Journalism and Social Media:
How Spanish Journalists Are Using Twitter

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Abstract

As part of their professional routine, Spanish journalists are gradually joining the ranks of active users of social networks like Twitter[1]. Following some on-the-fly strategy or just winging it, and fully putting into practice the idea that "one must be where the people are," they distribute information coming from their own media, viralize information from other users/media, editorialize as they go, sum up daily life or shoot the breeze about a variety of topics. This paper presents the results of an in-depth survey conducted among 50 Spanish journalists with active professional profiles on Twitter[2]. The aim of the survey was to find out how they are using this social media at work, how they feel about it and what their expectations are.

Keywords: Journalism, Social Media, Twitter, User Generated Content, Participation, Interactivity

Periodismo y Social Media:
cómo están usando Twitter los periodistas españoles

Resumen

Como parte de su rutina profesional, los periodistas españoles se están sumando a la nómina de usuarios activos de redes sociales como Twitter o Facebook. Respondiendo a una estrategia más o menos planificada o improvisando sobre la marcha, llevando a la práctica la máxima de que "hay que estar dónde está la gente", distribuyen información de sus propios medios, viralizan información de otros usuarios/medios, editorializan sobre la marcha, glosan la cotidianidad o lanzan al viento sus reflexiones sobre los más variados asuntos. Este artículo presenta los resultados de una encuesta en profundidad realizada a 50 periodistas españoles con perfiles profesionales activos en Twitter. La finalidad de la investigación era averiguar cómo están usando las redes sociales en su trabajo, qué percepción tienen de las mismas y cuales son sus expectativas.

Palabras clave: Periodismo, Social Media, Twitter, Participación, Interactividad

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[1] "Twitter is an application that permits users to post 140-character status updates, or "tweets" to their Twitter profile in answer to the question, "what's happening?" from the Internet, mobile devices, and third-party Web applications. The model of Twitter users "following" other Twitter users defines friendship ties. Potential followers do not have to initiate a connection to a follower, who can sometimes develop quasi-celebrity status due to a large number of followers" (Barnett -Ed.-, 2011: 885).

[2] By "active professional profiles" we mean journalists using Twitter on a regular basis as part of their professional routine.

Summary: 1. Framing the Object of Study. 2. Social Media & Journalism. 3. How Spanish Journalists are using Twitter. 4. Methodology. 5. Main Findings and Results. 5.1. Is Social Media Changing Reporting?. 5.2. Uses and Gratifications of Twitter. 5.3. *Portrait of Twitter as a journalistic tool.* 5.4. Newsgathering and Sourcing. How journalists on Twitter use the different social media to seek information and contact sources. 5.5. How social media is changing the verifying information process. 5.6. The state of social media "training" in Newsrooms. 5.7. New professional profiles originated by Twitter and other social media. 5.8. Mobile devices in the Newsrooms. 5.9. "Participation" That word… 5.10. How should news media foster users participation?. 5.11. Mainstream media in social media environments. 6. Conclusions. 7. References.

1. Framing the Object of Study

The world of journalism is experiencing troubled times, as is normal in transitional moments[3].

Internet has brought about radical changes in the quasi-monopoly of mediation (and of "aggregation") that the press and the rest of the so-called "old media" or "legacy media" boasted of for nearly the entire 20th century.

Disintermediation[4] means, even if it may sound paradoxical, that many other "intermediaries" have entered the scene, devoted principally to "directing traffic" and not to "making cars" (although some of them have begun to focus on creating content). Google, Yahoo, Twitter, Facebook, Apple, YouTube...these are the new metagatekeepers.

Journalists are among those suffering the consequences most directly. The constant disruptions caused by the dizzying pace of technological innovation, the radical reduction of entry barriers to the Internet, the decline of advertising revenue, the drastic readjustments of staff, the loss of readers, and even, in some ways, the loss of credibility and social relevance of a journalism that mainly relies on institutional agendas that do not necessarily prioritize public interest, are key factors.

A recent report for Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism (2011), pondered the magnitude of the change:

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[3] By "transitional" we refer, first, to the changes in the media system caused by technological disruptive innovations like those produced by digital interactive technologies. When the matter is the transition in "hearts and minds" of those who earn their bread communicating, like journalists do, we have to be much more cautious.

[4] "One of the promises of the Internet has been disintermediation, in which intermediaries are eliminated from the distribution system, reducing the length of the distribution channel. The Internet allows customers to buy direct from manufacturers or to eliminate one or more intermediaries. This potentially reduces costs to the consumer, but the functions provided by intermediaries must still be performed, sometimes by the customer." (RAVEN & FLEENOR, 2004: 813)

The monopoly or oligopoly that most metropolitan news organizations enjoyed by the last quarter of the 20th Century meant they could charge high rates to advertisers, even if their audiences had shrunk […] The move to digital delivery has transformed not just the business of news, but also the way news is reported, aggregated, distributed and shared […] If the old formula of "adjacency" -selling ads and commercials alongside content- is fading, what will replace it? There are many possibilities, but few are likely, on their own, to provide the stream of dollars that advertising and circulation once did (Grueskin, Seave & Graves, 2011: 115).

More than six years ago (an eternity in "Internet time"), on May 23rd, 2005, in an article published in The Wall Street Journal titled "How Old Media Can Survive In a New World", it was asserted: "There's no question: Traditional media businesses are struggling. Newspaper publishers, book publishers, movie studios, music companies, ad agencies, television networks -they're all trying to figure out how they fit into a new-media world-. Their old way of doing business isn't as profitable as it used to be, but they haven't found a new way that's as profitable, either." It seems that the search for El Dorado is still ongoing more than five years later.

Besides, there is something that the Internet has brought about too, and perhaps it has not been sufficiently highlighted: the flagrant visibility of the homogeneity of journalistic information due to the increasingly shrinking journalistic sources. This phenomenon is not new, but it is much more visible now and is becoming more acute. A handful of News Agencies, hyperactive PPRR departments of corporations and the constant flow of "news" from institutions of all kinds including governments, are monopolizing the journalistic agenda while the journals are cutting down on expenses by closing their foreign offices, downsizing and multitasking. These circumstances generated a paradoxical effect: The greater the number of messages circulating, the lower the amount of genuine journalistic information.

We have just said that informative homogeneity has become "flagrant. And we mean by that the opportunity everybody has to visualize through the Internet a wide range of news media from all over the world and, thus, to compare the contents they are publishing, while in the pre-Internet media system most of the people didn't usually buy more than one newspaper (if they did), so they weren't necessarily aware of that synchronous uniformity.

On numerous occasions, we have heard the death knell sound for the printing press, tempered by the fact that, up to now, advertising revenue has come essentially from the printed newspapers, while the perception of Internet as a source of advertising revenue for the news media is summed up in a laconic and resigned "trading dollars for dimes". At the same time, against this somber backdrop, the consumption of online news has grown steadily over the last years: "People are spending more time with news than ever before, according to Pew Research Center survey data, but when it comes to the platform of choice, the web is gaining ground rapidly while other sectors are losing. In 2010, digital was the only media sector seeing audience growth" (Pew Research Center, 2011a).

