

Internet as a New Source of Information, Opportunities and Problems

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Abstract: With the start of the new century, technological innovation has no doubt some of the great changes in information and communication area. The advent of online information creates new perspective but also placed at suitable new problem in the processing of information sources. In this article we deal in particular the growing number of "information sources" with the advent of the internet in the field of journalism and making news. Here we try to understand with examples and cases that in the internet does not exist any guaranty for the information which in many news network are given by groups or individuals who may not know the truth or don't want to tell the truth, then you wonder how to trust that content and what tools used to prove the reliability. A new vocational skills that the reporter needs that, you can define a "network culture" (and digital), ie a type of knowledge that takes hold of us working on the internet looking for information in different places where we discuss (in blogs, twitter, facebook, mailing lists etc.) by using new search engines and other tools that can provide network and periodically renewed. We will try to understand how the term information has expanded its meaning over the past decade with the rise of New Journalism, and which meets the seasonality difficulty in finding and interpreting information source on the network.

Key words: Internet, information, journalism, reliability, innovation

Introduction

With the start of the new century, has no doubt that the technological innovation has given the great changes in information and communication. The advent of online information poses new problems to the processing of information sources; new technologies exactly have facilitated the grid of a large number of social actors who use tools and logic of communication similar to those used by the media. In particularly in journalism has been a real multiplication of "information sources" thanks to the advent of the Internet¹ (which will be discussed later) become in a short time and at great distance from any point on the globe. If once the sources were represented mainly by news agencies (whose reports are then reworked by the journalist) and a series of personal and professional relationships, now on the web you can find more news and detail than ever before.

Even now, mostly in newspapers all journalists are based on materials from the agency, but if you want to give more original information, it occurs more and more to address to other sources to make differences from competitive media, and the amount of detailed information on the net is destined to grow even more. We are facing here a first problem: to become familiar with the online world, to know how to use it in the best way, you need to have the tools to find and check/verify everything found there.

On the internet there are no guarantees for any information found, for instance, if in the articles published in newspaper "Shqip" are the guarantors of the correctness of information (the director and his journalists), many reports on the network are given by groups or people who may not know; then you wonder how to trust that content and what tools you need to use to prove their reliability.

The journalists and the Internet

A new professional competence sees the journalists equipped with what that might be called "network culture" (and digital), namely a type of knowledge of which are mastered working on the internet looking for different information in places where are discussed (in blogs, in mailing list, facebook, twitter, etc.) using new search engines and other tools that

¹ In March 1989, Tim Berners Lee physicist at CERN in Geneva conceives the idea of a "hypertext system" to facilitate sharing between research groups, with the creation and management of IP (Internet Protocol) that enables communication between computers connected to the web, internet become finally a hypermedia information space, open to anyone. Marco Pratellesi, New Journalism, Bruno Mondadori, 2008, p.20

the network is able to offer periodically renewed.

For the journalist, the research and evaluation of sources types in the multimedia nature of the Internet, concerning not only to the simple texts but also images and video, poses new problems (in the case of photos and video are known the risks to which it meets of trusting only on what you see). In general, the changes occurring in the information, regards precisely the journalistic source: we seek to understand how this term has expanded its meaning over the past decades with the rise of New Journalism² (Pratellesi, 2008), and what are the difficulties encountered by the journalists in obtaining and interpreting a source of information on the network.

By observing the processes of change in place, two issues are emerging: on one hand is claimed that the profession of the journalist has not changed with the advent of new digital technologies, so the journalist has not changed with the advent of new digital technologies, so the journalist is a mediator who selects and hierarchized the news and has a duty to inform and interpret events in full compliance with the rules governing their journalism.

On the other hand is claimed that the way of working of a journalist has changed profoundly: the changes introduced by new media (computers, cameras, digital recorders, wireless devices, Internet, email, search engines, databases), intended as a new information sources (in addition to traditional sources such as news agencies), have changed the course of research, examination, testing and writing the news.

