

Online journalism and its publics

December 5-6, 2013, Brussels

Official languages of the conference: English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese

This international and interdisciplinary conference aims at fostering the debate on audience consumption, production and participation in the journalistic sphere. Discussion forums, comment spaces, fact checking, crowdsourcing, blogs and social networks have expanded the opportunities for the participation of Internet users in the news production process. The relationship between journalism and its publics has become more complex, with multiple levels of interaction that are not always easy to fit into professional practices.

In the last decade we have heard utopian discourses announcing a revolution in journalism and the end of one-way mass communication. But we have also lived through the normalisation of audience participation on online news media, with gatekeeping criteria and isolation from news production as key strategies. The moment calls for an in-depth analysis of the circumstances, motivations and habits of the production and consumption of news in a digital context. We know well the professional practices in the newsrooms, but we lack empirical evidence on their publics, how do they select the information they consume and why do they decide to contribute information through any of the available means.

The audience was until recently an imaginary figure in the minds of journalists, editors in chief, marketing or advertising managers, and consulting agencies. It has now materialised online under the shape of contributions, nicknames, arguments and conversations through the diverse socio-technical artefacts of online news media. While in the past the participation of the *reader* was circumscribed to the letters to the editor in the newspapers (later adopted through the audience ombudsperson in broadcasting media), citizen discourses are now legitimated by news producers. As the category of the “public-user” becomes more visible, we can formulate hypotheses about their consumption and production practices, their representations of journalism and its role in society. We can gather empirical evidence of the evolution of news flows and overcome the sterile cries about the end of journalism and resituate it within the context of the emerging practices in digital environments.

These changes in the journalistic landscape call for analyses from multiple backgrounds: sociology of journalism and news, reception studies, history of communication, discourse analysis, cultural studies, anthropology. Contributions to the conference can focus on the following issues:

The public as:

- An actor present in the newsroom: the public lives in the mental and discursive representations of the journalists, but also in a more concrete way in the contributions of the users and the data generated by the monitoring of audience activity on news websites. It also involves the creation of new professional practices (such as the role of the community manager to deal with active audience participation). How do media companies adapt to this

configuration (automated treatment of comments, new moderation tasks, outsourcing of moderation).

- An economic actor: news media try to monetise online audiences through support diversification of their products, recording increasingly complete consumer data, or developing production strategies that allow news consumption anywhere and anytime.
- An information producer, an expert: the public becomes an information source through comments in news and on the blogs embedded on the news websites. It is as well used by the media to legitimise some journalistic formats.
- A discourse producer: what are the features of the discourses of the publics? How do they engage in debates? What are their representations of the news products? To what extent do they challenge their reader's contract?
- A referee of social discourses: the new configuration enables the citizens to challenge the established distribution of knowledge in the public sphere and allows them to collectively monitor the journalistic discourse and propose rectifications.

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Call for papers

Contributions to the conference can be sent in English, French, Spanish or Portuguese (max. of 500 words) to publics2013@gmail.com before **May 5, 2013**.

Calendar:

Diffusion: February 5, 2013.

Deadline for abstracts: May 5, 2013.

Acceptance communication: June 1, 2013.

Deadline for full papers: October 5, 2013.

Organised by:

ReSIC: Centre de Recherche en Information et Communication (Université Libre de Bruxelles) & PReCoM : Pôle de Recherches sur la Communication et les Médias (Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles).

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