

THE UNIFICATION OF PLATFORMS IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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Abstract

Various studies conclude that from the point of view of journalists, the media convergence brings an improvement in the quality of journalism. Others argue that this phenomenon is rather a managerial subterfuge, as it requires fewer staff, and by default fewer journalists. The media convergence encourages the public to participate in the process of creating the content, but as a downside called upon is the difference in participation in that certain segments of the public are neglected and are unable to participate in the new media culture.

Keywords: *virtual environment, citizen journalism, informational content, media convergence, media producer.*

The increased rate of development and growth of the audience in the virtual environment significantly exceeds the similar rhythms Radio and Television, at the time of their extent. If some years ago, it was not at hand for anyone to send any information to a large audience, today you can, at any time, publish any information on the Internet in a very short time and with very little money.

Part of the audiovisual managers appreciate and support the idea that the internet, the radio, the television and the mobile telephone are separate, distinct domains, but, in reality, they now form one video-audio-textual universe. The future means the unification the radio, television and the internet, and not their distinct, independent, separate operation.

Listeners, viewers and internet users, in particular young people, find it irrelevant whether they get their informational content from radio, television, computer or mobile phone.

The emergence and assertion of new media to the public, the development of socialization platforms and of other ways and formats of producing and transmitting information, such as Facebook, Twitter, iPhone, iPad, Google, “smart TV”, etc., permanently enrich “information of

the audience”, modifying it substantially relative to that of traditional media.

At present it is estimated that most of the materials on the Internet are taken from newspapers, radio and television. The internet has only a collection of information and social networking as a new form of interpersonal communication.

The internet provides an unlimited distribution: where, how and when at the will of its users. Nowadays, according to the use degree, the internet ranks after the omnipresent performing mobile phone. This means that the broadcasting time of shows becomes less important, and the percentage of services at the consumer’s request increases.

Nowadays, the phenomenon is growing stronger, more concretely and correctly the tendency for users to get involved in carrying out of programs, which is ominous.

The recent industry changes media industry prompted the communication specialists to identify and define, and to identify, to draw the attention on the “citizen journalism” in the online activity of non-journalists users. For example the devastating earthquake in China (May 2008) was reported first on Twitter and then in the press, and recently it was the transmission by a Romanian climber who was in the Himalayas, of the earthquake in Nepal (April 25, 2015), which is an outstanding performance in the communication system.

The citizen journalism - a term that began to be used more and more frequently, enriches and amplifies the media phenomenon.

The moment when the appearance of citizen journalism was recognized was when an article which was posted on a personal blog came to

have more views than one posted on a specialized news site (Preda, 2006).

Nowadays, a significant part of the public possesses the necessary equipment, electronics and has the skills required to produce quality audio-video content.

Young people, especially, want to be involved and even have control over or priority in this area. They are creators, producers, commissioners and broadcasters. It is noted that the public turns from consumer into media producer, contributing more or less, to the shape and the effect of these media products.

It is a fact that the citizen journalism has become, and even is an increasingly relevant competitor for the conventional journalism, which can only lead to perfecting or at least the improvement of media quality.

The ease with which the new information and communication technologies are handled by anyone, enables the development of skills and dispositions sufficient and necessary for the of these ones to be used by all those concerned.

However, the journalist-citizen should not conclude that the broadcasting institution empowers him to gather news on its behalf, should not be encouraged to put at risk his life or body integrity, should not be encouraged to break the law.

At global scale the professional journalists cannot be permanently present in the places where events unroll. For example, in a location difficult to reach an aviation catastrophe occurs where huge material damage is made and all passengers die. To reach the site, journalists would need a long time, perhaps several hours. Suppose that at the moment of the disaster a citizen was nearby, had a video camera and filmed closely the tragic event. Thus, he becomes a key source for the journalists. At that moment, the tourist has several options: he can give recording to televisions, specialized sites, online editions of newspapers. He can also be asked live by telephone to the news, he may introduce on his personal blog the whole development of the event, or can call on other options, such as to send a message on Twitter, introduce the film on YouTube etc. Any other approaches of the citizen-witness, in addition to those listed above, are called citizen journalism (Coman, 2001).