In the late nineties and early twenty-first century, next to journalism in print, it's imposed the "online journalism" in the media system: faster news in real-time, constant updates, interactivity, multimedia contents, personalization. Now question is how this new journalism has influenced the production processes in the work of drafting new rules and imposing a new internal organization. Among the new figure as a journalist (e-journalist-)³ and the internet, stands in the first place the difficult task of organizing or rather quickly assemble an increasing number of reports and news within the network.

However, the risk which may incur the journalist who blindly trusts the sources on the Internet, without careful review the source of reference, is to spread wrongly false or unfounded news. Network communication, taking in account the ease of reproducibility of the messages, low cost and lack of filters, may promote the spread of rumors, real "buffaloes data transmission" (now known for some time, in some cases created specifically/ad hoc to deceive less experienced journalists). One has to wonder if this is a common factor in journalism and the media linked to the growing concern of finding information that "mark the headlines".

The tendency to sensationalism⁴ in making/doing information, the lack of time necessary for a control or verification are without doubt elements that play in favor of false information on the network. Sometimes it is verified that certain news taken from the network at the end turn out to be false ending to discredit the individual journalist and the media in which they work (write); is clear that in this case the responsible is the journalist and not the network containing false news. But it is always the network that also allows you to see these errors, to understand how as been build a false information (ultimately to reveal the way to make the information), thanks to the activism of the people in the network. So, the "the sources control" of information has now become increasingly a topic of discussion since the credibility of the news and journalism in general in recent years is collecting less consensus in the relationship with the public. The control of information sources and verification of the news, through the web tools, either by crossing the information with the traditional controls, should be an important part of future training for the journalists (online).

In the recent/last years, an element has dramatically increased the credibility of online journalism, increasingly gaining the respect and trust of readers, the practice of "linking" the sources and documents used in preparing the piece so that the reader can get their own idea and judge the work of mediation conducted by the journalist.

The news source

Proper evaluation of a source of information used to write an article is always an important qualification that marks the good work of the journalist, and more generally the treatment of sources is what distinguishes an quality information tool

² Multimedia Journalism. Term used to indicate the changes that the evolutions of new media are introduced into the work of journalists from the last decade of last century. Ibid, p.25 Ibid, p.25

³ The term emphasizes the close connection that increasingly binds the reporter to the information technology and internet world, through preparation and a more specific knowledge and qualified in the field of information. Ibid. p.39-40

⁴ Sensationalism is not a technique but a way of conceiving the news. Each notice must make sense, which should impress the reader. This is the result of a neurotic journalism with obsession of the "scoop": the sensational news that is exclusively published is the dream the journalist. Papuzzi Alberto " Journalist's Profession " Donzelli, Rome, 1998, p.95

(printed, both audio-video or digital) from another that cannot be considered the same. The source constitutes the "basis of the news," and much of the value attributed to the news depends on the great ability of the journalist to identify and treat the source of information.

The relationship between the journalist and the sources represents the most sensitive aspect of his profession; determining which the source of news is, constitutes the first step that carry out the journalist to understand how to set up the news and what its nature is. The goal of the journalist is to have a number of sources sufficient to ensure wider knowledge directly related to events⁵ (Pratellesi, 2008) However, the freedom and independence of the journalist are possible, with the condition to be himself to access to sources and these sources are not controlled or manipulated⁶ (Pratellesi, 2008).

The source in itself does not constitute the certainty of the event because it is still limited compared to the totality and complexity of the event. The source provides no absolute truth but a partial one: so is the quality of the source that guarantees a certain credibility⁷ (Pratellesi, 2008) to the news itself and the journalist; he must be able to interpret the version of the event regardless the type of source he is using (institutional/non-institutional, direct/indirect) based on his own cultural skills, technical and editorial. Furthermore should not forget that the journalist must produce the article within a precise conduct control.

