

Today's Social Journalism: Engaging the Conversation to Gain Credibility and Produce Better Content

From Theory to Practice: How to Assess, Measure and Apply Impartiality in News and Current Affairs''

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Abstract

Media need to engage a virtuous circle of trust with their audience and use current technology to reinforce their credibility by adding a stage to their value chain, using their content as a basis for debate using social media tools and interaction with the media consumer

Purpose

This paper will aim to identify a set of concrete methods and practices that could be implemented by all kind of news organisation in the final publishing and public stage of the publication process.

Design / Methodology / Approach

Our approach is a combination of a general review and an essay.

Findings

Opening up content for comments is an largely used method to engage the conversation, with rather low risk and increases of both traffic and credibility. Further, practices of social journalism can be implemented within the news organization to integrate audiences as a panel, as witness or as expert in one specific field in the process with the same level of journalistic standards..

Originality / Values

Contribution to the identification of actual, ready to use, efficient methods to increase credibility of news media organizations by augmenting transparency and openness when content are published.

Keywords: Credibility, journalism, social media, comments, relations with audiences

1. Introduction

Medias and news organisations have become key elements of any modern and democratic society. In parallel with the individualisation observed since the baby-boom and the post-war consumption rush, media outlets have followed a similar trend towards individuals, shifting the focus from mass to persons, from common message to targeted one-to-one communication (Giddens, 1984)¹. The recent evolution of technology over the past 30 years and the digitalization of the media industries have both accelerated and reinforced this trend.

Logically, all those changes are heavily shaking the media industry and its related branch such as technology, talent management, advertising and content programming. As in any human ventures in history, change is normal and natural, but always hard to coop with for existing leading players and creates new opportunities for challengers. Indeed, the current change in the media landscape leads to the biggest paradigm shift since Gutenberg. The new paradigm involves huge organizational changes within the workflow and impacts the full value chain, from sourcing to delivery via financial streams. In parallel of the technological changes, the credibility of news organization is decreasing for a large variety of reasons largely indentified by literature, but not always well understood by media professionals, especially journalists.

"Editors argued that news organizations themselves are at fault and blamed declining support for journalism on an increasing separation between the interests of readers and newspaper owners" (Picard, 2010).ⁱⁱ

The credibility of news media and journalists is challenged in the current times. More transparency during the whole production process should increase the credibility of news organization, by showing to the consumer that there is nothing to hide and that no debate is taboo.

2. Problem discussion

Current technologies are largely sufficient to lift the level of transparency as a cost effective and useful manner to gain credibility in short and long term. By doing so, media could engage a virtuous circle of trust with their audiences.

This paper will aim to identify a set of propositions of concrete methods and practices that could be implemented in the final step of the publishing process.

Indeed, at the end of process, after content has been published, media organizations could add a stage to their value chain to increase their credibility by using their content as a basis for debate, instead of considering it as the final step of the production process.

Opening up content for comments is an easy and rapid measure to take. By doing so, the media organization can show that the conversation can be engaged as well as that the feedbacks and the opinion of the audiences are important for the news organisation. Also, it can obtain real benefit with the unlimited energies and will to participate of the audiences. Indeed, *"it's that connection, that level of engagement that shows why social media hold so much potential for newspapers"*. (O'Brien, 2011).ⁱⁱⁱ

A further step in this logic could be the implementation of practices of social journalism within the organization to enrich and reinforce content credibility by the use of social networks. In such process, audiences can then be integrated in the process as a panel, as witness or as expert in one specific field.

Our research will try to identify the risks and benefits of opening articles for comments and discussion. Based on confidential discussions with professionals, we will try to further evaluate the reasons why only few media organizations are using such methods. Last but not least, we will highlight some current practices of social journalism that seems to work and strongly improve the level of credibility of those news organisations. Unlike O'Brien statement, we don't think that *"most newsrooms seem to have moved past whatever cultural antagonisms might have caused them to object to social media"*. (O'Brien, 2011).^{iv} The aim of the paper is to contribute to the identification of actual, ready to use, efficient methods to increase credibility of news media organizations by augmenting transparency and openness when content are published.

