Social Networks: The end of the media monopoly and the emergence of citizen journalism

Oussaidane Yassine [1*]

[1] University of Algiers 2 (Algeria), yassine.oussaidane@univ-alger2.dz.

Abstract:

In the present article we first attempt to draw up a summary of the change that computing tool had undergone through the various stages, and then we focus on this media metamorphosis, and of course, the passage from a traditional and conventional media to another more precise and expeditious. Thus, we address this transition from the printed press to the web, and at the same time, the adoption of forms specific to the web in terms of interactivity by heavy media.

We will also point out the deep mutations of journalism under the influence of the different forms of the web such as social networks and blogs. However, the profusion of information on the internet does not benefit from the certifications that would be given by a publisher, an editorial board or an institution. At the present, this information tool is emerging to be a mass media, especially in terms of opinion formation and the flow of information and knowledge. Finally, the developments in social networks during the last few years have created a new mode of journalism, which is not unanimously approved.

Keywords: Social networks, media, citizen journalism, information

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[*] The sender author.

1- **Introduction**:

"Citizen Journalism" is an ambiguous practice that is spreading in a spectacular way among active internet users. The weakening of the traditional borderlines between sources, media and public reactivates the imagination of a disintermediated communication, in which the editorial contents would circulate outside the traditional circuits. The idea of citizen journalism was taken up in California (Silicon Valley) by Dan Gillmor in 2004. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis define it as the action of citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating current information". This type of journalism has grown considerably under the influence of cyber culture theories (Castells, 1998 and 2001, Rheingold, 2005) and the "Web 2.0" ideology. The "naturalization" of "citizen journalism" would lead to the neglect of the question of the ability of lay people to produce, disseminate and appropriate information outside labeled spaces. But above all, it would not make it possible to grasp the influence of a mythologized representation of the public in the evolution of the journalistic configuration.

2. Metamorphosis of the computing tool:

In the 1940s and 1950s, calculators and then computers were impressive machines *(250t for the Whirewind)*, expensive and reserved for only some few specialists and not communicating with each other (Schafer, 2012. p. 75). We have to wait until 1970s to see the first *microcomputers*, which in time began to cross the threshold of homes, there were some authors who go so far as to say that the computer has metaphorically become a 'home' (Casilli, 2010. p.26). Probably, we are referring here to the internet more than anything else, because this tool has become increasingly important to users in their everyday lives but also an irrepressible fever, but worse, a real new addiction for them (Thibault, 2000, p. 73). It is also quite striking to note that the internet was not created by private initiative, but by the U.S. Department of Defense, which at the time wanted to set up a communication and exchange network linking its technicians and engineers throughout the world (De Tarlé, 1996, p.8).

The so-called "traditional" media, such as the conventional press, radio or television, are no longer the same on the Internet and their essential functions create an indissoluble union. The time between an event and its information, between an event and its audiovisual broadcast is reduced to the minimum, which was unimaginable a little while back (Prozorov, 2009, p.85). It was already noticed the existence of a gradual transition from the "printed press" to the web, in one way or another to insert the reader into the web. Already in 1996, "*le Monde diplomatique*" opened a discussion forum on its server where Internet users could give their opinions and views on the usefulness of the Internet. The recorded responses show that the perception of the Internet is not uniform. It gives his opinion and views, talks about sport or politics, but he always puts forward his point of view (Boulianne, 2009, pp. 5-17). In the era of new technologies, of Web 2.0 and of communication tools that are quick to create, free of charge and of all constraints, communications have become more horizontal than ever. In addition, media websites adopted very quickly the forms specific to the web in terms of interactivity. Thus, links, images, videos and audio tracks are shared by users who frequently leave their traces on the pages of the websites, since various articles give way to the possibility for commenting or sharing with acquaintances.

It is important to note that there have been profound changes in journalism under the influence of the various forms of the web (reference is made hereto social networks and blogs). Newspapers, for example, both web and paper versions, are increasingly including information, which is first, published by bloggers and internet users.

It can be said that bloggers or website administrators "Admin" have become in just a short time, an important sources of information for citizens, and even for journalists. Obviously, these changes are not welcomed with enthusiasm and glee, on the contrary, many voices have expressed their discontent, such as Chouinard, who talked about what she calls "Scrambling blogger" (Chouinard, 2008). The question which arises currently is how to get information? And how to learn in a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to sort out what is true from what is false? Or how to find new markers in that system where borders between expert and amateur is difficult to maintain?