In this scene of paradoxes and constant change, a kind of structural transience and the system of "trial and error" are holding the reins, along with a string of miracle recipes that stubborn reality takes upon itself to ruin: pay walls or no pay walls, mas-

sive audiences or audiences with a high degree of involvement, the "specialize or localize" dilemma so often repeated that at present appears to be beginning to faint, from skepticism and contempt to social media as a panacea....

If we had to summarize in one sentence the complex situation of the news media today, we could do it in quasi-Marxist terms: news media on the Internet have ceased to control the *means of production* and the distribution of their product and have gone on to be "renters." They are the new tenants of Twitter, Google, Facebook, Apple, YouTube, etcetera.

The overwhelming rise of Internet has to a large extent modified the very concept of information and the relationship of audiences with the news media, and requires journalists to adapt to this new situation on different fronts: newsgathering, content creating, genres and narrative forms, the relationship with audiences and interaction with users in a medium that incorporates large-scale feedback as one of its distinctive features and, of course, the "elusive" business of on-line information, all without forgetting the *raison d'être* of journalism, its foundations and its essential link to the proper functioning of a democratic system (we shouldn't forget that the democratic relevance of the journalistic institution goes far beyond the "quality" of the content generated in any given situation, beyond all the criticisms that can be made about this institution[5]: it is a power supposed to control other powers on behalf of the public interest, and if this power disappears democratic balance can not but be broken).

In any case, returning to our subject, the keys to this adaptation to the new digital-interactive environment are still uncertain. All that seems clear is that the old patterns are not working well in this new environment.

When journalists and news media resort to the "more is less" claim in order to barricade themselves against the information overload by trying to put the accent on quality vs. quantity in a tentative to clearly distinguish journalistic information from other kinds of information (it is difficult to discuss that genuine, original, non induced reporting is a scarce good and secrecy hasn't been banned by the Internet, perhaps much of the contrary, but pretending that news media coverage has been characterized by those attributes until the onset of the Internet is much to pretend[6]), this argument is a double edged-sword, because, in part at less, mainly driven by nostalgia. There is no choice but to take for granted that tide of redundancy, publicity, noise and misinformation that rocks the Web, and start defending and propping up journalism *from that premise.*

Having overcome the apocalyptic skepticism that many journalists expressed in the early days of "online journalism," the main risk at present is that the wound might

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[5] In the light of this argument, the statement made by David Cohn, "Journalism will survive its institutions" needs to be seriously nuanced (quoted in BRIGGS, 2010: 5).

[6] Edward BERNAYS wrote in his classic *Propaganda* (1928), about the weight of "induced" news (coming from institutions, lobbies, corporations…) in the newspapers agenda: "Nevertheless, it is only necessary to look under the surface of the newspaper for a hint as to propaganda's authority over public opinion. Page one of the New York Times on the day these paragraphs are written contains eight important news stories. Four of them, or one-half, are propaganda. The casual reader accepts them as accounts of spontaneous happenings. But are they?" (BERNAYS, 2005: 51).

not heal properly, taking for granted that journalism's transition toward the digital environment is complete, or on the way to being so, merely because a journalist has a blog or an account with Twitter or Facebook and chats with users and because the news media have widely joined the participatory hype (essentially as a way to measure audiences or drive audiences back to the news site). But not even in its most pragmatic aspect, as a potential source of revenue from the sale of audiences to advertisers, the management of the participation is, for the moment, producing the results expected from the powerful tools of web analytics and from the hyper-segmentation of audiences that the Internet facilitates.

In this context of transition and adaptation of journalism to the new media environment that the Internet has created, users participation made possible by Web 2.0 and its tools, and which currently finds its maximum expression in social networks, blogs, forums or the so-called "citizen journalism", (should we say the "almost former" citizen journalism since the concept seems to have made its way and being now in theoretical decline or, at least, undergoing its own metamorphosis) has become one more instrument for "capturing" ("creating communities" or "engaging" are also usual denominations) new audiences (one of journalism's pending subjects, since long before the appearance of the Internet), and of course for the distribution and viralization of content.

The last episode of the "reinvention of ties" with audiences in the Internet ecosystem is precisely the (increasing) presence of journalists in social networks, often without a defined strategy for the use of these instruments. The frenzy of social media has caught them by surprise and they have to navigate this new landscape without compass or guide[7].

It seems hardly questionable that, generally speaking "a future news system will be based –at least in part- on an interactive and connective mode of production, where media makers and users will co-exist" (Deuze, 2009: 24). But, the point is whether, in general terms, journalistic specificity is being exploited both as incentive and as a goal for participation. What news media offers to users, on the media site or in social networks, are usually the same formulas of participation used by non-journalistic media, without exploring specific formulas of participation framed in more comprehensive strategies for creating and editing contents, renewing the informative agenda, redeveloping the concept of service applied to journalism or creatively exploiting the Internet's ability to segment audiences.

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[7] The "social media guidelines" that are starting to pop up in the news media environment (AP, BBC, AFP, among others, have published their own social media guidelines), are mostly a repertoire of common sense recommendations to protect the "corporative image" in a "personalized" social media world in which journalists are present in their own name: "All AP journalists are encouraged to have accounts on social networking sites. These sites are now an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. They have become an essential tool for AP reporters to gather news and share links to our published work. […] Employees should be mindful that any personal information they disclose about themselves or colleagues may be linked to the AP's name." Associated Press, Social Media Guidelines for AP Employees.

A well-known example in the participatory field with a certain "sill" in an on-line scenario characterized by a virulent theoretical obsolescence is the above mentioned "citizen journalism" (or "participatory journalism"[8]). It is one of the most successful coinings as an attempt to acknowledge journalistic implications of interactivity. Though, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the spaces supposedly devoted to "citizen journalism" in news media are in most cases subject to a kind of "cordon sanitaire" which prevents a productive convergence with the journalistic process. This ultimately breaks the natural chain of feedback between journalists and citizens. It seems urgent to lay the foundations to develop participatory dynamics adapted to news media, as well as new content that allows for the exploitation of journalistic specificity and the consolidation of the much-needed renewal of the "spectatorial link" to certain audiences, especially young adults. They will be the ones who decide the future of journalism in the most immediate way, and up to now, they have not really been taken into account by journalists (at least as "hard news" consumers). News media, feeling secure for decades in their almost monopolistic mediation, did not bother so much about their audiences. In this sense, Internet has just rendered much more visible and evident a gap that already existed.

2. Social Media & Journalism

In one of the many definitions offered up about social media, we intuit the reasons for the centrality which journalism continues to occupy in this "new" arena: "Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media"(SAFKO & BRAKE, 2009: 6). We may wonder where much of this "shared" information comes from:

> More than 99% of the stories linked to in blogs came from legacy outlets such as newspapers and broadcast networks. And just four: the BBC, CNN, the New York Times and the Washington Post accounted for fully 80% of all links. Twitter, by contrast, was less tied to traditional media. Here half (50%) of the links were to legacy outlets; 40% went to web-only news sources such as Mashable and CNET. The remaining 10% went to wire stories or non-news sources on the Web (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2010b: 3).