3. Theory background

The importance of media in the world strongly depends on the value that media creates for their audiences. Since a bit more than thirty years, the value creation within news organisation have decreased for various reasons such as the change in the way journalist do their job, multiples events highlighting how information can be manipulated despite the coverage of top-notch medias and the rise of highly specialized audiences requesting their own types of content (Becker&Schönbach, 1999)^{iv}. Last but not least, digitalization, internet and new medias fully re-shuffled the cards in the media and entertainment ecosystem, breaking the nearly monopolistic barriers that ensured the market dominance of traditional players (Christensen, 1997)^v.

In terms of public expectation, the role of journalism in modern society and the role of journalists as a part of society did not evolve since the 19th century but the industry did change. Historically, journalists were a class of their own, at the top of the pyramid of common people, challenging the elites of all natures with their question and inquiries, with their curiosity. This role of challenging the elites lead to the importance of the position of the journalist in modern democracies and the concept of the fourth column, of an independent power challenging the other more traditional pillars. In the author's perspective, the apex of this function of journalists in society was reached with the Watergate scandal, where journalist impeached the president. From there, our vision is that journalists, especially younger post-Watergate generations, started to focus the power and advantages they had in society, in terms of social position, salary and easy access to things, thus forgetting the mission that lead them to obtain all those benefits: being curious, seeking the truth and sharing it at all cost.

In parallel, they was more pressure in the media economics which also lead journalists to rely more and more on third party content, from PR agency and major news provider, thus limiting their role to compile facts and stories they did not really choose or produce.

In his recent book on *"value creation and the future of news organizations"*, Robert G. Picard reminds that *"two activities of news organizations are crucial to the concept of value creation. The first activity is the actual creation of content by journalists, photographers and videographers, and related content professionals. This process is influenced by the choices of what is considered newsworthy or informative, how it is covered, and how it is presented. The second activity that creates value is the selection, organization, packaging, and the processing of self-created content and content obtained from other sources"* (Picard, 2010). The current lexicon of industry experts tends to call the second activity as "content curation".

In our perspective, the last decades lead a confusion between content creation and curation, where a lot of journalist tends to consider as creation works of curation, as original pieces of content something which actually only is a compilation of content produced by third party. Without being precisely theorized by audience, the public does perceive this confusion, mainly in the way most media speaks about the same thing at the same moment, in many cases with a similar angles of the stories. In general, everyone tends to recognize that news outlets have been suffering for decades of *"excessive sameness"* (Hotelling, 1929)^{vi}.

This feeling that media are saying the same things and the question of media credibility became even more relevant by a series of event in the nineties that did underline the contradiction between the race for burning news and the tempo of verification, the competition for scoops and the search for truth, the industrial fight between media groups and the general interest of the public. Events and their associated media coverage such as Timisoara massacre^{vii} or the first gulf war seriously damaged the reputation of media as independent, objective and fact-checking organisations.

Another element in the lack of the trust is the behavioural change in the audience, and the fact that audiences are always more fragmented with a large variety of non-overlapping interest. And it's really difficult for news organization to address those various communities that all have in common to be truly different, that *"represent widely diffused interests and often are not supported by formal structures and organizational arrangements that can be easily observed and contacted"* (Picard, 2010).

All those elements, combining with a large amount of other reasons, lead to the point where audience don't trust media anymore and assume that, per default, media are not trustworthy and they have their own agenda. One trust is lost, it's really hard to regain it. In that sense, both in terms of societal mission and economic future, trust is a fundamental asset, central for the future of news organisation and their ability to maintain long-term relationship with their target audience (Seligman, 2000)^{viii}.

To maintain, reconstruct and expand this social capital of trust, all honest methods and all ethical process must be considered in the shorter term to ensure the future of media organization. In that regard, considering that the mission of the media is not completed - that in some cases in only starts - when a content is published can be a very strong elements of future building of trust, showing the audience that their opinion matter, that the information they can bring is valued and mistakes will be corrected.

4. Propositions for social journalism

Media is fundamental element of a democratic and open society. In our perspective, the more media, the better, and thus, we'd like to see the larger possible amount of current media companies to survive to the current shift in the industry and the actual important challenges in terms of credibility. Without any exhaustive pretensions, the purpose of the study is to identify valid propositions based on our research that could contribute to define the appropriate adaptation that is currently required from media firms to embrace social journalism. After some rapid case studies with various industries players, we do hope that some valid propositions may suggest some relevant paths to solve the current problems of credibility and of trust that some media firms have.