As above mentioned, often the journalist is not a direct witness to an event which happened, so its need is to rely on sources to ascertain the veracity of the event. It is possible to distinguish two source levels: the first level or primary sources (top-level), and sources of second-level or secondary. The top-level sources provide credibility to information because they have an institutional authoritativeness or they are guaranteed by a specific skill: ministers, mayors, magistrates, lawyers, unionists, pleadings, etc. The source of the first level not only transmits an image of reality but is a part of the reality. The sources of the second level instead are those whose reliability is entrusted to the same journalistic quote in the sense that it is the duty of the journalist to legitimize them in the public eye, by connecting the same sources with the others to confirm the veracity of the event: the eyewitness, the neighbor, the spectator of an event, the man in the street.

Unlike the sources of the first level, the second level sources which are not trustable individually require careful review by the journalist. Another distinction regards the direct sources that is the information (mostly raw materials) that the journalist interprets and elaborates, and indirect sources that are the materials elaborated in various forms from the press release to the full article, until it reaches the status of news⁸ (Lepri, 2005): press offices, public relations, promotion offices, press officers, secretaries, spokesman. The main indirect sources are the news agencies which unlike the other sources are presented as the specialist firms that operate within the information system.

Internet as a source of information for journalists

Regarding the issue of sources of information, it surely affirms that the internet however is unquestionably a great primary source, a new arena for the journalist thanks to the enormous amount of information that circulates inside the network itself. However the internet as a source is sometimes not considered legitimate by the journalist, but his ability to propose new issues, the ease of finding information (especially those such as a phone number, the definition of an abbreviation or an author's biography), has become a useful tool for journalists working in different media.

At the same time very often exactly on the internet, is impossible to verify the origin of the source of information and exactly this particularly aspect⁹ affects the quality of information. With access to the Internet increases the sources of information and the journalist's job is to verify the degree of reliability and truthfulness of what he provides. Given that the reporter does not tell the truth, but at best "the journalistic truth", exactly the latter is the result of a correct application of some strict rules within the journalism and communication in general to maintain a certain authority in relationship of trust

⁵ Ibid, p. 29

⁶ Today, the threats to the independence of the press in most cases arise from the organization, orientation and manipulation of journalists' sources. The widespread distribution of press officers, politician's spokespersons, public relations of companies and institutions it is a reflection.

⁷ The reliability or credibility of the source is an element crucial to the news with reflections also on aspects of ethics.

⁸ The news values are conventional evaluative criteria governing the selection process because they help to determine the newsworthiness of an event, which is its ability to count as news.

⁹ While the activity of public information is made easier and faster, from the other side is seeing a sort of unintentional distortion of the news. Vittorio Roidi, *Small Manual of Journalism*, Laterza: Bari, 2004, p.50

with readers:

Avoid publishing rumors, unless you really are attributed to a reliable source; Being skeptical in regard to news reported by one source or from anonymous sources; Exercising the right and duty of criticism and verification of information disseminated by other media; Always indicate the source used; Always respect, when possible, the rule of crossing two independent sources of each other before publishing a news story, Distinguishing, when possible, if information comes from institutional sources or from other non-official sources; Giving attention to the possibility of being manipulated by sources for private interests that were extraneous to the information service to readers; An anonymous source on any subject is not in itself trustful; The mere fact that the sources indicates information, does not mean per se that this information is complete or that are completely justified.

While until a few years ago the basic information of the newspapers was exclusive of news agency, thanks to direct access to the internet the information market has suffered changes: in the network the sources of information have multiplied (most of the sources are free), increasing day by day. However, in Internet the information sources are the same not only for news agencies and newspapers but for anyone who wants to receive information directly without the journalistic mediation¹⁰ so are sources for the same consumer market in competition with the press. The truth offered by the primary sources is a coded truth which the journalistic mediation must decode. Through the direct approach to the Internet who can ensure that the source is reliable and his information is credible?