In many ways, and although it might seem to be an anachronistic assertion in the midst of the polyphonic mood that has invaded the discussion about the "new media," we continue to find, at the "beginning" of the communicative process, a small number of media/emitters (the "digital divide" seems to apply to social media too) which continue to be the ones being "talked about".

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[8] A classic definition of "participatory journalism" was provided in 2003 by BOWMAN & WILLIS: "The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires" (p. 9). Citizen journalism can be considered, at large, as a conceptual construction trying to explain the implications for the journalistic institution of online massive emission by users.

Among them, news media still play in a significant way, the role that Gabriel Tarde, the French sociologist and one of the first "media theorists", attributed to newspapers at the beginning of the 20th century: "Journals have ended up running and shaping opinion almost at their whim, since they impose on the speeches and talks most of their everyday issues" (Tarde, 1986: 87). The fact remains that, at this moment in time, "mainstream" journalism still provides much of the fuel that powers the viral machinery of social media. Even if we have to consider as social media "influencers" a relatively small amount of Internet-based publications, mainly blogs, with a considerable proportion of publicity-reporting (Tech Crunch, Mashable would serve as examples) or aggregation.

It is hard to deny, nonetheless, that social media are substantially changing the ways in which journalists relate to their audiences. Yet it remains to be seen whether, for example, Twitter will become an innovative tool for reporting, fostering a better knowledge of the public and their journalistic interests or whether eventually the "public relations" look shall prevail. For the time being, Twitter potential for crowdsourcing is beginning to be exploited[9], bearing, inevitably, the burden of the difficult verification of social media sources. But it seems to be more a question of "concept" than one of feasibility to turn this potential into a structural trend, into a strategical tool for reporting[10].

As a matter of fact, currently Twitter seems to be much more a means of recycling and viralizing information than a means of gathering raw material for subsequent reporting[11]. Even if we are getting used to statements of the kind "Twitter talk shows us the future of journalism"[12], the future is everything but clear.

As Jeff Jarvis pointed out in his latest book, *Public Parts* (2011) the expression "digital native" (those born or almost in the "Internet Age") doesn't meant the "native"

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[9] Examples that are usually brought up to prove (evidence) the power of crowdsourcing mainly relate to natural disasters, terrorist attacks or upheavals in non-democratic countries. Rarely crowdsourcing is exemplified through less "spectacular" events taking place in "normalized" democratic societies, even if there are some exceptions to the rule, like the one reported by The Guardian journalist Paul Lewis, concerning the investigation through social media of the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 demonstrations in London in 2009: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/07/ian-tomlinson-g20-death-video

[10] "Nearly a year in, I've come to understand that the real value of the service is listening to a wired collective voice", said David Carr, the New York Times reporter who played the "cicerone" role in the recently released documentary "Page One. Inside de New York Times" (2011): http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/weekinreview/03carr.html

[11] The same conclusion was reached in a recent report from Pew Research Center (2011: 9): "How mainstream media outlets use Twitter. Content analysis shows an evolving relationship", where it was stated that "The vast majority of the postings promoted the organizations' own work and sent users back to their websites".

[12] In Sofia Mirjamsdotter words: "When Twitter talk shows us the future of journalism". Retrieved 2011, Nov 8, from: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/nov/08/twitter-initiative-sex-journalism?CMP=twt_gu

fully understands the implications of the media he is being using so easily, just the same as "analogical natives" used to read the journals and watch TV without being aware or even asking themselves about the origin of the news, how the legacy agenda was setting or many other "metatextual" questions. The point is, and we have had the occasion to realize it several times during our sustained research on digital journalism, that to be a "digital journalist" doesn't necessarily imply an innovative (journalistically speaking) use of social tools like Twitter. We have observed that many "veteran" digital journalists or digitally-savvy professionals can share a rather conservative vision of what journalism is and could be, trying at the same time to keep the distances with those journalists in the "digital rear", who are progressively finding their way through the "wonders of the Web".

In short, and whenever we are talking about "natives", "immigrants"[13] or "laggards", we should ask ourselves some questions, concerning both the "pioneers" and the "new-comers": In which ways is the so praised "art of community" fostering an improved media coverage of events and public issues? Are journalists and the news media taking advantage of these tools or are they allowing themselves to be swept away by the relentless pace of innovation, losing in this race against time some of what are supposed to be their hallmarks (alongside with a significant portion of its workforce and its critical mass)? Are they acting or reacting? Are they simply engaged in the mist of confusion, auguries and multitasking, in an almost heroic struggle for survival in an unfamiliar environment, burdened by tradition[14]? Has "the divide between social media and journalism"[15] been bridged, even if only in a moderate way? Are journalists using Twitter to build new stories, to broaden the agenda[16] by covering new topics of public concern, are they getting closer in an unprejudiced way to those "new audiences"? To do so would

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[13] Both expressions were profusely used by Rupert Murdoch in his speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April 2005: "In short, we have to answer this fundamental question: what do we – a bunch of digital immigrants — need to do to be relevant to the digital natives? […] I do not underestimate the tests before us. We may never become true digital natives, but we can and must begin to assimilate to their culture and way of thinking". Retrieved 2005, April 13, from: http://www.newscorp.com/news/news_247.html

[14] There doesn't seem to lie at the crossroad between the "apocalypticism" underlying the statement "It's time for journalism thinkers to turn to the real task: how to re-empower reporters" (in Dean Stakman's words: http://www.cjr.org/feature/confidence_game.php) as opposed to the theoretical "empowering of the little guy" (i.e. the so-called users or "citizen journalists", the "army of David's" in Glenn Reynolds words) via the "participatory Web". Neither seems to be the main point of the opposition between "institutionalism" (it's the media brand that essentially empowers their reporters on social media) and "personal brand" reporters on Twitter are building a reputation by themselves that could make of them, in a way, a kind of "unipersonal" media etc.)

[15] MIRJAMSDOTTER, S. (2011)

[16] A steadily shrinking "agenda of their own", symptomatic of a media system fueled by the same bits of information from a limited number of press agencies and from all kind of corporate or institutional agendas that have found their ideal partner in the hyper fast pace and in the accelerated obsolescence of the information in the Internet.

require first and foremost to get rid of a lot of a priori assumptions and preconceptions. And perhaps the first of those preconceptions to be thrown away is that people should be *enormously glad* "to have the honor" to pay their visit to the journalistic institution, *through the back door*. Perhaps it is no longer time for the "patronizing formula" that many of the spaces devoted to "citizen journalism" or citizen participation in news media, have, in general, adopted or simulated.

And one further question remains to be answered, a mcluhanian one: does the medium (the Internet medium in this case) change definitively the very nature of the journalistic storytelling (not to talk about the business model) that drove the newspaper business since the beginning of the mass media era? Only time will tell, but perhaps we are not being aware enough of the "software effects of the hardware", in McLuhan's words. Are we systematically *missing the hardware* while talking over and over about the angelic and discerned world of the digital data deluge?

