INTRODUCTION

EXPERIMENTS IN JOURNALISM:

an introduction to the special issue"

PHILIPPE USEILLE[I]
Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, Valenciennes – France
ORCID: 0000-0003-2174-073X

MONICA MARTINEZ[II]
Universidade de Sorocaba, Sorocaba – São Paulo – Brazil
ORCID: 0000-0003-1518-8379

For more than two decades, the news industry has been undergoing rapid and profound changes in the Portuguese and French-speaking world, like Brazil and France. These mutations have multiple causes: a crisis of the economic model of the traditional news media, technological evolutions, disintermediation due to social networks and platforms, disinformation, disaffection, even discredit, on the part of worldwide citizens. The coronavirus pandemic has accused certain aspects: the demise of printed newspapers, journalistic lay-offs, new business models such as subscription and membership. Not to mention the precarious working conditions of journalists as a professional category to be protected from the virus in order to adequately perform their social function, since in countries like Brazil it was not included as a priority in vaccination campaigns.

At the same time, this global sanitary crisis has also shown the value of accurate and reliable information[1]. Faced with these challenges, experimentation becomes imperative for the news media. By experimentation, we mean an experience carried out intending to achieve a result. By experimenting journalism has historically adapted to new

---

I Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, Valenciennes – France. E-mail: philippe.useille@uphf.fr
II Universidade de Sorocaba, Sorocaba – São Paulo – Brazil. E-mail: monica.martinez@prof.uniso.br

contexts of production, broadcasting, and reception, in search of a viable economic model associated with editorial choices and to respond to user's needs. Likewise, journalism research has traditionally investigated and adjusted itself to obsolescence as well as technological innovations.

In the journalism field, changes in the media landscape and technological innovations are giving rise to various experiments that concern organizations, processes, and editorial strategies with the imperative of keeping up with changing modes of information consumption. The development of digital technology (Mercier & Pignard-Cheynel, 2014) presents new possibilities in terms of production, editing, distribution, and increasingly personalized engagement of audiences. The transition from web-first to mobile-first (Hill & Bradshaw, 2018) favors cost minimization and versatility of journalists, technological convergence (Jenkins, 2008; Deuze, 2007), flexibility in the use of different formats. Young people consume more news through mobile services, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, which forces journalists to take into account the codes and grammar of the mobile, to promote more interactive relationships between journalists and their audience (Pignard-Cheynel & Van Dievoet, 2019).

One can refer to the experimentations as a "change or die" situation, for themselves represent a sign of necessary adjustment to new technologies in an environment of rapid disruption, as some research may suggest in the field of virtual reality (Watson, 2017; Toursel & Useille, 2019), artificial intelligence and the use of algorithms for instance (Wölker & Powell, 2021) the autonomous production of journalistic content through computer algorithms, is increasingly prominent in newsrooms. This enables the production of numerous articles, both rapidly and cheaply. Yet, how news readers perceive journalistic automation is pivotal to the industry, as, like any product, it is dependent on audience approval. As audiences cannot verify all events themselves, they need to trust journalists' accounts, which make credibility a vital quality ascription to journalism. In turn, credibility judgments might influence audiences' selection of automated content for their media diet. Research in this area is scarce, with existing studies focusing on national samples and with no previous research on 'combined' journalism – a relatively novel development where automated content is supplemented by human journalists. We use an experiment to investigate how European news readers (N=300. For example, chatbots or artificial intelligence (bot) capable of discussing (chat) [2] (Veglis & Maniou, 2019) are used in favor of conversational journalism (Antheaume, 2016) that respects the codes of interactions via mobile.

Launched in 2015, Jam[3], a 100% messenger media, is a chatbot that addresses young people in France by animating conversations around the major interests of young generations (news, series, social networks, travel, relationships, trends, and career, among others). Yet, these conversational agents are causing new ethical tensions (Dörr & Hollnbuchner, 2017). In addition to these technological innovations, these experiments also consist of new journalistic practices, ways of investigating (Bot, 2018), verifying (Gray et al., 2013), formatting, visualizing information (McCandless, 2012), and creating more attractive content (Lacroix, 2020) in order to reach new audiences, and above all to keep them while they are very fragmented. Do these experiments allow us to clear the way for the journalism of tomorrow or are they doomed to vanish in a near future?

As far as we know these experiments question the foundations of journalism, its borders, and even its epistemology. After all, they are led by a multiplicity of actors, journalists or not, media or not. The 2000s have been marked by the irruption of citizens as content producers (van Dijck, 2009). In this context, the new content generators modify missions and skills, identities, and professional trajectories. These experiments are renewing professional cultures by transforming the very profession of journalism, but they are also encountering resistance. They are sometimes the result of individual initiatives, or they are supported by original forms of organization within the media themselves: R&D departments, media labs like that of Agence France Presse[4], which brings together journalists, designers, and digital editors. These new profiles make up multidisciplinary teams adapted to new modes of production, capable of imagining new forms of narrative (Hernandez & Rue, 2016). Other places, more unexpected, sometimes far from the media, like the Labo 148 in Roubaix (France)[5].

The researcher questions these experiments through the discourse and practices of the actors, who are themselves divided between enthusiasm and resistance. How do they see themselves in their principles, values, and purposes? In their relationship to technologies, they question the place of editorial, the social role, and the meaning of journalism in its ethical and deontological dimension. If specific skills are identified, how can they be integrated into the training of future journalists provided by professional schools and universities?