The Internet and multiplication of sources

The potential use of the Internet as the main source of information (research of information and credibility of the sources), in the last decade have led to debate on some important issues:

a) The multiplication of information: in the near future the Internet will be the tool to ensure greater freedom on condition that the information¹¹ must be as correct as possible, and the sources are reliable; however having a lot of information can create confusion and disorientation.

b) The multiplication of sources: until a few years ago the production of information was the sole responsibility of information professionals that are the bodies of written and spoken information.

The advent of the Internet has brought the business of information (especially during news gathering phase) to reorganize own work in response to new needs, thereby aiming to dramatically reduce production costs and maximization of digitized information profits. In addition to encouraging a multiplication of information, the Internet has led to the emergence of an infinite number of sources. In Internet many sources of information (individual and private) occur freely in the absence of authority that ensure, or call into question the credibility and reliability of those sources.

Today we invest less in the activity of news making (retrieval of news) characterized by a used source of information mainly distributed by news agencies and institutional sources, while focusing more resources in the phases of newsgathering (selection of news)¹². The change in the management of communication has led to reflections on the organization of the same process of editorial work (working time, selection criteria, codes, values and styles), while these reflections have made public information activities easier and faster, the other gave rise to a sort of unintentional distortion of the news.

Also in the path that leads a fact to become news, media are engaged in an activity of "trading"¹³ between the sources and recipients of information, or the public.

Currently, the retrieval of information is more through intermediate sources and these sources thanks to modern digital technologies distributes in a timely manner a huge amount of material that often requires only a few minor changes before being published. The news before gets to the media is selected and encoded by particular types of sources. The

¹⁰ The communication actors seem to be only two as in direct communication: the source and the observer, in *ibid*, p.55

¹¹ In other words is is find from the media a half preference for indirect or intermediate sources which intentionally spread the news at the expense of indirect sources, which must be sought with more difficulty, in *ibid*, p.60

¹² It is constantly in place a "bargain" by which the source is such, only if he can get in touch with the apparatus of the media, which in its turn, may decide to discard it or attempt to obtain from them a certain kind of information even it is often the source itself to have "bargaining power". Everything then has to be developed keeping always in mind the potential public expectations, which constitute a key variable in the selection process of the news. *Ibid*, p.64 *Ibid*, p.64

¹³ This relationship which appears to be linear only in appearance, it is actually characterized by a substantial circularity, in the sense that the relationship sources-media-public has within it a different flows of feedback, as the three elements are able to influence mutually. *Ibid*, p.66

multiplication of sources allows us to reconstruct a credible set of events through the comparison of different information and knowledge. By virtue of these new opportunities offered by digital technology, the editors of the mass media can consult numerous sources and investigate the cases treated.

However in the network emerges a numerous complex problems because new material is introduced from which depend subsequently the direct relationship with the source; the end user of the communication that is the public, seems to seriously jeopardize the mediation of traditional media. The mediation of journalism: direct access to information sources on the Internet threatens to eliminate the institutional role of journalism that is the function between those who produce information and those who search to meet up its own information needs. In the absence of mediation, the journalism risk to extinction, then it must recover its basic function due to the selection of information in circulation, and especially the operation of control. Computerization of society: must bear in mind that the internet as a guarantee or less as a contribution to freedom of information concerns not only the current and future journalism.

Internet has proved to be a useful mean for the dissemination of ideas and knowledge of free initiatives¹⁴. In the field of communication the internet is presented as an forced alternative to the traditional journalistic information, and as confirmation of direct information (from the issue of message to the recipient) that can do without newspapers; so the journalists to protect their function as mediators of the "truth", must produce correct and impartial information. The journalists work either on traditional sources or the one accessible through the network and in some cases in the selection process of the news it is possible to be guided by an image, sound, video and also become potential sources of information.

The technology (internet) represents a major opportunity for a change in the way of working of journalists. The Internet has facilitated, simplified and speeded up the archival research, has dejected some limits on access to information thanks to databases; has reduced the physical presence to the office and travels for research and consultation of the documents; has improved the investigative work¹⁵.