3. How Spanish Journalists are using Twitter

We wanted to find out (and it was the main goal of our survey) how Spanish journalists that usually employ Twitter as a professional tool (we were not interested in their private use) were using it and how they perceive this social platform in itself and by comparison with other social media environments like those provided by Facebook, YouTube or blogs. We wanted to keep Twitter as the background against which the rest of the social media were reflected.

4. Methodology

The survey "Journalism and Social Networks" is a part of a research project about the state of participation in the Spanish "infosphere" carried out by LabàPart (www.laba-part.org), a Research Group of the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid focused on analyzing online participation in different fronts. Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent vie e-mail to a selected sample consisting of 50 journalists coming from different legacy media (Newspapers, radio stations, TV Networks, magazines, News Agencies and media groups… such as *El País*, *ABC*, *El Mundo*, RTVE, Cadena Ser, *La Vanguardia*, La Sexta, *Público*, EFE, PRISA...) and others coming from "online-only" news media (lainformacion.com, cuartopoder.es, 360grados.com...) in April 2011. The survey was available from late April to June 2011 to facilitate its completion[17].

The average age of the respondents was 38, having been working as journalists for around 15 years. The survey was structured and designed on the basis of 169 items, divided into 126 four point Likert scale questions, one multiple choice question and 42 single-answer questions. The test was validated by expert judges: 5 senior journalists with a deep knowledge of social media tools and processes. To calculate reliability we used the test-retest method. We obtained a reliability coefficient (Kappa index) of 0.76. Some of the key findings of the survey are graphically summarized below.

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[17] Some of the results were presented in advance at the IAMCR 2011 Conference in Instanbul. Slight variations in the figures now presented are due to ulterior adjustments in the sample following new results not yet available at that time.

5. Main Findings and Results
5.1. Is Social Media Changing Reporting?

We wanted to know to what extent journalists consider that social media, and more specifically social networks, are on the brink of changing the ways they report by introducing substantive developments at the core of their work, i.e sourcing, agenda setting, audiences, storytelling…
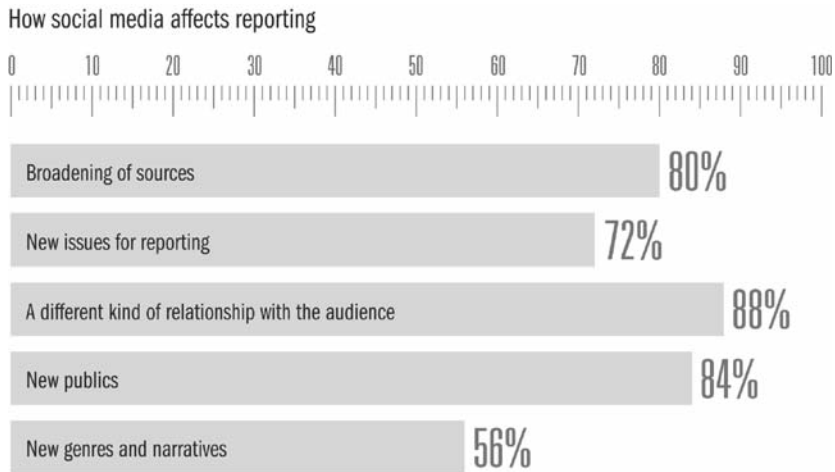
How social media affects reporting

Broadening of sources	80%
New issues for reporting	72%
A different kind of relationship with the audience	88%
New publics	84%
New genres and narratives	56%

Figure 1

If we pay attention to the above mentioned results (Figure 1), we cannot but observe a perhaps excessive optimism[18] about the present significance of social media

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[18] Several studies empirically grounded have concluded that news media sites first and then social media weren't being so far a place for producing new content. Online journalism has been essentially build upon the content of the offline newspapers and of news agencies, institutional and PR information, leaving little room for the emergence of an online genuine and exclusive agenda. A report of the Pew Research Center (2010), "How news happens. A study of the news ecosystem in Baltimore" concluded that "the expanding universe of new media, including blogs, Twitter and local websites -at least in Baltimore- played only a limited role: mainly an alert system and a way to disseminate stories from other places", preventing at the same time against idyllic offline sceneries: "The local papers, however, are also offering less than they once did. For all of 2009, for instance, the Sun produced 32% fewer stories on any subject than it did in 1999, and 73% fewer stories than in 1991, when the company still published an evening and morning paper with competing newsrooms […] As the press scales back on original reporting and dissemination, reproducing other people's work becomes a bigger part of the news media system. Government, at least in this study, initiates most of the news. In the detailed examination of six major storylines, 63% of the stories were initiated by government officials, led first of all by the police. Another 14% came from the press. Interest group figures made up most of the rest". Anyway, trends are there to be reversed and there is nothing that prevents social media or the Internet as a whole for becoming a place for genuine and original reporting, except for the collapse of the news media business itself.

for journalism sourcing and newsgathering. So, we cannot but ask ourselves what exactly do journalists understand by "broaden the sources"? Have the ability to easily contact with sources? Put into practice that ability? Do they mistakenly identify followers, users and sources? As we'll see later on, very few journalists agree to be using social media for investigative reporting, so we have to conclude that engagement and interaction with users must be mainly substantiated in terms of a rather soft (but no less relevant) "phatic" function[19].

What appears to be an almost unanimous feeling among journalists is that social media are setting the grounds for a new kind of relational environment, which will lead to a sort of renewal of the news media bond with audiences. As one of the surveyed journalists pointed out, "social networks came along accompanied by a new generation of users and new forms of behavior and interaction different from those prevailing in the mass media or in the blogs Era". The adherence of journalists to the statement concerning the growth of reporting issues, due presumably to the "inspiration" provided by social media conversation, raises the same question: if social media conversation is driven, to a great extent[20], by topics provided by the "old" legacy media and a handful of blogs mainly powered by publicity, to what extent users genuine interests are allowed to arise and, thus, be tracked by journalists?

5.2. Uses and Gratifications of Twitter

Glossing the well-known & long-haul mass media theory, we can establish the following inventory of uses and gratifications, applied this time not to the "audiences", as it is usually done, but to the "speaker" or emitter, the journalists in this case. "Mainstream emitters" (such as journalists) have been systematically analyzed as influencers, persuaders or even propagandists, but scarcely from the perspective of the gratifications obtained by their position in the information chain. One of the findings of this survey is that Twitter seems to be extremely gratifying for journalists, allowing them to rediscover (even "reinvent") themselves by playing their role in this sort of "emancipatory" social media environment (while, most of the time, backed by their respective "old legacy media"). The "You-Effect"[21] seems to have fully reached the journalists themselves and social media are, to a great extent, responsible for this. The recourse to "narcissism" or the opposition between journalism as an institution and the

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[19] In the sense given by Roman JAKOBSON (1985: 115): "There are messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works, to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention […] This set for contact, or in Malinowski's terms phatic function, may be displayed by a profuse exchange of ritualized formulas, by entire dialogues with the mere purpose of prolonging communication". Or, as Gabriel TARDE (1986: 93) put it, "talk for the sake of talking".