Many of us have noted that valid information can be found just as easily on official websites as on sites that do not a priori offer any guarantee of seriousness (Malbreil, 2008, p.109).Effectively, there is a profusion of information on the Internet, but it does not benefit from the certification that a publisher, an editorial board or an institution would give. Should we therefore claim that the Internet has not really facilitated the flow of information? In fact, in order to be correctly informed on the web, one must be able to demonstrate a discernment that cannot be learned from online encyclopedias, as Malbreil pointed out in this context: "It is not because Wikipedia often comes first when a query is submitted to a search engine that Wikipedia holds the absolute truth".

Are we facing dangers in the misuse of the Net? We can say that the rapid growth of data stimulated by websites (added to fierce competition between websites to see who can provide the hottest scoop) has created an informational "fog" that is growing from day to day, and in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find one's way around, whereas the Internet was perceived, at the outset, as a simple alternative media. However, this information tool is nowadays emerging as a mass medium, especially in terms of opinion formation and the flow of information and knowledge. Although some people continue to behave as if everything could be said and done. This is especially the case for some large media, which maintain the confusion by not filtering their content sufficiently (for example during the civil war in Syria, where misinformation has played a major role with the accumulation of real or supposed facts and events systematically attributed to one side only, thereby causing an effect of demonization and conditioning first of all of the journalists, and then of their viewers, readers, listeners and Internet users). This is also the case of many readers, who have become contributors, who take the columns of online newspapers as a vent. Furthermore, polemical altercations on the Internet can easily become an extraordinary mass phenomenon, open and frank to become really audacious. The expressiveness of the sometimes severe judgments, deprived of censorship and often self-censorship, undoubtedly influences the virtual public opinion where the same passions as in the real society prevail, beyond the web network (Prozorov, 2009, p.85).

3. Real-time information (RTI):

Real time is the possibility to be informed about events that are taking place at a distance, at the same time as they happen. In the past, it was the radio that made it possible to broadcast information in real time, about events taking place on the other side of the world (Manach, 2012). Then television found a term to define this real time: "live" or "live stream". Today, new technologies introduce the discipline of delay. While we have thought in terms of speed limits for a long time, speed is no longer a problem, since everything is immediate and happens in the present. However, people have not yet fully adapted their way of thinking and the planning of their exchanges to this new fact. Certainly, we have not taken the full measure of these mutations, either in the use or in media production. Thus, in just a decade, the media

have acquired a real *"civilizational"* scope. It should be noted that elements that bring such as cultural changes in a very short time, are particularly rare (Servan-Schreiber, 2012, p.83).

On the other hand, the media have embraced this development more quickly than they could react. This explains the repeated structural crises in the media sector and the sudden decline in the quality and value of whole sections of the media universe. We can refer here precisely to various daily newspapers, which used to be the large media and the most deeply rooted in the culture and functioning of societies in all countries of the world. In a more general way, according to a well-known phenomenon, we are witnessing a devaluation of information. The latter, it has not become less interesting, but it does not cost anymore: it has lost its market value, because each of us can obtain it for free. In this duel of the *"fast and free"* against the *"paying that takes time"*, it is easy to imagine who will triumph. We can clearly see that the transition is already largely underway, but it is not completely achieved. In addition to this phenomenon, each year new technological objects emerge which make the use of the media even more practical and portable, regardless of where one lives; therefore, news will now be able to be treated in real time, on live and in direct connection with the places where events are taking place and where media decided to send a special correspondent (Nobre-Correia, 2006). Moreover, through the *iPad*, it is now easy to read a magazine or a daily newspaper online in Montreal at the same time as in Sydney, just by taking into account the time difference. At present, Twitter allows news to be broadcast within five seconds. For example, feeds from the White House or the UN General Assembly allow you to follow the latest decisions against the Syrian regime. And as soon as a controversial bill is voted, we inevitably see that several Internet users broadcast and highlight their opinions on these decisions by *"twits"*. However, with the emergence of information technology, real time information can become ancient or, in other words, an *"oldlink"* in a matter of minutes.

In another context, journalists can be denied in a resounding manner and in real time through comments, whether on Facebook or Twitter, or via blogs and other news websites. We take the example of the earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010: some newsrooms received a supposedly exclusive video of the earthquake from an Internet user. Faced with doubts about the authenticity of these images, some journalists mentioned the video on Twitter, in the hope of verifying its veracity (Manach, 2012. p. 101). In this particular case, journalists active on the social network Twitter managed to discover within just a few minutes that this video had been made in the United States a year ago, but this same video was broadcast on large television channels. In this regard, all those who claim that rumors undermine the credibility of internet journalism, are clearly not aware of the dynamics of rumors. Every journalist knows that if he publishes an error, he will be denied without complacency in the next few minutes, and his error will be exposed as widely as possible, especially through social networks.