In conclusion, given the number of currently existing technical means, chances are, it is possible anywhere in the world, to be a person who could photograph, film or record any event. Therefore, nowadays, the media organizations no longer have a monopoly on news.

The rapid evolution of technology has completely changed the traditional logic and practice of the production and distribution of the journalistic content. Currently, there are many people who can have information that they consider valuable and distribute it to a numerous and informed public.

“Due to the unprecedented expansion of newspaper and magazines from the post-communist period in Romania, says the academician Constantin Gh. Marinescu, we witnessed the appearance of a crowd of journalists, with or without any specific training, both in the local and central media. Besides journalists, well-prepared intellectuals joined the new publications, but also very many dilettantes with a superficial, pragmatic and limited culture or other people who were influenced by ideologies or doctrines without any resonance within the public conscience.” (Marinescu, 2015).

Andrei Pleșu, at the National Journalistic Symposium in Cluj – Napoca, on October 19, 2012 stated among others that: *“I know believe that journalism is the least serious job in Romania. I watch TV shows and instead of watching journalists I see a group of militants, I look for information and I find partisanship. This profession slides towards politics. Instead of becoming members in a particular party, the journalists appear on TV and broadcast propaganda. This is a great journalistic danger. We move towards a status that does not belong to the journalist, but to the agitator.”*

Many important companies from the media field accepted the idea and understood that the contribution of “the so-called occasional journalists” cannot be neglected and therefore they created, with the help of the new media technology, specialized platforms where users can contribute with a particular content, such as: CBSEyeMobile (CBS), uReport (Fox News), Sharek (Al Jazeera), Your news (BBC), iReport (CNN), etc. The independent platforms were built using the same principles, without having any connection with the traditional media

groups, allowing “amateur journalists” to broadcast their informational content (Citizen News – YouTube, NowPublic, Helium, Bleacher Report, Cell Journalist, OhMyNews, AllVoices, Demotix, etc.).

Twitter, video and photo platforms direct citizen journalism towards a new dimension, that of collective journalism, in which the people who own the technology and skills may contribute to the development of a particular topic.

The audio-visual institutions that produce and place mass-media may and have to benefit from the services and possibilities of citizen journalism, following the various knowledge and experiences involved in these fields. The varied content of the products, coming from various sources, adapted to multiple platforms leads to an improved broadcast in real time and to a greater audience (Hass, 2001).

“We witness a tremendous change in journalism,” said, in an interview, Seymour Hersh, a very good print journalism specialist. He came up with the idea that *“this change takes place online. A new and fascinating way of communication is borne”* (Von Gehlen, 2010).

Therefore, multiplying the distribution platforms of the audio-visual content (radio, TV, Internet, mobile phone), generates more and more content requests, especially from the public, and so there is a need to make production more flexible. In this way, in contemporary society, citizen journalism has become an effective method of beneficial involvement in the life of the community.

Mutatis mutandis, became a need that the representatives of citizen journalism to be trained so that they can conduct shootings, edit, record the sound, photograph or write texts in very good conditions, etc.

If a citizen with particular skills practices journalism and journalists are outnumbered by the Internet users, one may legitimately ask the question: Which are in fact the true duties of the journalist? In these conditions the professional has to firstly investigate the topics proposed by the public, to check the authenticity, to establish priorities, to establish a hierarchy of the materials developed by the citizens and to prepare them for broadcast.

Therefore, in our opinion, the journalist has the duty to communicate with the service provider and to ask for details: where do the images come from; what time were they recorded; where was the provider; where is he know; what did he actually see in the development of the reported event, etc.

At the same time, he has to establish the quality of the images, if they are credible, if they could have been recorded by a single person, if they weren't previously processed using Photoshop, as many tricks and fakes had been pointed out.

The journalist has to oversee that the images received from the amateur journalist do not jeopardize private life or public decency since it has become a trend to insult, slender, harass and threat on the Internet. He has to have the approval of the people involved in situations that require this aspect. Also, he has to clearly state where the images come from and which the source of the information held is.