Electronic access to sources has introduced some innovative features: the possibility of a search by mail location (convenience); raise enormous amounts of material (productivity) direct access to source documents.

However, the use of the Internet as an information source also involves some risks to the reporter:

a. false identity, must be asked whether there are reasons to doubt about the statements or information found in the network assigned to a particular character and verify the origin of the source.

b. False information: it is possible that the news could be put into circulation with the purposes of propaganda or conditioning.

c. The evaluation of the source and verification of a fact are equally important and essential, in both ways, to work with materials in the network, whether if it's a statement of official or unofficial sources.

d. There are urban legends and they are spread also in Internet until they become globalized legends.

Often, the urban legends are not without consequences: for example, in August 2000 an American college student Mark Jacob was able to introduce in the Internet, the false news about a U.S. company that manufactured optical fibers which came to be in a serious state of Economic crisis¹⁶. The urban legend in the network depends on two critical elements: the speed with which they spread the news once occurred on the internet and the speed in the process of acquiring, writing and re-launching the news (online journalism). For this reason, the reporter must show great care and sensitivity when dealing with news coming from the stream network.

Given the need to move in a very short time in the midst of a myriad of potential news, the journalist must step up its own expertise and with them, the tools to select what is relevant and what is not, what can be trusted and what needs to be subjected to careful and scrupulous verification. To be defended from false information in the network is essential to know the Internet and then be able to assess/evaluate the context in which information occurs in the online circuit. First of

¹⁴ Many sites created by university professors of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce have been successful in spreading news and opinions that would not easily can be read in the business pages of newspapers more than any other subject to the influences of economic and political power. Papuzzi. A " Journalist's Profession" Donzelli, Rome, 1998, p.70

¹⁵ Internet offer an ample ground for investigative reporting and research; are many cases in which, thanks to the network you can find information that once required a patient and expensive search work with displacements also challenging. Just think of the possibility of collecting data on individuals, companies, to find documents of public bodies and ministries. Ibid. p.73

¹⁶ This information is taken from some official agencies such as Bloomberg and the financial section of Yahoo! The maneuver allowed to Jakob a speculation on the stock exchange that make him earned \$ 250,000, but the company lost about \$ 2,000,000 in market value; and exposed and arrested a week later, Jakob was sentenced to 44 months imprisonment. Ibid. p.78

all you have to wonder what is the origin of the document, the authors, site managers, the place and date of publication and the data¹⁷.

Conclusions

By now the Internet has become one of the information sources because there is a public to be kept exclusively informed in prevalent or occasionally way on the web from home or work through a personal computer or other supports/facilities (such as smart phones or PDAs). The public itself has led to the formation of an information market online, and news online. The Internet represents itself more possibilities to obtain faster information, in any place, anytime, in real time, gaining access and documents and materials without moving to look for them personally. And this fact has changed notably the profession of journalism. This is the only profession that is faced with the risks arising from Internet as a source of information. Because every news can face three major problems: false identities, misinformation and urban legends. All three have their roots in the power that internet has today regarding the theme/topic of information.

At the end I want to stress that the journalist is facing some issues: such as the loss of privileges for access and direct control of the sources; the end of the central journalistic feature of its old-fashioned template in a organizational and productive context in which news were unearthed and documented personally; the need to develop new languages and new features of multimedia communication; the renunciation from a cultivated handwriting, literary, not compatible with the network environment.

All this makes us think that the internet is a new source of information, however, has its positive and negatives sides. One major caution on problems that may occur using the Internet as a source is one of solutions to get real news.

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¹⁷ For example, if the document has arrived via a search engine is essential to visit the "home page" of the site and assess all the other "link" necessary for orientation and to determine the context in which the document is inserted; another element of evaluation is the "domain" in which is worth to mentioned an institutional site which is known or not, if it has a clear name or a mark that does not refer to anything. Ibid, p.80