013). On the basis of a study of messages generated by a *hashtag* referring to the Australian elections of 2010, Burgess and Burns (2012) find that critical comments, even more than debate, on politicians and media repeat the tendency detected a decade earlier in research on bloggers.

Although to a lesser extent, Facebook has given rise to some research on the presence of Spanish media on this platform (Noguera, 2010), and has led essentially to enquiry into the differential uses of the two main social networks. In the Latin American field, what stands out is Facebook's potential as a source of consultation, as does the immediacy of Twitter (García de Torres *et al.*, 2011); while in the United States this comparison has been made with local televisions (Lysak, Cremedas & Wolf, 2012) or, in a wider context, with surveys of users, through the report by the Pew Research Center (Mitchell, Rosenstiel & Christian, 2013). What stands out amongst the conclusions is the limited percentage that accesses news stories based on the networks' recommendations (9%), and the quantitatively greater influence of Facebook.

Research on the journalistic use of Twitter has focused on content, production and interaction with these messages, and to a lesser extent, through surveys and interviews, on discovering customs and motivations. However, the diversity of approaches, the limited comparison amongst countries –with exceptions broadened to the Latin American field (García de Torres *et al.*, 2011)– and the, at times, disparate results do not contribute to explaining the scope of a relatively new phenomenon. This requires a more qualitative approach in future studies, with methodologies that facilitate comparison between countries and also consider professional cultures or other factors that are influential when it comes to making generalizations.

5. HOW TO MANAGE USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Finally, we should consider the research on user-generated content (UGC). Due to its nature, interaction between UGC and the medium has been deepest and most complex in those media that are present in digital environments, although we must start out from a fact that defines journalistic practice: the medium has always listened to its audience, even if interest in what it has to say might be minimal (Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). The substantive differences are related to the progressive growth of the forms and possibilities of interactivity (Hermida & Thurman, 2010; Braun & Gillespie, 2011), the volume of information generated on the

basis of this dynamic (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Loke, 2012) and the perceived utility of such information (Lamuedra & Lara, 2008; Loke, 2012).

It is in this context where the traditional roles of the journalist and the media company (the medium) begin to mutate on different levels. In spite of what one might think at first sight, the process is slow and polymorphic. Since the year 2005, when the blog phenomenon had reached a significant degree of maturity, the big mainstream media in the United States (Moretti, 2007) and the United Kingdom (Hermida and Thurman, 2008) took decisions that indicate the *renewed attention* with which the user of information was being listened to. With time, these attitudes were to become a pattern in the media company and global journalism (Bachmann & Harlow, 2011; Meléndez & Cuartero, 2013).

In these circumstances, in the year 2007 we find another notable landmark with the introduction of *microblogging*, concretely with the spread of the use of Twitter two years later, as the majority of authors point out (Braun & Gillespie, 2011; Saugman, 2012; Meléndez & Cuartero, 2013; Murthy, 2013). The quantity and volume of information provided by users has obliged the media to dedicate increasingly large resources in order to manage it suitably (Williams, Wardle & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). Similarly, throughout this time the great question of whether the costs or the benefits are greater has remained unresolved (Braun & Gillespie, 2011), which is why the debate on the role and form adopted by censorship has been reopened (Loke, 2012; Morozov, 2012). Moderating comments, emails or audiovisual material sent to the medium has, to a certain extent, meant the transformation of the journalist's role. This is placed in question, obliging him or her to reconsider his or her functions, which, traditionally, were well structured and hierarchized (Loke, 2012). A clear evolution can also be perceived in the attitude of professionals to this challenge. The analyses made during the initial phases of the phenomenon reflect an evaluation and attitude towards it that was clearly conservative (Moretti, 2007), even defensive of the journalist's role (Maciá Barber, 2007).

In more recent times, when it has become inevitable for the medium to accept the growing influence of UGC in the news content and productive routines of the media, regret is still expressed over the degradation that this means for journalism. Some authors (Vasilendiuc & Gross, 2012) have even coined the terms *Google reporters* and *office journalists* to refer to the new and different generation of news professionals. Nonetheless, in a certain way, these analyses also confirm that there is growing deliberation in the attempts to provide an answer to the questions arising. Hardly anybody now questions the central role that journalists must continue to play and the need to implement formulas that improve *dialogue* with users. However, there is still a lot of argument over what the functions of journalists should be and the control that they should exercise over users (Singer, 2013), given that examples of a radical transformation of the journalist/user relation continue to be

scarce (Kperogi, 2011). This concomitance has deep implications for the journalists' function of moderating between UGC and the medium. As we have already noted, the particular cases suggest that real dialogue, real interaction and a supposed transformation of the roles of user and journalist are still far from materializing (Cleary & Bloom, 2011; Jönson & Örnebring, 2011; Binns, 2012).

The big media are promoting experiences to test the limits of interaction (Moretti, 2007). And the media *are* interactive, but they still have a clearly selective attitude. The tendency takes concrete shape in implementing participatory solutions for mobile devices (Alonso, 2013; Noguera, 2013) and in determining user behavior (Noguera, 2013). Media like *The New York Times* or the *BBC* are developing strategies for predicting and influencing behavior (Noguera, 2013). To a lesser extent, there are more explicit undertakings like the BBC's initiative *Have your say*, in which users are invited to express their opinions. Or like *Citizen Journalist Report*, where an editor from the MSNBC suggests a newsworthy issue for development by the user (Kperogi, 2011; Braun & Gillespie, 2011), but always under professional control.