Today's journalist, in order to be efficient and to be part of the vanguard of social progress, has to keep pace with the multidisciplinary and multivalent informational revolution. He should also have an innovative, constructive and stimulating vision in order to support economic development projects, as well as both national and global culture and civilisation projects. Therefore, the public will trust the journalist's honesty as well as the publication that he represents.

The principles of the American journalist Joseph Pulitzer are as up-to-date today as they were in the past. He said: *“I dedicated my whole life to journalism, which I consider one of the most noble and important jobs. Our responsibility, of all journalists, is extremely significant, because people read and believe us”* (Stoian, 2013).

The main merit of the “amateur journalists” is that they offer information at an alert pace, usually their grounds are well justified and professional journalists cannot get their hands on this information.

For many journalists from the traditional media, the topic of press disappearance and the spectacular changes in the job of the journalist, the disappearance of journalism as a job and its substitution with the citizen or popular journalism, represents a reality.

Citizen journalism has become a competitor of the traditional journalism, but this threat is positive because it stimulates competition. We consider that in time we will witness a symbiosis, an inevitable cohabitation between the two components of journalism.

The market and the today's journalistic environment acknowledge the fact that the journalism performed by the professional journalists cannot disappear, but it needs to adapt to the realities and the tendencies of the globalized society and to the conditions created by this information age, in order to ensure continuity to the classical and conventional journalism.

Well-known journalists acknowledge the importance and potential of this type of developing journalism, but we are sure that the dangers coming from the lack of censorship of civic opinions and of the information broadcasted by citizen journalism will also be taken into account.

Mónica Herrero, the dean of the Faculty of Communication from Navarra University (Spain) and Eli Noam, professor at Columbia University took part in one of the radio shows from Radio România Actualități. They discussed about "communication tendencies: challenges and survival in the digital era."

Mónica Herrero stated that "professionals compete with the ones who make a lot of noise, a situation that didn't exist before. But, I think that this communication battle doesn't ever take place on a short term. There is no immediate success, because it is difficult to build a reputation, it takes time and it is also difficult to preserve it. The legacy media, traditional media with digital versions have this advantage, of a brand that is already known off-line. The new media, born directly in the digital era have to build this reputation. So, the noise already exists, but we also have the opportunity to build reputation". But not only reputation, but also the vast experience and the values gathered by traditional journalism cannot be ignored by the global tendencies of contemporary press. At most, they will coexist and confront, but we will never witness the succumbing of century-old institution, which is the Press.

It is beneficial and extremely important to establish, define and select some general means

and methods which may lead to qualitative changes in practicing journalism, taking into account the previous and current national and global experience, built with the help of some important journalists or sacred monsters of this profession.

This process has to be analysed by experts, but it has to be understood firstly by journalists, because now social platforms may be invaded by non-professionals who may come up with a so-called journalistic product.

Among others, we appreciate some of the advantages of mass-media convergence, such as: *the journalism's expansion towards new fields (online) and the improvement of the journalists' competence level, by re-assessing mass-media's role in the society* (White, 1998).

Improving the media product assumes some managerial strategies regarding the merger or separation of the editorial staff, identifying the elements of convergence, the integration of web journalists into editorial meetings, etc., with the purpose of stopping the decline of the written press.

Closely related to the problem of the cultural values that are appropriated and promoted by the representatives of the 4th Power in the State, we have to follow the example of our ancestors, to study and take from the invaluable experience of some great scholars, poets and writers who, at the same time, were great journalists or reporters, such as: Mihai Eminescu, Ioan Slavici, Titu Maiorescu, V. A. Urechia, Octavian Goga, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Nicolae Iorga, Constantin Stere, Mihail Sadoveanu and many others.

Taking into account the fact that this century has to belong to all the inhabitants of this planet, it also has to be the century of full, unimpeded and protected manifestation of the human personality, of the work potential and of the intelligence of each individual, in the near future everything that previously mentioned involve a reorganization due to a possible union between the radio, TV and Internet news editorial staffs, and subsequently even of the entire radio, TV and Internet management.

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