[20] Of course there are exceptions, that confirm the rule

[21] The YOU "Person of the year" with which Time Magazine celebrated the beginning of the "Empowered User Era": "YOU, Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world", (GROSSMAN Lev, Dec 25, 2006). Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html

brand new "personal brand" of journalists in social media may just be explanatory "escape routes" that can only scratch the surface of this change with profound implications. Trying to apply the old "star reporter" paradigm to explain this "gratifying" rediscovery of individualism and the power of personal prescription in journalism could lead us to completely miss the point.

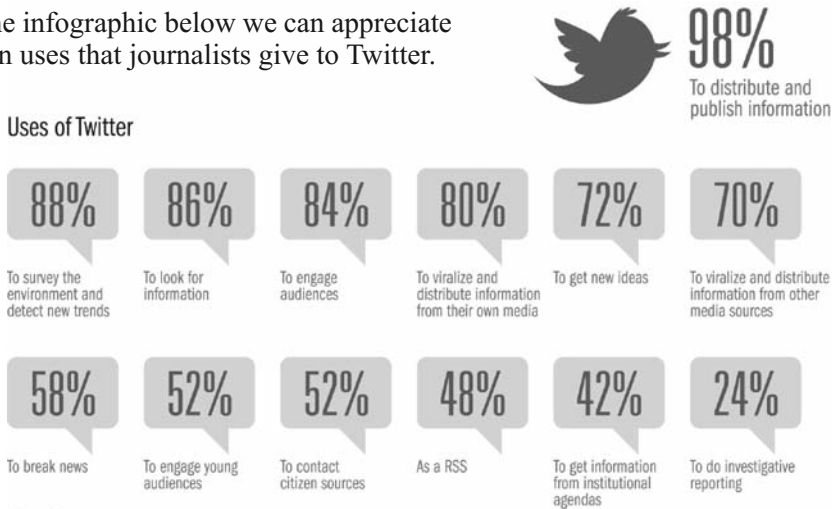In the infographic below we can appreciate the main uses that journalists give to Twitter.

Figure 2

As we can appreciate in the above figure "to distribute and publish information" resumes the main uses of Twitter. "Viral" uses, like distribution of pre-existent information (coming from the media site or the legacy media) or of information provided by other news media are the most common and widespread among journalists, account for 80% and 70% respectively. Vigilance, newsgathering and engagement are sensible issues as well. But acknowledged uses like "looking for information" seems to be highly institutional-related, since only 24% acknowledge using Twitter for investigative reporting.
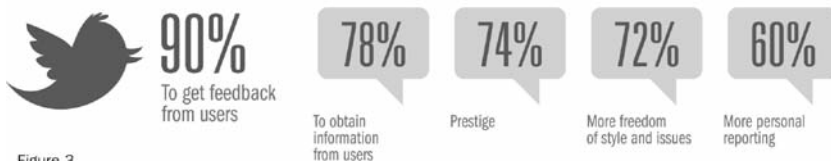

Figure 3

As for the gratifications, to get feedback from users, obtain information and prestige seems to be the most valued Twitter gratifications, as the above figure shows.

It may be instructive to compare the gratifications reported by Twitter, Facebook and blogs in the case of the polled journalists, to see how active users of Twitter value other social media.

As we can see from the graphics below (Figure 4) Twitter is the most rewarding social media when it comes to users feedback, user-generated content and prestige.

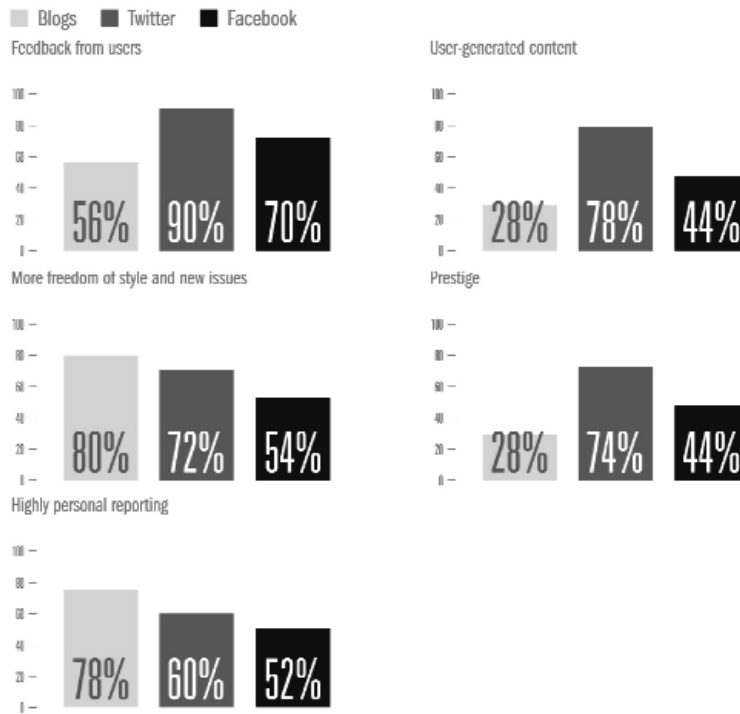Gratifications reported by blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

Blogs   Twitter   Facebook

Feedback from users

Blogs: 56%   Twitter: 90%   Facebook: 70%

User-generated content

Blogs: 28%   Twitter: 78%   Facebook: 44%

More freedom of style and new issues

Blogs: 80%   Twitter: 72%   Facebook: 54%

Prestige

Blogs: 28%   Twitter: 74%   Facebook: 44%

Highly personal reporting

Blogs: 78%   Twitter: 60%   Facebook: 52%

Figure 4

5.3. Portrait of Twitter as a journalistic tool

We have asked the polled journalists to evaluate Twitter, in comparison to the legacy media, according to some provided features, and we found out that the most relevant features of this social media seems to be speed, fugacity and diversity. The less prominent features are thoroughness and reliability, both traditionally considered as the main foundations of journalism.

We also raised the question whether it would be possible to stay "well informed" only via Twitter (Figure 6).

Would it be possible to stay "well informed" using only Twitter?

"No, citizens are not gatekeepers. It's up to journalists to prioritize the information" — 42,86%

"No, not at all, Twitter information is superficial and scattered" — 16,33%

"Yes, and perhaps he (the "user") will be better informed than following an in-depth "monomedia" diet" — 26,53%

"Yes, citizens have sufficient resources to decide which sources are relevant and which are not" — 14,29%

Figure 6

Journalists made numerous remarks to this question, of the type "It depends on the Time Line of the user" or "It's the journalist who has the resources to stay informed via Twitter", or they nuanced the given statements: "Only the users who are able to carefully select their sources. Most of the users would probably feel lost in the gigantic ocean of information and still require that news media offers them an orderly account of the world".