The combination of words "social journalism" will used in many part of the paper to describe the use of social functions (rate, comment, share) and of social networks (facebook, twitter, linkedin) in a journalistic process of producing and publishing content.

The propositions are the following:

- opening comments on the website is a first essential step to show to the audience that their opinion do matter, that the publishing content is not the last step of the mission of the news organization,
- such comments are really generating value when they implemented as part of the content production workflow which includes a precise policy on content moderation and how to engage conversations with audiences,
- media consumers could do a lot more than just rating, commenting and sharing existing content, but could be included as part of the production process as panel, witness or experts.
- Social media – current and upcoming - are a fantastic tool to help the content production process, by providing a direct access to witness, panels and experts.
- All those new practices are relevant and efficient only if the standard journalistic standards are applied to the use of social journalism within the news organisation and the social media policy is implemented

5. *Basic Social Functions*

a. **Share, rate and comments**

First of all, we think that is quite important to clearly state the function that are covered by the concept of social functions such as rate, share and comment, taking into account that those are just the internet translation of behaviours that always existed. Indeed, crowds at the café, friends at the pub or families at the dinner table, have been rating content quality and credibility, sharing information perceived as important with their own introduction and commenting freely on both the informational content and treatments of the facts provided by news organization.

On websites, and in a more general manner in all types of digital media based on IP / internet networks, rating is the easiest to implement a basic social function, asking the audience are very simple question, that could be summarized as "how would you grade this content" but could also be understood as "how much value do you see in that content". Most ratings are based on very simple numerical scales, such as stars – one star as the lowest rating, five stars as the highest – or on straight numbers. This rating function actually generates two different statistics: first of all, the percentage of people that did rate content compared to full amount of people that consulted the content, and secondly, the rating itself, giving an idea of the value perceived by the part of the audience that did vote. Sharing is another important social function, giving users easy, efficient and swift ways to share any contents with groups of friends on various social networks. For obvious reasons of popularity, a vast majority of sharing is done via Facebook and Twitter, the two major social networks, and our research mention them exclusively. With the same risks and benefits, content can also be shared via other famous services such as Delicious, Stumble Upon, Digg, or emerging companies like Segnalo, Furl or Simpy. We consider that actions like a "Facebook Like" and or "Google +1" are sharing functions.

When the user shares the content, and actually republished headlines on Facebook or Twitter, he can easily change the titles or add his comment while sharing the link. In that regards, it is important to notice that in a lot of cases, the content sharing is done with the public online identity of the user that shares, as a lot of user have accounts on social media with their real name, unlike comments which can be and generally are fully disconnected of the identity of the poster. For sharing functionalities, the mission of the media outlet is not so much to control what is said than to provide the most effective, less time consuming ways to enable content sharing with the lowest investment by the user. Indeed, the facility of sharing the content will be an essential element of the success of such functions and thus strongly based on technical and user interface skills. In terms of control and requirement to "let go", the fact that users can share anything they want, even if the functions are not proposed by the media, make all types of control rather impossible, and surely useless.

It is clear today that such functions do strongly increase the traffic on the specific content, when the fact of sharing can be understood as some of endorsement from one person, giving confidence that consuming this content will also be worth it for the whole network of the sharing endorser. Last but not least, commenting on an article is last step of the current ladder of involving audiences, where media propose to their consumer to comment contents and to publicly display those comments associated with the content. Comments are either addressed to the producer of the content, questioning a fact or an opinion in the article or answering directly to other comments.

More rarely, the commenting crowds do share personal experiences or expertises related to the matter in discussion. Tons of the comments are often very sharp, possibly aggressive. In many cases, users need to be registered on the website to comment but have no obligation to use their real name. A higher level of involvement into the content is required to make the effort of commenting. Indeed, users that comment are often sharing personal opinions, beliefs, values that may be challenged, possibly aggressed, by other user and therefore take a higher personal, emotional risk, than with the two other social functions described above. It is not only a theoretical risk as dialogs between users are often tough and aggressive, and any conversations last sufficiently long seems to end with insults (Godwin, 1994, 1995)^{ix}.

This high personal investment also can lead to other concerns in terms of objectivity of the provided comments that we address further in the rest of this paper.