As the articles in this special issue show, academic research in journalism is very interested in these experiments (López-García et al., 2019), and addresses it by using various paradigms far from a deterministic reading grid. Beyond the discourses of professionals, a

large place is given to the point of view of the users. Their relationship to information has changed: more chosen and less constrained by the timing of the media. Mobile devices in the form of smartphones are transforming the temporality of consumption experiences, from legato forms to staccato forms (Dholakia et al., 2015). How do researchers manage to impose their own temporality on a field that is constantly changing? This distance is, however, the condition for detecting invariants, cycles, and ruptures in the rapid succession of innovations. In a context stressed by the increase and massive circulation of content (Scherer, 2011) and disinformation (Arbulu, 2018), the researcher establishes a fertile dialogue with the journalists and brings her/his contribution to reflect on the conditions for the quality of information delivered to the citizen in our still fragile democracies.

NOTES

1 Retrieved from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/dnr-executive-summary

2 Retrieved from https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/chatbots-et-si-linfo-vous-etait-contee-par-messages-automatises

3 Retrieved from www.hellojam.fr

4 Retrieved from https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/medialab-de-lafp-linnovation-au-service-de-linformation

5 Retrieved from www.labo148.com

REFERENCES

Antheaume, A. (2016). *Le journalisme numérique*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Arbulu, R. (2018, 20 de agosto). *Brasil tem mais de 4 milhões de casos de fake news no segundo trimestre*. Canaltech. Retrieved from https://canaltech.com.br/internet/brasil-tem-mais-de-4-milhoes-de-casos-de-fake-news-no-segundo-trimestre-120592/

Bot, O. (2018). *Chercher et enquêter avec internet*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

Deuze, M. (2007). Convergence culture in the creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 243–263. DOI: 10.1177/1367877907076793

Dholakia, N., Reyes, I., & Bonoff, J. (2015). Mobile media: from legato to staccato, isochronal consumptionscapes. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 18(1), 10–24. DOI: 10.1080/10253866.2014.899216

Dörr, K. N., & Hollnbuchner, K. (2017). Ethical Challenges of Algorithmic Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 5(4), 404–419. DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2016.1167612

Gray, J., Bounegru, L., Chambers, L., Kayser-Bril, N., & Robert, C. (2013). *Guide du datajournalisme: collecter, analyser et visualiser les données*. Paris: Eyrolles.

Hernandez, R. K., & Rue, J. (2016). *The principles of multimedia journalism: packaging digital news*. New York: Routledge.

Hill, S., & Bradshaw, P. (2018). *Mobile-First Journalism: Producing News for Social and Interactive Media* (1st ed.). London: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315267210

Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide, Updated and with a new afterword*. New York: New York University Press.

Lacroix, G. (2020). Brut et le vertige de l'information. *Le journal de l'école de Paris du management*, 142(2), 38–44. DOI: 10.3917/jepam.142.0038

López-García, X., Silva-Rodríguez, A., Vizoso-García, Á. A., Westlund, O., & Canavilhas, J. (2019). Mobile journalism: Systematic literature review. *Comunicar: Revista Científica de Comunicación y Educación*, 59, 9–18. DOI: 10.3916/C59-2019-01

McCandless, D. (2012). *Information is beautiful: revised, recalculated and reimagined*. London: William Collins.

Mercier, A., & Pignard-Cheynel, N. (2014). Mutations du journalisme à l'ère du numérique : un état des travaux. *Revue Française des Sciences de l'information et de la communication*, (5). DOI: 10.4000/rfsic.1097

Pignard-Cheynel, N., & Van Dievoet, L. (2019). *Journalisme mobile: usages informationnels, stratégies éditoriales et pratiques journalistiques*. Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck Supérieur

Scherer, É. (2011). *A-t-on encore besoin des journalistes?* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Toursel, A., & Useille, P. (2019). Immersive Journalism, a "New Frontier" of Information Experience? *Brazilian Journalism Research*,

15(2), 336–357. DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v15n2.2019.1230

van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(1), 41–58. DOI: 10.1177/0163443708098245

Veglis, A., & Maniou, T.A. (2019). Chatbots on the Rise: A New Narrative in Journalism. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 7(1), 1–6. DOI: 10.11114/smc.v7i1.3986

Watson, Z. (2017). *VR for news: The new reality?* Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Wölker, A., & Powell, T. E. (2021). Algorithms in the newsroom? News readers' perceived credibility and selection of automated journalism. *Journalism*, 22(1), 86–103. DOI: 10.1177/1464884918757072

PHILIPPE USEILLE. Assistant professor in information and communication sciences at the DeVisu Laboratory (Visual and Urban Design, EA 2445) at the Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France (France). His research is devoted to the emerging forms and writings of media information. E-mail: philippe.useille@uphf.fr

MONICA MARTINEZ. PhD professor at the Graduate Program in Communication and Culture at the University of Sorocaba and visiting professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (Celsa) at the Sorbonne Université (France). She is leader of the Literary Journalism and Narratives of Personal and Social Transformation Research Group (JORLIT - Uniso/CNPq). She has a PhD in Communication Sciences from São Paulo University. She authored *Literary Journalism: tradition and innovation* (Florianópolis: Insular, 2016). E-mail: monica.martinez@prof.uniso.br