

Informative agenda reconfiguration in light of media emergence

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Abstract

The questioning of the informative agenda proposal in the traditional media, when faced with the emergence of multiple communicative possibilities, has caused the writing advice to define contents published to be restructured.. Audiences have changed their consumption habits, use of information, and the ways in which they interact with content. Digital platforms have forced traditional media to revamp itself and be subject to the scrutiny of an active audience that demands both form and content, and manipulates said information, which is reproduced in a variety of ways until it controverts from its *prosumer* status. The present document proposes an analysis of the definition changes in informative media agendas, an agenda characteristic of the audience, and the evident restructuring of the media-audience relationship, given the outbreak of electronic and social media.

Key words: Informative agenda; Media; Audiences; Social Networks; *Prosumer*.

1. Introduction

Over three decades ago, the American futurologist Alvin Toffler, in the first edition of his book, *The Third Wave* (1980), coined the term *prosumer*, to refer to the consumer who decided to produce that which they consumed, and thus not form part of the economic circuit. Toffler's proposal evolved over time, and has now been used in many other contexts. Among other things, it has been applied to the definition of new media audiences that, via the use of social networks, have made media interaction an opportunity to highlight their own communication constructions.

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North American Edward Comor, specialist in the politics of communication, affirms that: "... via the combination of production and consumption, both progressive analysts and progressives conceptualize prosumption as a liberating, empowering, and for some, prospectively revolutionary institution" (2010, p. 309). This affirmation permits the comprehension of the audience's rush. It has historically been repressed and submitted to the passive receptor role, to proclaim its opinions, question information, and especially, to produce its own content on social networks. Many of these become viral informative pieces that are picked up by the media and reproduced on traditional platforms.

This innovative circumstance in the media-audience relationship has forced writing tables to reconfigure their routines, establish spaces in which foreign or external content is considered, and attempt to preserve greater contact with the receptors of their information, who are simultaneously spontaneous and occasional collaborators.

The informative agenda is no longer a unilateral media topic. The matter transcends newswriting. It is inevitable to look at audience social networks to learn about what is happening, and more importantly, what truly interests those who are being informed.

In this new dynamic, proposed by *prosumers*, is another social viewpoint related to what María José Hernández-Serrano (2017), and other academics, call *social logic*. These academics state that traditional news consumption and production habits have radically changed, and that these social logics cause society to innovate, in order to increase connectivity and participation, taking for granted that audiences are ever more involved in informative production.

Before the massive production of information by common citizens, who decide to create their own means and circulate all kinds of reports, there is the question of how traditional media should address this multiplicity of informative sources without falling into the misinformation trap. This brings about the reconsideration of ways in which to *understand new routines* of informative production for those who have appealed to traditional media, and thus comprehend the information logic of prosumers in both creation and consumption.

2. Old media - new audiences: the co-creation paradigm

Traditionally, media were the proprietors and lords of the information that society received. One was informed of that which the media deemed worthy, as they wished, when they wished, and with the coverage they considered sufficient. The new communication paradigm is news production *cocreation*, based on the questioning of information as property, which springs from the recognition of the right to inform and be informed, as adopted in many political constitutions in the democratic world.

The media has learned that there is a new generation of content consumers. They are an irreverent, discontent, unsatisfied audience that is aware that it can play a role in the content that is emitted. This, however, may partly reflect interest in protagonism, as it can also be seen as the need to be heard through its own version of reality.

Canavihas & Rodrigues (2016) state that several studies have detected that journalists agree that the citizenry should support the media with their ideas and general observations. However, Finnish journalism professor Ari Heinonen (2011) indicates that these same journalists are reticent to turn over greater responsibilities to citizen collaborators in processes such as news creation. Maintaining distance from *prosumers* could be an option to enable the media to guarantee control over content, but how interested are these citizens in understanding traditional media filters and restrictions? Undoubtedly, society has made social networks and new digital platforms their own. As such, they have learned to produce information in the same way that they would like to receive it: with a transparent structure, regardless of the preferences of others, and without parameters or protocols traditional to the news narrative.

The era of hypertext has not only spurred novelty in form, but has also generated in-depth changes, such as the topics on which audiences prefer to receive information, and the times at which they wish to receive it, without depending on the decision of a news table or editorial line that determines each of these aspects without audience input. Today, the media has created spaces for prosumers to publish their reports, as well as opine, question the media, and correct it, as necessary.