In our perspective, comment on content is the social function that creates the biggest value as well as the biggest risk out of the three functions we identified. Indeed, rating does not really create any risk but does not either generate a lot of social value. Sharing is definitely far more risky but has strong benefits in terms of traffic and social references; it can also be done independently of the proposed set of functions. We thus identify comment on content as the core elements to be tested empirically with this research and case studies, as well as by other fellow colleagues in the field.

b. Supporters and opponents, risks & benefits

The first supporters to enable to comment contents are often audiences themselves that really feel that – in today's information society – it is their utmost right to comment any content that is provided to them. Both in terms of value creation and adaptation to the need of the audience, it is indeed quite logical to push both the concept and the comprehension of value a bit further than just throwing contents to audiences without asking at any stage if the content provided does create the expected value. Commentaries in general can thus be understood as a smart and relevant way to enable without any effort from the media to have an efficient, costless retro-feedback loop with the audience.

A lot, if not a large majority, of media outlets tend to propose those three social functions today. It has not been an easy process and there is still some very important media today that are not proposing, and are not planning to, any of the social functions we've discussed. Let us focus on those organizations to understand the blockages to engage the conversation with their audiences. Within the news organization, we could observe that in most cases, it is the journalists, the editors and the newsroom in general which are often against the opportunity of proposing to users to comment the content they produced. "*Social media, being uncharted territory for many news organizations, can offer many cautionary tales.* (O'Brien, 2011)". In oral statement, they generally express the idea that the audience has nothing to bring to the content, with the exception of partisan rants and subjective critics, as if the recent trend for social function was just the latest journalistic translation of populism.

Facts have proven the use of social media and interaction with users does not impair the quality of journalism. Indeed, "*New York Times columnist Nicholas D. Kristof still produced the columns that have won him two Pulitzer Prizes while also filing substantial blogposts. But his use of Facebook created a particular kind of intimacy, both humanizing Kristof and inviting the audience to join* (O'Brien, 2011)."

Strangely enough, newspapers and media outlets with the highest level of credibility and reputation of being trustworthy tend also to be the most reluctant to opening commenting functions associated to published content. Again, if the argument of populism is often served as the reason for such refusal, we'd more incline to think that the issue is the way those journalists see their roles, their mission in society.

Indeed, as we've seen it in the theory background, the general society as well as all types of elites have often delivered an over-optimistic message to the journalism community that they were by essence, trustworthy, important to democracy and mostly accurate. When actually, all those values do not come from the fact of being a journalist but from exclusively from the vision and practice that journalists have of their mission as well as on personal qualities of each individual. In that process, a lot of members of the profession have lost an important part of their curiosity and of their ability to permanently search to create value for the audiences. The current climate of depression within newsrooms does not only come from purely economic factors, but also from a strong doubt – often not really explicitly expressed – on the role of journalism in the soon-to-come future.

In many ways, we think this explains why some media with the highest reputation also host a editorial staff that is really reluctant to let audiences comment on their production. Indeed, as they already suffered from personnel crunch, reduction of the numbers of pages and the rise of digital media, it is rather tough for them to accept the fact that from now on, anyone – truly any person in the world without any prequalification– could comment and challenge their content, assault their positions as experts, question their findings and underline weaknesses or mistakes in their works. We thus think that this reluctance is far more psychological than editorial, far more related to the doubt that journalists have about their own position in society that based on worries of giving a stage to populism.

This expressed, we really want our reader to understand that, despite the rather strong stand we take on the matter, we fully and honestly acknowledge the current state of turbulence of medias and that a lot of the current problems could have been avoided with more vision, efficient leadership and a fairest management of the human resources. In a way, we do see this type of blockage as a natural and predictable outcome when analyzing the way journalist have been treated over the past ten years.

An important factor pushing for integrated social functions is also the fact that users can do it anyway, without asking the right to do so or requesting any technical tools to do it independently. In that sense, users will still be able to freely share, comment and rate, but outside any control or structured process, and with a true complexity to be able to monitor this activity.

In the author opinion, an important risk resides in the fact that most comment can be considered as non-objective, oriented information. Indeed, when members of the audience takes the time to comment, to share their opinion with the general public, it's generally because they do feel strongly, often emotionally, involved into the topic covered by the content which is commented. In that perspective, we can assume that the largest part of comments and information's that are provided by end-users can be considered as subjective and orientated, which does not diminish the potential interest and value contained by those information. An other argument, really relevant, could be that comments leaves access to online spaces for all types of contents, including links, which could use by software-bot to fool and manipulate traffic, based on search engine optimisation tricks, or in a more commercial way, be a perfect stage for pure marketing and commercial speech.

