



Universidade do Minho

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade

What *is* journalism and what only *looks like* it?

Re-defining concepts, roles and rules in the wide field of communication (*)

Joaquim Fidalgo

jfdalgo@ics.uminho.pt

Abstract

In today's public information landscape, it seems to be increasingly difficult to draw a clear line between what is and what is not journalism (even if it appears as such). Under this cover, a lot of different practices are being developed in the wide field of communication, raising complex questions about what specifically defines journalism – whether it is carried out by formally recognized professionals or media companies, or by other kind of individuals and groups who now have easy access to public communication instruments (Internet sites, weblogs...) and commit themselves to gather, handle and diffuse some kind of information in the public sphere.

* Paper accepted and presented at the *IAMCR 2007 World Congress (Professional Education Section)* in Paris, France, 23-27 July, 2007.

We can say that professional journalists (and their institutional contexts) no longer have the monopoly of this activity – of this public service, we should say. Still, many new actors trying to enter this field – or to mix with it – very often don't seem to respect some of the basic standards and ethical demands in which journalism is grounded, although they tend to use its technical tools and usual forms and models.

In this paper, we present a case study of a Portuguese quality daily newspaper in which these questions were discussed (namely through the involvement of its ombudsman), following the publication of a piece of work presented just as a journalistic piece, but actually ordered and paid by an external advertiser. We argue for the need of a kind of *back to basics* effort, meaning specifically *back to ethics*, under the assumption that, particularly in our digital environment, the line defining the boundaries of journalism (and, therefore, distinguishing journalism from other forms of public communication) is, above all, not a matter of “who”, “what” and “where” things are done, but rather a matter of “how”, “why” and “what for” you do them. That is to say, only information gathered, designed and published according to the ethical principles and procedures of journalistic professionalism, genuinely aiming to serve the public interest and the need for the citizens to make sense of the world they live in, is really trustworthy information – which means that it is not an activity driven by some hidden, commercial, private interests of various kinds.

We argue, furthermore, that these different kinds of information and communication in the public sphere should always be clearly identified and identifiable by the media users. In fact, this seems to be important in order to preserve the specific value and role that journalism can claim (and play) in contemporary societies, as well as to protect it from a sort of dilution in the broader and vague field of public communication activities and jobs.

Key words: Journalism, media ethics, information, communication, public interest.

* * * * *

1. The technological changes...

News and reporting in the public sphere are no longer an activity exclusively in the hands of journalists and of the media companies where most of them still work. Technological developments – specially those brought by the enormous expansion of Internet, and recently of the broad band – made it very easy, very fast and very cheap for anyone to access to ‘home made’ mass-communication media and to gather, handle and diffuse information (writings, sounds, pictures, movies) on a world-wide scale. Moreover, the technical knowledge or skills required both for the journalistic craft and for the self-edition mechanisms are nowadays accessible almost to anyone at any place. The most known example of this is the overwhelming dissemination of weblogs – “the most foolproof format yet invented”, to use Singer’s expression (Singer, 2006a: 9) –, a device much simpler to set up than a simple website and which is being used by many people also to spread information (news, reporting, interviews, comments, and so on) through the public space. And this seems to lead us to a situation where

[s]taffs of traditional media outlets such as *The New York Times* or *CNN* share web space with an enormous variety of producers of online-only content that can legitimately claim to be forms of journalism (Singer, 2003: 147).

The first question to be asked is what, if any, are the differences between journalism (as we traditionally used to define) and these new ways of working with news. The second question is how you can recognize the differences. The third question, finally, is if it is important to make this distinction – and why, and for whom.

‘Old’ media themselves are, somehow, taking part in this new trend, either because it is a defensive way to deal with the new possibilities of public communication (‘if you can’t beat them, join them’), or because it actually helps to improve an interactive relationship with the audience they want to seduce, to please and to keep. Increasing experiences of participation under the name of the so-called (more or less properly) ‘citizen-journalism’ can be seen everywhere, for example with newspapers or TV channels asking people to use their cell-phones to take pictures when journalists are not there (because they couldn’t get there on time or because they simply are not allowed to be there...) and to send them to go public. Besides that, the success of new kinds of online newspapers such as the Korean ‘*OhmyNews*’, entirely made with average people’s contributions instead of professional journalists’ work¹ – shows very impressively how things are changing in this domain.