5.4. Newsgathering and Sourcing. How journalists on Twitter use the different social media to seek information and contact sources
Twitter and blogs are the most valued social media for seeking information. The following graphic shows us how journalists ranked the different social media considering their potential for newsgathering.
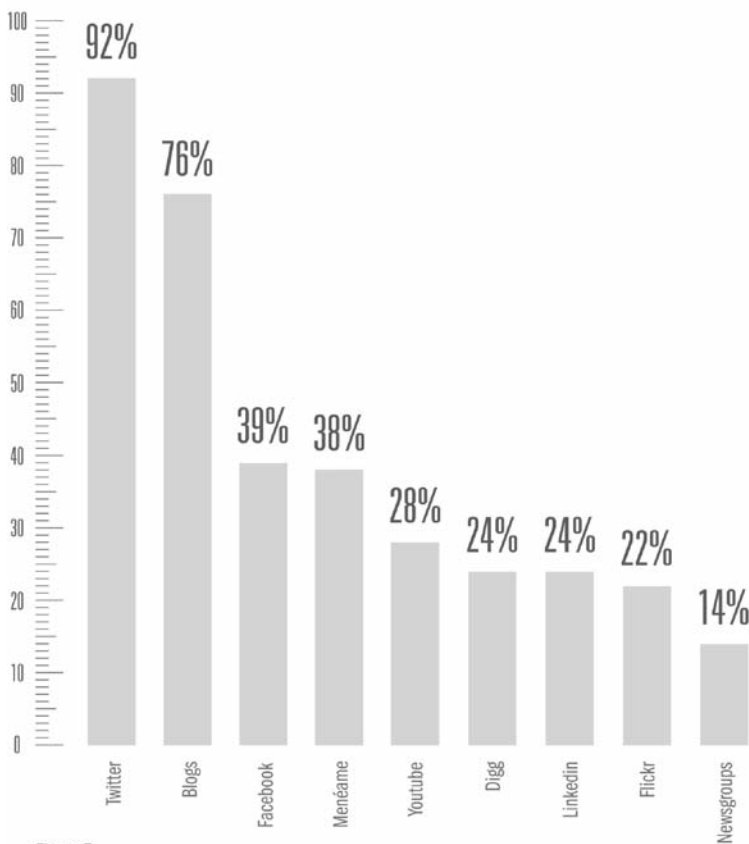

Figure 7

As we can appreciate from the above figures, Twitter is, by far, the highest rated social media when it comes both to look for information or contact sources. Obviously, it is a fact that the survey sample consisting of journalists targeted by the neat use of Twitter will introduce some bias in the consideration given to the different so-

cial media for the above mentioned purposes. But, as we have already said, our interest is to see how the continued use of Twitter relates to the use and consideration of other social media.

5.5. How social media is changing the verifying information process

One of the "workhorses" when it comes to dealing with citizen sources in social networks or other social media is that of verification. As we have seen reliability is not precisely considered one of the main qualities of Twitter. There is a lot of complaining about the lack of credibility and the poor "reliability" of much of the content circulating on the Internet. We asked the journalists how social media are changing the processes for verifying information from online (or offline) sources. The percentage of agreement with the different proposed statements points towards the diversification of the ways for verifying information as the most outstanding feature (Figure 9)

How social media has changed the processes for verifying information (percentage of agreement)

Diversifying them — 84%
Relaxing them — 42%
Requiring more time to verify — 42%
Requiring less time to verify — 38%
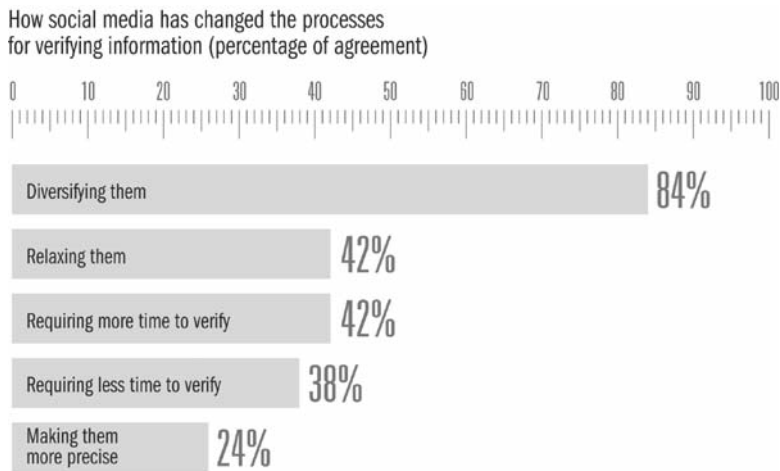Making them more precise — 24%

Figure 9

Then, we seek to know what kind of processes do journalists follow for verifying social media content, and we found that journalists acknowledged using different formulas ranging from contacting with sources to going through users timeline (Figure 10)
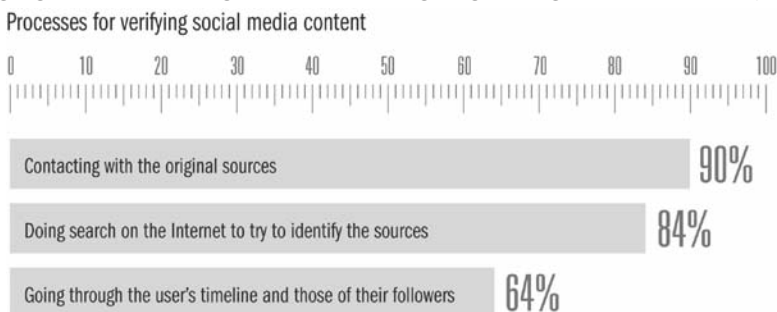

Processes for verifying social media content

Contacting with the original sources — 90%
Doing search on the Internet to try to identify the sources — 84%
Going through the user's timeline and those of their followers — 64%

Figure 10

5.6. The state of social media "training" in Newsrooms

We asked the polled journalists whether they had received or not some training on different tools/issues related to social media. Only 36.73% acknowledged having received such training. 83.3% said they have received some specific formation on social media, 77.78% on SEO, 72.22% on writing for the web, 44.4% on blogs and 22.22% on the treatment of Internet sources.

Apart from some general rules and casual recommendations, most of them resorting to "common sense"[22], an established and formalized social media guidelines pointing to some kind of global social media strategy doesn't seem to exist (see Figure 11). As is common on the Internet, the "neophyte strategy" prevails, according to the structural uncertainty that drives a media whose nature seems to be a perennial "in the making". The answer to the question "Is there in your news media something like a News Style Guide for Social Media or explicit rules for its use?, is pointed towards a direction of widespread "amateurism" or "autodidacticism", that seems to be a universal trend, even if news media are increasingly trying to provide some guidelines, essentially oriented, (footnote 7) to safeguard the reputation of the journalistic institution the journalists are working for.

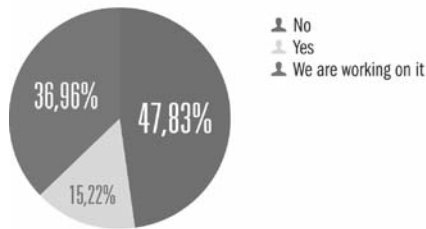Have specific guidelines for the use of social media been established in your media?