In our perspective, there is nothing unique to comments by audience with that possible risk. Indeed, we also think that professional journalist cannot be considered automatically as objective and that in most cases, they are quite subjective, which is totally normal as they are individual human with their own set of values and experiences.

Therefore, this risk must be taken into account, understood and integrated in the production process but should not lead to problems of quality. In general, the same doubt can be applied to all kind of citizen journalism and free content production, based on the idea that people do not invest their own time for free if they do not feel involved, thus subjective, about the matter.

Placing such comment as an personal and emotionaleffort also underline the fact that when users are actually commenting, they want to convince someone: the writers, other readers, other commentators and/or the general public. In that sense, one can easily notice that in heavily commented content pieces, a large part of the comments are actually directly or indirectly targeted to other comments, to other users that previously commented the content. In many of those cases, a conversation – closer from a shouting contest than a peaceful dialogue -can be engaged between those users. They will be interesting future researches to be conducted in order to identify the flows of information within comments.

In many media organization, the part of team that pushes for social functions is often outside the editorial staff. Indeed, internet and mobile team are keens to offer on their services what they see actually everywhere else and they know the undisputable traffic benefits they can get by having those functions enabled. As such policy tends to extend the reach and the audiences, advertising, marketing and other commercial functions within the organisation are also supporter of such a services.

6. Social journalism

In that part of the paper, we will describe various possible paths to use social media tools to improve content quality by involving audiences with various kind of relations.

First of all, it's important to remind, that, rather logically, all the described practices can only be implemented successfully when journalist or news organisation already have a social base (connexions on LinkedIn, friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter) or after this base have been created.

All those usages can be at all stages of the production process: before the content is produced, during its production process and after its release.

In general, involving users and member will also have side benefit, not really measurable but truly present, as nearly every person that have been involved in such a social process would tend to become a supporter of the media organisation. Indeed, even the user sharing the toughest critic will be honoured if what he says is taken into consideration, if he feels that his opinion does matter.

a. Panel

Panel are used in the media for various reasons, such as the validation of new display or measurement of the audience. Media are also intense users of all types of polls, surveys and results of questionnaires that are used as basis for articles or as statistic part of a wider content. In order to reflect the variety of functions that panels currently have in the media, it's really important to envisage such panels, as heterogeneous and flexible.

Social networks could be an interesting way to reach the various types of panels that are needed by media, both replacing current services and enriching their knowledge of the audience.

A part of the current services that media acquire could be replace by an efficient strategy to access a variety in social networks. Currently, media pays survey companies to measure the public opinion on a specific matter, with rather small samples between 400 and 1000 people; this amount of people could easily be reached by social network, that tends to provide similar demographic categories that traditional panel. Media organisations are also paying consulting company to engage research on smaller panel, targeting qualitative results on appreciated in the media, how the ads are perceived or if the new design is easily usable. Again, we really think that a large amount of those functions covered reduced qualitative panel could be now provided by a serious integration of social networks standard sociological and statistical research. For example, to validate its new design, a media outlet could select 100 users, active and representative, that would be actually be more than happy to share their opinions. By doing so, the media would access qualitative feedbacks, which would be as valuable as the one obtained by the consultancy firm, for a fraction of the cost and winning hundred life-long supporters in the process.

A panel is first and easy way to use the strength of the individuals composing society to reinforce media credibility.

b. Witness

A large part of journalistic tradition has been composed around witnesses and insiders. For decades, the rating of a journalist was as much based on the quality of his writing that on the depth on his contact book and the type of confidential sources he could obtain. Those methods are not yet lost but rather diminished by the increasing pressure to produce rapidly and millions of possibilities offered by modern telecommunications to access information without leaving the desk.

In our perspective, social networks could give a whole new impact to this traditional practice. Indeed, if we consider as proven the theory of the six degrees of separation (Karinthy, 1929) ^x, the address book is now unlimited and the journalist can virtually access anyone by using social networks.

The need for qualification is as high, or even higher, than in traditional journalism. Indeed, the false anonymity of the Internet would surely lead to higher amount of tentative of manipulation, oriented testimony or wrong statements, where "lying witness" would try to drive the journalist towards findings and conclusions.