¹ This newspaper defines itself as “the pioneer in citizen participatory media” (cf. <http://english.ohmynews.com/index.asp>).

Is this good or bad? It can be one or the other – or perhaps a little of both, depending on how people deal with it.

An optimistic perspective will look at these new possibilities as a fruitful **opportunity** to foster citizens' involvement in the production and diffusion of information that really meets their interests and gives meaning to their real lives, thus bringing a contribution to 'open' the media system and to fight the "fortress" where journalists, as a professional group, sometimes tend to close themselves (Nordenstreng, 1995; 1997).

On the contrary, a pessimistic point of view will see here no more than a **threat** to the dissemination of trustworthy information in the public sphere – information selected, gathered, handled and edited according to the basic standards and values claimed (at least in theory) by professional journalism, that is to say, according to the ideals of freedom of expression but also of social responsibility, according to technically competent procedures but also to ethical principles and norms.

In any case, it seems rather clear that "the new technologies challenge the traditional understanding of journalism" (Joseph, 2005: 587-588), and this new environment is not without consequences:

When taking the profession-centred approach to journalism, it is bloggers who undermine the professional model, and when taking the society-centred approach of journalism, it is the Internet that questions journalism, with its offer of a higher rate of participation in the public debate (Joseph, 2005: 588).

We could say that, from different points of view regarding journalism (both from the outside and from the inside, from the journalists' self-perceptions), the very definition of the profession and of the 'legitimate' professionals is nowadays more and more an issue for debate.

2. ...and the economic pressures

But the important changes in the contemporary media landscape are not produced by the technological developments alone. The economic problems felt by most media companies (especially those aiming for quality in news and information), facing some decrease in public's demand and a growing competition for audiences, put an added pressure on the newsrooms. This leads here and there to more market-oriented news, rather than information in the public interest, and to some blurring of the borderlines that traditionally used to separate the editorial area from the commercial department. This means that the decision to run or not to run a story, to invest or not to invest in a subject, is sometimes made not

according to news values or to journalistic criteria, but according to the possibility of convincing an advertiser to sponsor it – or, inversely, according to the fear of losing an important advertiser with some vested interest in the subject to be reported.

This economic pressure on the media business has also some consequences on the behaviour of advertisers themselves, eager to turn such weaknesses into their profit. Advertising has always tried to come closer to the information areas (and often to mix and confuse itself with them), in order to seem more ‘neutral’ and, therefore, to get more credit from the audience. Pieces of advertisement very often ‘invade’ the newspaper areas typically reserved to news, seeking to be caught by the reader’s eyes in an unavoidable way. Product-placement, especially in TV, is another well-spread strategy developed by the advertising industry to announce different sorts of goods in a subtle, hidden (and usually forbidden) form. Given the increasing competition in the media industry, it becomes more and more difficult to say ‘no’ to these business proposals. And when a direct competitor of yours accepts some of these dubious forms of advertising, more or less mixed with the editorial areas, it turns naturally harder for you to refuse them. Advertisers know that better than anyone.

As Hallin & Mancini recall, “the media are in a very important sense a political institution, but they are also (increasingly often) businesses and are shaped by many economic factors” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 47). And the strong development of the advertising industry is one of the most influential, as those authors underline, arguing that “commercialization” actually “has transformed both print and electronic media in Europe”, acting as “the most powerful force for homogenization of media systems” (*ibid.*: 273). And this is not without consequences either:

[T]he process of commercialization, though it may accelerate the differentiation of the media from political institutions, tends to subordinate them to the logic of the market and of the corporate struggle for market share, often diminishing the autonomy of journalists and other communication professionals. In this sense the media become less differentiated from economic institutions as they become more differentiated from political institutions (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 302).

Again, this seems to raise the question of where and how to draw the line separating journalistically-driven information from commercially-driven information, under the assumption that the first one can be trusted as something the newspaper decided autonomously to report on its own merits and public interest, while the second one can probably be trusted as well, but as a non-neutral and non-independent piece of advertisement, intended to promote a product or to persuade potential customers, rather than to inform them.

If we accept that “the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001: 17), then

this distinction can be of some importance. As well as the bare distinction between a ‘customer’ and a ‘citizen’.