Not all that which circulates in the citizen media is apt to be published in traditional mass means of communication. Its emission in these spaces lends legitimacy to many informal reports, after having passed through source verification, fact confirmation, and even narrative structure filters. The existing tension between these parties should continue to exist, as this generates rigorous information handling in the midst of the rush associated with digital platform circulation.

In this news production dynamic, the topic of content reliability and credibility is also considered, as the lack of rigor in certain foreign reports may undermine the veracity of the information they contain. *Fake news* is a clear example of this phenomenon. It risks informative security for a large audience. An alternative, called *distributed credibility* by Hernández-Serrano (2017), and others appears in this context. Nicholas Burbules states that they insure that this causes refined individuals to be able to collectively evaluate, so as to guarantee information source reliability and credibility. Thus, audience participation in news production is sanctioned. Reporter reliability forms part of a process that humanity has already learned, and builds from constant interaction with verified and verifiable information exchange, such that the interacting parties co-create reliability as they build content of mutual interest.

For Mexican sociologist Octavio Islas (2008), the appearance of the news *prosumer* is the principle he calls the *ubiquitous society*. Said proposal is backed by new possibilities for citizen communication. Academics ensure that there are three factors of vital importance for the development of ubiquitous society: solid network infrastructure, content services, and efficient terminal devices.

The emergence of the citizen partition in traditional means of communication, in addition to technological advances and communicative ease, also have to do with the need for information references that, in the audience's mind, are ever less reliable, as revealed by the annual *Edelman Trust Barometer* study (Barómetro de confianza, 2017) performed in 28 countries,

four of which are Latin American. The level of trust that the media do the right thing decreased by 13 points in a single year, and conversely, confidence in personal media (70%) and search engines (67%) was above that of traditional media (66%).

The explosion of citizens in informative content, make it is key to establish that *participative journalism*, which refers to joint creation, between the media and citizens, of news coverage, through the use of material created by said citizen is one thing, and *citizen journalism*, which could be equated with that which prosumers do, provided this type of journalistic coverage is produced entirely by the citizen, from the reporting to the editing, and posterior circulation in their own media, as corroborated by Mexican professor Juan Carlos Suárez Villegas (2017), is another.

One path to face this new millennium circumstance could be self-regulation, taking the informative onslaught in stride and implementing efficient filters, such as those contemplated in selection theory, or *gatekeeping* (Lewin, 1947). These enable greater control of the content published in citizen contributions. This theory proposes the filtration of information learned to the public, by way of subjective character evaluations. Here, the importance of the news is not emphasized; the media considers other editorial values which establish the criteria to determine whether a piece of information will come to public light.

Axel Bruns (2005), an Australian professor and expert in cultural studies, states that the *gatekeeping* concept has been reevaluated, and as such, he personally promotes the use of *gatewatching*, which he defines as the activity of observing, from traditional media, all citizen channels and publications, such that there is constant awareness of the informative offering on digital platforms. This aids in decision-making processes regarding possible content of interest for the media.

Coexistence between the old media and new prosumer audiences is raised as inevitable in contemporary communication. The informative onslaught from social networks has resituated the significance of news in its traditional protocol, as almost everything could be defined as news. Everything that is reported is documented--there is always a *prosumer* citizen at the scene.

3. Media alternatives

Audiences demand, ever more often, professionalism of those who produce information. The media aim to employ journalists trained in the discipline, as informative rigor guarantees seriousness and credibility in the media. The outbreak of new informative proposals can only be considered a challenge for responsible journalism, and cannot ever become an excuse for them to lose their way. The media must understand that these citizen, and in some cases, company proposals, have both strengths and weaknesses, which also constitute competition. However, as assured in economic environments, competition must bring returns for consumers, and in this case, audiences must prevail and be well-informed.

Access to information, and consequently, the creation of new media, forms part of the use of an old citizen right to inform and be informed, for which reason it cannot surprise those

who have always worked in media. The landscape has changed, and the inevitable alternative is to coexist in the so-called *media ecology* (Islas, 2015, p. 10) that, in one reference made by Octavio Islas, the American professor Lance Strate, is defined as: “The study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information and communication codes play a fundamental role in human affairs” (p. 10).

Citizens have appropriated the tools that technology has placed in their hands, and they have done so to improve their living conditions, in accordance with their own interests. Give this new panorama, traditional media have no option but to embrace the changes, modify their routines, and understand that audiences have not shifted to be allies or enemies, but they have changed. Thus, methods of informing, educating, and training, the historical function of traditional media, have also had to change.

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