In our perspective, the time invested to convey such investigations is largely compensated by the benefit, in terms of time of acquisition and content quality. Also, exactly in the same manner that in the traditional and physical world, the journalist to have regular relations with some witness that will find their credibility reinforced, lowering the need for a top-down verification of the testimony.

c. Expert

The world is always more complex and each branches of science, economy or technology are becoming deeper and harder to grasp holistically for people outside the field. We expressed earlier our vision that a part of the current problems of credibility in media comes to the lack of specialized expertises from journalists, always increasing in parallel of complexity. Journalists cannot and will never be able to be experts in more than one or two narrow subjects. Currently, journalists produce content where experts always find mistakes or rely on a very tiny network of experts identified as valid and available. This is not sufficient.

To face complexity with the necessary level of specialization that audiences expect, journalist now need to accept the nearly permanent need for external, professional, targeted expertise and that such experts should change really often. In that sense, to avoid critics and losses of audiences, it will not be acceptable any more to have journalist making important mistakes on subjects and to always on the redundant same group people, possibly friends.

Social networks are a fantastic tool to identify experts and engage conversation with them to increase the accuracy and the relevance of the content. There is many social networks and further research may identified a ranking of networks associated to various types of social journalism needs, thus proposing a precise direction based on the requirement for expertise of the journalist. In that sense, we can imagine that it will easier to find expert in green techs on LinkedIn and to find samples of the Z generation (born after 1990) on Facebook.

They are numerous advantages of using social networks to recruit experts. Firstly, a immense of amount of people are already online, describing their skills, searching for dialogue and visibility. For nearly any question, there are people online right now with the answer. Secondly, social networks and Internet based communication are nearly in real time, in line with the intensity of the informational flows. Feedbacks can thus be received with an amazing speed, just minutes or even seconds after publication, and lead to valuable addition or correction. Thirdly, experts are often very keen to help as many are searching for ways to share their expertises, either by pure altruism or as a smart promotion tool for their "personal brand". For that reason, experts that participate in content will tend to share it within their own network and will surely become a positive supporter of the news organization. In today's media, experts already proactively come and share their expertise. One of the most common topic where experts nearly feel obliged to add detail or correct to a piece of content is law and legal practices. Indeed, in such a field, in permanent change, with not much in common between local rules on divorce and international laws on patent, it is nearly impossible for journalist, even with a legal background, to be always right and up to date with such matters.

7. *Examples of practices*

a. **Rue 89 – a leading pure player with social journalism focus**

The website Rue89 has been founded by journalist from French daily newspapers "Liberation". Its news editor is Pascal Riché, former chief editor of Libération, and Pierre Haski, former deputy editor of the same newspaper. As an "pure player" internet media, financed by ads, social functions are a the core for their journalistic practices. This philosophy is beautifully reflected in their motto: "information with three voices, journalists, experts and you !". They refer to their team as three circles: first circle with their editors, second circle with the experts, and third circle with the community of reader.

Needless to say that each and any content can be rated, shared or commented. Comments are often used a base for other articles, that compile comments or put them in perspective, always quoted to the identity (pseudo) that posted the content. Some content are actually just a trampoline, very short piece or opinion which are there to stimulate the debate, the engage the conversation in the global village, thus being a basis for further content produced by the team.

In some case, a large amount of commentary and sharing on an article initially considered as minor by the team can also lead to deeper investigation and content production on the topic. Most successfully social contributors also have room in the paper edition that was launched last year. Rue89 is composed of traditional journalist coming from "old school" newspapers and medias. They are confident that they doing a good job, therefore there are ready to be challenged, and sometime, to correct themselves. By doing so they also engage a fair conversational dynamic with their readers, where readers support journalistic team, helping them to produce more accurate content and to access high quality experts, while giving hints for future content production and providing nearly real time feedback on what is hot or not.