- No
- Yes
- We are working on it

36,96%   47,83%   15,22%

Figure 11

Nonetheless, even if no formalized rules exist, it doesn't mean there was no "guidance" at all. This appears to be most logical conclusion if we consider that only the 4.7% of the surveyed agree that performance on social networks is left "to the free will of the journalist."

The number of people working in social media in the newsrooms of the surveyed journalists, ranged between 1 and 4 in 75% of the cases. In the remaining 25%, five people or more were working on the development of social media in newsrooms.

5.7. New professional profiles originated by Twitter and other social media

Professionals reporting on social media and driving participation in newsrooms seem to match a hybrid profile that mixes both senior journalists who had developed their work in the legacy media and "juniors" who began their journalistic carrier in the "digital world": 62.22% of the respondents pointed to this hybrid profile as the one that best described the situation in their media.

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[22] We shouldn't forget that Twitter has already made a few heads roll by now: politicians, journalists, artists...

We were interested in the way journalists perceive the emergence (or not) of new professional profiles in their field, related to the new ways of interacting in social media environments and on the Internet in general. 42.68% of the respondents agreed that new profiles are emerging as journalists join the ranks of social media users. 48.98% consider that, whether it is true that new professionals profiles are popping up, it has less to do with Twitter and social media than with the new informative challenges posed by the web as a whole. Finally, 8.16% of the respondents considered that, in reality, there are no new profiles coming in.

"New profiles" are depicted and figured out according to: new ways of interacting with the public (93.48%), new technological skills (93.48%), new ways of reporting (80.43%), new sources (67.39%) and new issues (56.52%).

5.8. Mobile devices in the Newsrooms

Mobile devices have evolved into multimedia devices with Internet access and a wide range of applications. This evolution has its implications in both newsgathering and reporting. The impact in reporting of mobile devices like smartphones and tablets is bound to be substantial. In 2010, the executive director of Google, Eric Schmidt, stated in an interview that "In five or ten years, most of the news will be consumed in an electronic device or something alike"[23]. 93.88% of the participants in this research use mobile devices to access Internet. 91.84% access Twitter via Smartphones and 42.86% through tablets. Besides, smartphones are used by the 63% of the respondents to register or recording material that will be later used for reporting in Social Media.

5.9. "Participation" That word…

Even if social media is (supposedly) all about participation and "building relationships", participation in news media has been (and still is) a "thorny" issue. If we understand participation in journalism only in a reactive way (something like an "on demand" request of information that suits the interests of news media), it seems clear that we are not talking about a fully accomplished kind of interactivity, that only could be consummated if the "citizen" or user were able to participate not only in a debate settled by others (i.e journalists, institutions, companies…) but in setting the topics for discussion ("setting the agenda"). As Peter LEE-WRIGHT (2009: 79) pointed out while analyzing the impact of New media on the organizational change in the BBC: "The BBC makes much of the invitation to people to have their say and send in their shots, but there is little evidence of a transformed agenda". Words such as "interactivity", "collaboration" or "feedback" remains most of the time in a kind of conceptual "flou", and it happens too when those words are related to journalism[24]. They

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[23] FALLOWS, J. (2010, June). How to save the news. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/06/how-to-save-the-news/8095/

[24] Leaving aside the fact that when we post a comment, information flows not only through explicit or manifest content, but also through the "implicit" information that can be used on web analytics; and precisely this unconscious or semi-unconscious feedback (let us call it "meta-interactivity") is the one that can be monetized and sold or used for influence-seeking strategies.

have become kinds of catchwords to compose catchphrases more than conceptual tools to help clarify a blurred reality. If the final goal is "a world in which vast numbers of strangers contribute directly to something that those journalists alone once controlled" (SINGER et al, 2011: 1), the ways in which this honorable desire could become reality seem, at the moment, quite inscrutable. It's not just the fact that "participation is not enough", glossing Nico CARPENTIER's (2009) words. What "users participation" means, if we talk about the journalistic institution is, with little doubt, a concept doomed to reinvention.

When we asked the surveyed journalist if the news media they are working for were actively involving users in the "gatekeeping process", only 17.78% answered "Yes usually". 64.58% considered that their media were trying to use interactivity in a creative way (journalistically speaking) but they still have a long road ahead.

We asked journalists in which way the different participatory "spaces", both in their own news media site and in social networks, contributed to reporting or to having a better knowledge of the public, or if it was all about analytics and the sale of audiences to advertisers.

As we can appreciate in the graphic below (Figure 12) journalists value social media over news sites when it comes to getting a better knowledge of audience's preferences or contributing to broadening the media agenda.
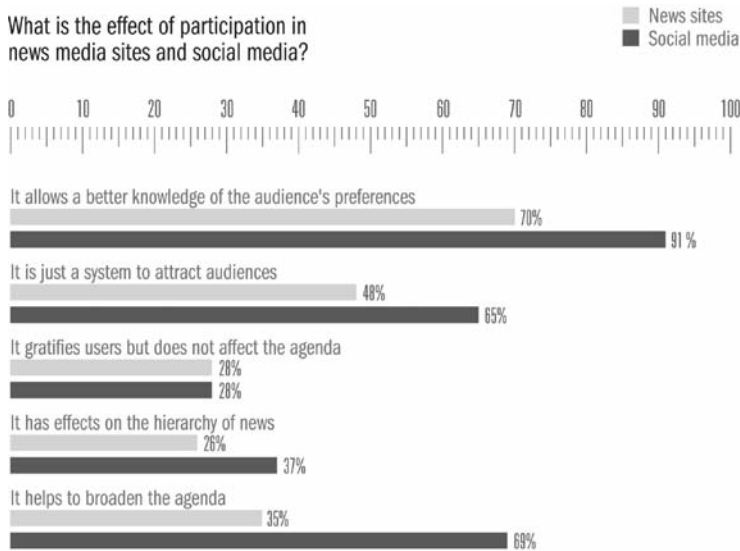

Figure 12

5.10. How should news media foster users participation?

Much has been written about users participation and "community building" as key factors for a successful online communication. In a profession such as journalism, legitimated by its role of "public service" and "democratic watchdog", this should be, a fortiori, a central theme. How to encourage citizen participation and, at the same

time, make feedback and interactivity productive and helpful to improve the quality of information in news media? That seems to be a central question and the answer hasn't been found so far. The level of commitment of the surveyed journalists to different proposals aiming at improving participation in news media suggest that allowing the users to leave comments and giving the public the opportunity to collaborate with journalists are the most preferred options (Figure 13)
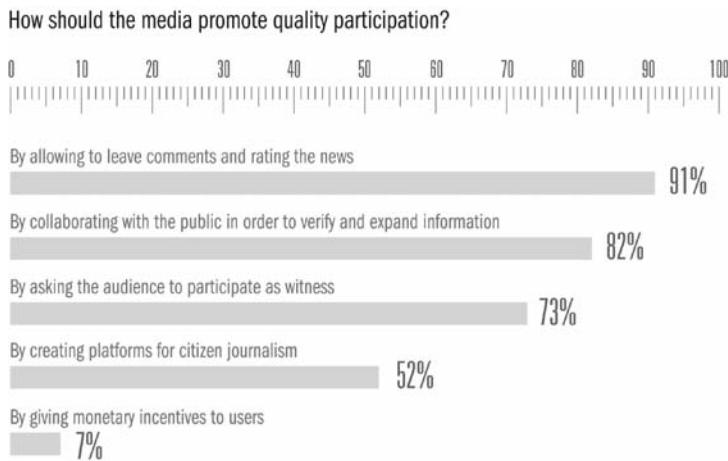