And finally, the developments in social networks in last recent years have created a new mode of journalism, which is "link journalism". The daily written press model, particularly in the United States, has already been challenged by the advent of the internet. News websites will continue to multiply increasingly, while news is produced by a new emerging category of people who are not journalists by training, which will be the novelty. According to some specialists in the field of media, the great transition we are in will last for decades. Eventually, digital technology will have completely regulated the functioning of the media.

4. Citizen journalism, towards a new mode of information:

Citizen journalism represents a new form of expression, in constant and parallel development with the internet. Since the 2000s and the explosion of blogs (or weblogs), the internet media has seen the birth of a new form of expression. Initially conceived so that everyone could expose stories through their computer without being afraid of other people looking or judgment, the blog has been diverted from its original use. Actually, it can now be used as a forum for expression by and for ordinary citizens, also as a means of drawing attention to specific causes (political, economic…). Contrary to traditional media (television, radio, press…), the blog offers the capacity for decentralized dissemination (De Rosnay, Revelli, 2006).In the other hand, blogs are characterized by a network structure (the blogosphere)and then can feed back the information. This multiplication of possibilities makes us consider the blog as a communication artefact: "It is an object produced by a human activity within a given culture; it has a capacity to amplify the potential of the individual or group that uses it; it modifies also the modes of functioning of one and all. (Agostinelli, 2003, p.182).The main argument put forward by the defenders of the blog as a tool for collective intelligence is its capacity to increase exchanges and stimulate conversation thanks to comments and hypertext linkages. Common problem solving would be achieved through the conversation that the active individual would engage in with readers (Gillmor. 2004). In addition, the possibility for everyone to access at any time to a multitude of websites that publish general or specialized information has contributed to the decline in newspaper and magazine readership and the slump of television audiences.

In addition to "opinion blogs", we start talking of "citizen journalism" or "participatory journalism" to designate "websites that edit and centralize information from individual 'witness-sensors' who propose images, audio or video', and also 'citizen reporters', to designate a thousands of Internet users who contribute to the collection of information (Delmas-Marty, Massit-Folléa, 2007, p.64). To illustrate this point, we may cite the example of the young Norwegian of Somali origin who was attacked in a park in Oslo, with serious head injuries. The paramedics were called to the scene and carried out a cursory examination. They speak to him with an abusive manner and refused to provide care for him, and suggested to the police that they take him to a clinic. Finally, the victim's friends took him there by taxi, where he fell into a deep coma. Ten minutes after the incident, the daily newspaper Oslo VG had received ten independent reports from witnesses of the scene. These reports were supported by photos and videos taken with cellular phones of some few citizens present at the scene. The story with photos and videos was immediately published in the electronic edition of the newspaper, and then by the next paper edition and it caused powerful emotions in Norway. This multitude of activities and websites that create a sort of community information network is coupled with technical means to exploit it. Thus, readers feed the paper edition of a newspaper, its electronic edition, and even television channels.

The citizen journalism, in our view, allows everyone to collect images and communicate them to a broadcaster, but these shocking images can come from citizens who are not precisely "ordinary Mr. and Mrs." turned into occasional reporters (Bürger, 2009. p.27). Thanks to technical progress and mobile phones, which now contain photo and videos, the number of cameramen and photographers of "potential press" has increased by thousands times, therefore the number of forgers also. This ability to use the shock of real or fake images by anyone has also had terrible consequences in the real world.

On the other side, it can also be noted that the internet provides the means for those who, in good faith, have been misled. But one should not be naïve, because of the risks of manipulation, disinformation, and even information for criminal purposes are growing at the same rate as the positive effects.

Over there, the ability to broadcast images directly to the masses via internet, bypassing the established media and thereby avoiding censorship, is probably not unrelated to the development of certain types of contemporary terrorism.

The Internet also allows for the broadcast of each type of image to targeted audiences. This access to a worldwide audience for all of us significantly alters the data that have hitherto governed the development of the mass media as we know them. Then, technical progress will continue to keep the fast and constant evolution of the environment in which they will evolve in the future.

5. Conclusion:

In all cases, these "cyber journalistic" practices raise some social and ethical challenges as well as questions about the future of journalism (Proulx, 2009). The first issue concerns the credibility of citizen sources and the quality of information. Any rigorous practice presupposes the setting up of mechanisms for control and validation by citizen media of information submitted by the Internet users. The presence of professional journalists in the editorial control committees is seen as crucial to ensure quality control. Regarding to the second issue, it concerns the possible integration of these citizen practices by a large industrial actors of the field of internet or by traditional media companies, that some of they are showing a marked interest to this new kind of journalism. This certainly heralds the emergence of new associations and collaborative strategies where citizen media, traditional media and a large major internet actors. This is the only sense that could speak here of the establishment of a regime of "conflicting cooperation" between "mainstream" media and new individual mass communication media.

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