Last but not least, it is interesting to note that Rue89 is the one of biggest news destination in the French speaking web (position 129 based on Alexa ranking)^{xi} and benefits of a great reputation of trust and exclusive news breaker.

b. Matrix of social attitudes of major newspapers in the French-speaking part of Switzerland

Media	Share & Rate	Possible to comment	Possible to submit ideas
20 Minutes	Yes	No	Yes. Homepage: "lecteur reporter (reporting reader)" Specific page with needs and policy
Le Matin	Yes	Yes	Yes. Contact page: "temoin lecteur" witnessing reader
La Tribune de Genève	Yes	Yes	Not directly. Contact page non explicit*
Le Courrier	Yes	Yes	Not directly. Contact page non explicit*
Le Temps (access only with account)	No	No	No. Contact page non explicit *
La Liberté	Yes	No	No. But complete contact page with direct mail to full staff
Le Nouvelliste	Yes	Yes	Not directly. Contact page non explicit*

* Contact page non explicit: a page where you can reach the editors but there is no invitation

8. Further researches

First of all, we would like to have a larger amount of interviews and of cases to study and to compare a sufficient amount of data to be able to derive hypotheses or theories. We are planning this collection in the coming months. Empirical studies on practices of social journalism should be regularly updated as the strategy evolves and new technologies are breaking through. In our perspective, in regards to the speed of changes of both practices and tools, the minimal rates of updates that we consider as relevant would be yearly. Indeed, as written above, this paper has no exhaustive pretention, aiming at engaging this particular conversation with the industry, and further researches will be necessary to make a precise topology of the ever-evolving practices of social journalism, with their respective combination of risk and benefits, changing as new technologies arrives and behaviours adapts accordingly.

In the field of speech analysis, the content of comments and the ton of online dialogues could lead to many interesting research. The same researcher could also study the flows and their various directions, for example, addressed to the media, addressed the public and addressed to a comment previously posted. This could also be interesting for scientist working on the visual representation of network dynamics. A smarter classification of social networks would also help media professional to have ideas and imagine strategies in the field of social journalism. The permanent apparition of new social network can question current practices and media organisation needs to permanently evaluate if they proactively creates services on each possible social media and just follow the trend once it is set. Recent services such as Tumblr, Chime.in or even Google+ can be questioned in that sense.

An other research question could be to identify the best social network for what function of social journalism. Do you find experts only on LinkedIn? Do you find young person only on Facebook? What type of interaction can media generate on Stumble Upon ? Talking about experts, an interesting question is the topology of the experts, covering their type of professional situation, sources of motivation and the nature of the involvement they have on social journalism. Are those experts professionals in the field? Why are they doing this for free? Are they independent professional or part of a larger organization? Do they do that on their work time or private time? As media and digital consumption are growing, as interactive conversation and social dialogues appears to be here to stay, we are looking forward to see research in the field.

9. Conclusion

We have covered two different types of practices when journalists can use social media to maintain and or reinforce their credibility. In terms of social functions (share, rate, comment), it seems clear that creating an open, ruled and democratic space for people to dialogue induces both increased accuracy of content and a series manageable risks, impact positively the traffic and can be the source of new pieces of editorial work where comments can be used as base for a new content, a new articles, using comments and their variety of expressed opinions to compose new pieces content putting all those opinions in perspective.

Further ideas for social journalism have also been proposed based on the used of social network to gather information before the production, to enrich the content while it's produced and to validate the content by submitting production to public comments and possible correction. The coverage of the Arab spring in Tunisia and Egypt, and of the current repression in Syria, would not have been possible without those new tools.

If social media are new tools, the practice of journalism shall not change, having a very strong focus on fact verification, accuracy of the information as well as identification of the possible bias and hidden agenda of sources. *"In recent years, organizations ranging from The Washington Post and the Associated Press to many mid-sized newspapers such as the San Jose Mercury News and the Roanoke Times have adopted some kind of social media policies. The essence of these policies is to remind employees that they must adhere to basic journalistic standards when using social media.* (O'Brien, 2011)."

In the author perspective, this element is a key factor of success for the future of news organisation: acknowledge the fact the tools have changed but that a large part of the industry fundamentals stayed the same. Indeed, media of tomorrow will have the same mission that always: create value for their target group, provide accurate verified information and be in line with the current consumption practices.

Notes, URL & Sources of Quotes

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^{iv} Becker, Lee and Schönbach, Klaus. *Audience Response to Media Diversification.* Mahwah, NJ, USA 1999;

^v Clayton M. Christensen. *The Innovators Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1997;

^{vi} Harold Hotelling, *Stability in Competition,* in *Economic Journal*, 39:41-S7 (192), Wiley-Blackwell, 1929.

^{vii} http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/special_report/1999/09/99/iron_curtain/timelines/romania_1018.stm

^{viii} Adam B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust.* Princeton University Press, 2000

^{ix} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godwin's_law

^x http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_degrees_of_separation

^{xi} <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/rue89.com>

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