In this respect, the medium tries to continue exercising an iron control and filtering of content, understood from a conventional *gatekeeping* approach. It has been stressed (Braun & Gillespie, 2011) that, irrespective of the degree of interaction, the medium needs to implement a clear moderation policy in relation to UGC, even when the medium has no real intention of giving up its dominant position (Cleary & Bloom, 2011).

This has had direct effects on the debate concerning journalistic deontology (Doval & Martínez, 2012) and on the limits of journalism. These and other authors (Singer, 2013) work with the term *secondary gatekeeping* to refer to the capacity of UGC to change or influence the agenda. This is an especially sensitive issue, given that the medium continues struggling to uphold the "brand" (Bruns, 2005; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Braun & Gillespie, 2011) as one of the heritages inherent in the editorial tradition. The idea of news product quality continues to be brandished as an argument in defense of the traditional roles linked to the journalistic profession (Singer, 2009).

The medium's economic model, that is, the viability of the journalistic and media projects, continues to be an unresolved question and the possible solutions are advancing very slowly (Lamuedra & Lara, 2008; Fico *et al.*, 2013): content is adapted to the user and the user adapts to the content (Nielsen, 2013). In consequence, the journalist and the media company change. And also the user, who, for example, accepts low quality content (videos) (Lamuedra & Lara, 2008; Niekamp, 2010).

And it is the *new type of user* –less (or more) demanding, better adapted to the changing digital life and less loyal when it comes to choosing his or her sources in

his or her news routines— who is posing one of the most important challenges (Nie-kamp, 2010). Non-professional blogs, websites with links, or social networks (Bryfonski, 2012) are increasingly emerging as alternatives to the traditional medium. Thus, in the opinion of some authors, it is an error of calculation to presuppose that UGC is inherently counter-hegemonic, and the fact that the media are probably allowing themselves to be seduced by a type of fashion might result in the undesirable total loss of the distinction between citizen and journalism (Campos Freire, 2008; Kperogi, 2011; Wall, 2012).

It is obvious that this situation demands the elaboration of new theoretical paradigms (García de Madariaga, 2006). However, in practice, research is limited to descriptive works on what the media are doing facing this situation. The results obtained by academics, based on quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) methodologies, do not appear to herald the appearance of a solid theoretical framework in the near future (Loke, 2012). Since the irruption of UGC into media routines, journalists and the media have been obliged to change the nature of their activity. From the strict frontal opposition of some, to the forced redefinition of traditional concepts like *gatekeeping*, the new professions oscillate between a role as a mere filterers and accommodators of UGC in the medium's content (Saugman, 2012), to being creators of new formats and managers of digital communities (Braun & Gillespie, 2011). The process continues to be an open one.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the crystallization of the economic crisis with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, many voices from different fields have spoken of two parallel crises: the systemic crisis and the media crisis. In a certain sense, both phenomena have been brewing since several years ago: on one side, citizen dissatisfaction with the drift in the application of democratic systems, subjected to a neoliberal economic current that has been replacing the general will with an affiliation to the needs of groups with particular interests (Fontana, 2013). On the other hand, the media crisis is visualized as a loss of the centrality of the traditional mass media in their role as social guardians and mediators, the journalism's "watchdog role", according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2012: 170). Cases like that of WikiLeaks were to foreground that shift in the function of the traditional media towards the new technologies by using the Net as the space for putting a "transparency activism" into practice (Curran & Gibson, 2012: 306) and restoring to citizens the confidence lost in governments and mass media due to their abusive practices.

In this context, the need is more urgent than ever for a global reflection on the journalistic profession due to its development with the new technologies. This must

cover all fronts: from the configuration of new media to the status of reception, including the role of the journalist in today's society, the configuration of the profession, practices of job insecurity and news censorship, and the possibilities of opening up new expressive channels by implementing the possibilities of the formats of the new technologies, aspects addressed in this article. As we have seen, this global reflection can only be made with particular studies and case analyses, but these must also be articulated around a communication paradigm that is difficult to tackle, due to the media environment's high capacity of mutation.

No less important is the problem posed by the inertias in the world of work and the academic world, which also make it necessary to constantly rethink teaching in Communication and Journalism. As we have noted, the university cannot remain impermeable to the reality of the profession. The training of good journalists, with a critical spirit and an interdisciplinary education, is one of the best guarantees of fulfilling the role as a watchdog of power and maintaining that romantic notion of the journalist as an independent being at the service of the citizen. On the other hand, the university's provision of a theoretical apparatus must include a broad humanistic training, but with special attention also paid to the advances of the communication industry. We have, for example, the case of the expansion of Web 2.0, which has resulted in the appearance of dozens of new tools that can be applied in journalism, some of them enabling permanent contact with audiences (Storify, CoveritLive), as well as greater transparency in professional work (DocumentCloud). From an empirical perspective, the application of these new tools has barely been addressed, and the majority of studies focus on analyzing the impact that blogs and Twitter have had on journalistic routines. Thus, academic studies must be attentive to these novelties, insofar as they entail an active role of the recipient of the news.

The different indicators of journalistic quality must be adjusted to the new technologies in the claim for this theoretical paradigm that we have been making in these pages. Because the journalistic profession and the social environment will both benefit from fulfillment of the criteria of quality. In this way, the concept of "interactivity" takes on a special relevance as a transversal notion in the different strata of journalistic communication, because it serves to verify that this communication is reaching its destination and fulfilling its watchdog role, the final purpose of the journalistic profession.

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