Figure 13

As it can be appreciated from the above figures, the option that gets less support is the one that suggests "paying" the users for their providing quality content. The "free culture" mood seems to have completely permeated the "collective imaginary", including journalists' who, on more than one occasion, have claimed for pay walls and criticized the idea of the gratuitousness of the information. We believe it is worth mentioning that journalists have not suggested any new proposal in this sense in the suggestions section of the survey.

5.11. Mainstream media in social media environments
After so many words poured out on the subject of disintermediation, we were curious about the opinion of journalists on this matter, specially because in social media environments they act *as another user*[25]*,* although their impact and influence may be greater. 54.35% of the journalists surveyed consider that they still are very influential mediators, only now they have to share this position with other newcomers to the "infosphere": bloggers, new digitally based publications, social media influencers...

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[25] "We should respect the fact that users on site X are not our users: they are not bound by the same Terms of Use and House Rules as we apply on BBC Online. Attempts to enforce our standard community rules on third party sites may lead to resentment, criticism and in some cases outright hostility to the BBC's presence." In "Social Networking, Microblogs and other Third Party Websites: BBC Use". (BBC, 2011)

The so-called "personal brand" that is also starting to yield a lot of talk, is related to the fact that journalists still report and emit as institutional journalists in social media environments but they figure as individuals, listed with their own name, building their "online reputation" with their *own repertoire* of followers. In this sense only 8.70% of the respondents consider the "empowerment" of the "I-journalist" as the reverse of the "loss of influence" of the legacy media, by agreeing with the statement that "Legacy media have lost much of their influence but their journalists have gained influence as individuals, in revenge"[26]. A small percent, 6.25%, agreed with the statement that "Disintermediation has led to the loss of much of the capacity of legacy media influence"[27]. Only 6.25% of the surveyed consider that the viralizing activity

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[26] The Spanish journalist Ramon Trecet told the following anecdote: "I was back to the office of a renowned Editor. We talked about the qualities of his columnists. And I said to him, "Look at the top of my Twitter account. My name is 31.000, that is the number of followers I have today. What I am worth today is that figure coming out right there. So, Mr. So-and-so? Yes, He is wonderful, he writes so well... Ok, but he has 2.000 followers!"": Gómez, J. & de la Calle, F. (2011) Ramón Trecet: Un periodista vale hoy su número de followers. *Jot Down. Contemporany culture mag.* Retrieved from http://www.jotdown.es/2011/10/ramon-trecet-un-periodista-vale-hoy-su-numero-de-followers/

[27] A different point of view is expressed by the multimedia manager of a news agency we have interviewed, apparently much more worried by the side effects of disintermediation: "For us (social media) is a source, but each time that source is more important and also, from my point of view, I think it can get some serious competition for content providers to the extent that many sources previously used agencies to raise awareness … for example a photo of the birth of their child, report on the death of a relative, of a renowned writer … Such sources, institutional, corporate or even personal, used agencies like this one to reach the mainstream media of Spain or of the rest of the world. Now, we are finding that soccer players make statements via Twitter, companies disclose their results through social networks, i.e, they are starting to compete against news agencies. And that is happening to a great extent on social networks, which are taking over us, the content providers, the role of intermediaries between the source and our customer (i.e, the legacy media). Now sources provide directly to the public the information they want to reach the mainstream media or the users. To summarize, in a very graphic way, they don't need us, content providers, any more. If they want to communicate something to the world they can do it via their Twitter or Facebook account. Let's take the example of Piqué (a Fútbol Club Barcelona soccer player), who was afraid of someone distributing or selling his picture with Shakira on her Birthday. To prevent the picture from being sold, he published it on Twitter, making the photography available worldwide. Not long ago, the picture would have come to us, news agencies, first, and we would have disseminated it among our clients (e.g, the mainstream media) and our clients would have spread it among their readers". On the same wave length, Kevin Bakhurst, Deputy Head of the BBC Newsroom, acknowledged that "some of our role (the role of traditional media) is probably gone. Will we be "First with the Breaking News"? Probably not in many cases. Someone on Twitter will be. Will we have the first still of a hero or victim? Facebook probably will have it. Will we get the first video out of Siria or Burma? YouTube will almost certainly have it posted first, although we'll often be one of the first to verify if it's genuine (or not)". Bakhurst, K. (2011, 9 Sep). How has social media changed the way newsrooms work? *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2011/09/ibc_in_amsterdam.html

of users in social media is one of some relevance in empowering journalism by helping to spread many of their contents through social media.

We asked the journalists if they consider that we are living times of information overload. 40.43% agreed with the statement that, actually, there is too much information and the receiver is unable to process it. 31.91% considered that the true intoxicating factors are noise and redundancy disguised as "information", and 27.66% of the respondents considered that even if some risk of information overload exists, the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, since the public can access more information than ever before.

6. Conclusions

Journalists use Twitter to distribute and viralize pre-existing content much more than to create new content using social media crowdsourcing and newsgathering opportunities. Twitter is scarcely used by journalists for doing investigative reporting.

Twitter seems to be a highly gratifying medium for journalists using it on a regular basis. This rather "inflationary" perception may be the cause of the excessive optimism and the high expectations placed on Twitter, especially concerning sourcing, newsgathering and engagement. But there still is a deep contradiction in this "high value panorama", since two of the main ingredients of what has been considered the "added value" *par excellence* of journalistic information, thoroughness and reliability, are low rated in the case of Twitter. Bias, superficiality and spectacularization get also relatively high rates on Twitter when compared with legacy media.

Twitter seems to be, compared to blogs or Facebook, the social media that provides the most gratifying kind of feedback with users, according to the surveyed journalists.

Twitter provides a kind of "comfortable freedom" for those journalists working on it. They have found a place to build their own personal brand, while, in most cases, they are still protected and backed by the legacy media they work for. A new dialectic between news media, journalists and users is being set up.

As befits an environment dominated by a structural unpredictability, journalism practice on social media is not driven by exhaustive guidelines or established strategies but, once more, by the "trial & error paradigm" only tempered by soft guidelines that seek to protect the reputation of the legacy media the journalists work for.

Mobile devices (both smartphones and tablets) are widely used by the surveyed journalists to access social media and upload content, to a point that they seem to be their natural "environments". The almost ubiquitous Internet access allowed by these devices is transforming not only the consumption but also the production of information into a "delocalized" and continuum process.

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