TOWARDS NEO-JOURNALISM?
REDEFINING, EXTENDING OR RECONFIGURING A PROFESSION

SPECIAL ISSUE ON ONLINE JOURNALISM, PART 2

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The present issue on online journalism, divided in two volumes (39/40), is a compilation of papers presented at the International Conference on Online Journalism, held in Brussels on the 3rd and 4th October 2012, and co-organized by the University of Louvain (UCL) and the University of Namur. The conference allowed professionals and researchers working on online journalism from a variety of disciplines (linguistics, psychology, ethnology, sociology and communication sciences) to share research experiences and findings concerned with the redefinition, extension, and reconfiguration of the journalistic profession.

The conference was guided by an attempt to answer the question whether 21st century journalism can be called *neo-journalism.* More precisely, the question concerned whether the prefix *neo*, as used in artistic movements, would be appropriate to qualify today's journalism as a practice that calls for a return to previous journalistic forms and values in force before the Web 2.0. In this sense, when applied to journalism, *neo* would refer to the revival of earlier ways of conceiving and doing journalism, that is, it would imply reinventing an existing topic. A scope of this issue is to understand how observing this reinvention process and how understand it?

Furthermore, neo-journalism may include a participatory ideal of empowerment, like the neo-television described by Casetti and

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Odin (Murhula *et al.*, 2007, p. 86). Today, participatory technologies (blogs, micro-blogging, social networks) allow a series of actors that do not belong to the traditional journalistic field to publish or comment information, bringing new challenges for journalists. Should we consider this phenomenon as an extension or a redefinition of the profession?

We have organized the articles of this second issue on online journalism as follows. Section 1 includes investigations concerned with the products of the news making process and how journalistic outputs are made available to news consumers. Section 2 comprises studies investigating professional discourses about online journalistic practices. Finally, Section 3 includes investigations focusing on news consumers in order to shed light on how new kinds of media interactivity have fostered a growing participation of the public in the process of content production, reception, and evaluation. We have ordered the articles in this way because for us this sequencing was most compelling, developing as it does from the production of news to its release into the public world, and finally to the public reception and evaluation of journalistic contents. We are of course aware that readers may choose to dip in and out of the collection in a different sequence, depending on their interests and preoccupations.

1. The products resulting of the news making process

The study of Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and Brigitte Sebbah analyzes news content production and journalistic writing practices with *cover it live* tools recently adapted by French information websites. The authors use the case of the covering of the "DSK affair" by *lemonde. fr* to investigate the media's relation with readers and sources, and the information provided about the event, questioning the traditional role of the journalist as a gatekeeper due to the participatory nature and the workflow logic of the medium.

Emmanuel Marty and Franck Rebillard analyze the frames that guide meaning construction in journalistic discourses. They study the description of a specific 'discursive moment' on 209 information websites, namely the resurgence of violence in the Libyan conflict. By means of *Iramuteq* software, they identify the presence of word co-occurrences indicating discursive frames (geopolitical stakes, United Nations negotiations, etc.). This processing allows them to identify the

predominance of frames in the different media and to find out about the discursive identity of the websites.

Stefania Spina presents a comparison of the use of selected linguistic features in online and print Italian news, advancing the hypothesis that Internet and communication technologies have introduced important transformations in the writing, organization, and delivery of news. Her study shows that those transformations are indeed observable at all levels of linguistic analysis.

Justine Simon explores articles published just after the election of the 44th President of United States, Barack Obama, on November 4th 2008 in three French print and online newspapers and three pure players to examine whether there is a real difference of enunciative contract between the two supports. Her hypothesis is that a keen observation of the journalists' enunciative positions with regard to the represented opinions enlightens the interpretation of those contracts.

Marjut Johansson investigates French digital press videos composed of several video quotations with regard to the representation of different opinions on a given topic. She shows that digital press videos can be defined as a new, hybrid genre, as quotations from different media sources are edited into a new media story with novel characteristics that she describes and illustrates within the frame of her work.

2. Professional discourses about news products

Juliette De Maeyer examines journalistic meta-discourses about the nature and role of hyperlinks in online journalism. From a socio-historical perspective on the emergence of such discourses within English-speaking organizations specialized in online journalism, she keeps track of the controversies aroused by different scholar and professional views of hyperlinks, and analyzes the impact of those views on journalists' conceptions of journalism in the digital era. She shows that hyperlinks are not only concrete objects belonging to the everyday practice of online journalism, but also formal objects whose meanings and pragmatic implications go beyond the field of journalistic practices.

Valérie Croissant and Annelise Touboul analyze the emergence of data journalism as a 'discursive category'. Through a semio-discursive approach they aim at revealing the presuppositions and strategies impacting data-journalistic discourses and realizations. They show that datajournalism is mostly oriented towards an ideal of the social

usefulness of journalism. Without aiming at redefining journalism as such, datajournalism appears to propose a way to resist to economic and managerial pressures by placing a bet on quality, the time necessary to conduct deep investigation, and cooperation between different actors (designers, journalists, and the public).

3. Consumption and reception of news products

Tom Bakker, Damian Trilling, and Luzia Helfer investigate the impact of source and setting on news credibility. Through a survey-embedded experiment based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, they examine the extent to which argument credibility of news articles (e.g., experts, lay citizens), the kind of sources that are cited (e.g., partisan, non-partisan), the type of news outlet, and the style of information gathering impinge upon people's perceptions of media credibility. Their results show that arguments provided by experts are judged more credible than those of lay citizens, and that the way information was gathered (for instance, from *Twitter* or from face-to-face interviews) do affect people's judgments of media credibility. They conclude by highlighting the implications of situational factors for people's perceptions of media credibility.

Omar Rosas analyzes the French-speaking Belgian public's reception of, and trust in, online news media. By drawing on a qualitative research carried out in 2009 and 2010, he shows that online newsreaders have different levels of engagement with online media, hold divided conceptions of media credibility and trust, and negotiate different levels of media-related assurance while searching for information. He also examines four heuristics that newsreaders draw on in order to decide whether or not they trust online news, namely transparency, accountability, reputation, and recommendation. He concludes by analyzing the extent to which these heuristics affect newsreaders' attributions of trustworthiness to, and engagement with, online journalists and news media.

This volume covers articles from different disciplines including communication studies, sociology, linguistics, and psychology presented in French or English by scholars from different cultural backgrounds. Most of the presented investigations are qualitative in nature and a few others adopt a quantitative approach. The multidisciplinary and multilingual approach of the research topic allows for deeper insight

into the vast field of information communication and, hopefully, a better understanding of the online journalism universe.

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