3. Towards a new paradigm?

Either because of the technological developments and changes, or because of the increasing economic pressures in the media industry, the journalistic field seems to be, nowadays, challenged by a diversity of new actors (both individual and collective), new diffusion forms, new distribution channels and new criteria of public legitimization. Besides that, new possibilities of monitoring and publicly scrutinizing the activity of traditional media on a regular basis are bringing to the light, more than ever, their contradictions, biases and dependencies, suggesting that some dubious practices are often carried out (and justified) under the protective name of journalism.

The economic pressures and the supreme logic of the market, forcing to a strong need to get more audience, have a great responsibility in the fact that the media discourses themselves feel increasingly tempted by practices that used to be found in popular, tabloid newspapers, but not in the so-called quality newspapers. A trend towards ‘light’ information, towards ‘infotainment’, towards sensationalism and the hyper-valuation of ‘fait-divers’, together with a mixture of news and commercial promotions, can be seen in a vast number of newspapers, radio stations and TV channels, to a point that some authors now talk about “communication journalism” as a category clearly differentiated from the previous “information journalism” (Brin, Charron & Bonville, 2004). And there is some place to discuss whether this is a normal change *inside the journalistic paradigm* – “communication journalism” would be only a “new episode”, among two or three others, in the history of journalism – or, on the contrary, we are faced to a “paradigmatic crisis” (*ibid.*: 19), and eventually to an entirely *new paradigm*, where journalism, as we tended to define it, doesn’t find its place any longer. And the journalists themselves could be, in this context, somehow blurred among the vast amount of ‘media workers’ or ‘communicators’, finding it more difficult to explain what actually makes their job professionally different and socially most valuable.

This new environment that challenges media (and, more specifically, journalism) in multiple levels – the technological, the economical, the one of the professional practices – can be analyzed in general terms, but also in very concrete situations occurring in the newsroom. In order to discuss it in more detail, we’ve drawn our attention to a recent case in a Portuguese ‘quality newspaper’ where these questions somehow converged.

4. A case study

In March 2006, in the context of the coverage of the Lisbon-Dakar Rally (a famous international sports competition), the Portuguese newspaper *Público* – the leading quality daily in the country – published some rather controversial pieces of ‘reporting’. Everyday, next to the areas where a journalistic account of the rally was given (mostly using news agencies material, because the newspaper hadn’t any reporter of his own on the spot), a peculiar column was published: it was written in a journalistic style, it was signed by someone who was actually ‘covering’ the rally, it was presented exactly with the same lettering and by-line that the newspaper uses for its information stories, but it was also surrounded by a piece of advertisement (*see picture at the end, p. 16*). In very small letters, at the end of the story, we could read that the author of this writings was accompanying the rally “*by invitation of Precision*” – a trade mark for car spare-parts and mechanics repair services. So, the author of this ‘journalistic’ piece of work, written in a feature style (focused mainly on stories with ‘human interest’ among the pilots and the spectators rather than on the sportive details of the rally), was not a journalist paid by the newspaper. Actually, at the moment she was not a journalist at all, although she had already worked as an editor for a women’s magazine some years before, as well as a TV presenter and host in talk-shows. Above all, she was (and is) a well-known, fashionable young woman.

This odd situation called a reader’s attention and led him to question the newspaper’s ombudsman. He wanted to know if that column was the result of an “editorial choice made by the newspaper” or, on the contrary, if it was a piece of advertisement paid by the sponsor so visibly identified on the top and on the bottom of the writing. He also asked if the author was paid to write the daily article, and by whom was she paid. Finally, he questioned if such a practice could eventually be found in different newspaper’s sections, other than the sports pages.

The newspaper’s executive editor confirmed that that peculiar column had been offered to *Público* by the industrial company *Precision*, “in the context of an exchange of advertising space with a financial benefit for the newspaper” (*apud Araújo, 2006: 15*). *Público* didn’t pay for that column and her author didn’t belong to the newspaper’s staff, he added. He also argued that the column presentation and *mise-en-page* was somehow different from other columns or news pieces, and the newspaper had been careful enough as to stress that the author was travelling in the rally “*by invitation of Precision*” – something which could even be considered as “redundant” (*ibidem*), since that was, in his personal opinion, “fairly clear” for any reader. Finally, as far as the column’s content was concerned, the

executive editor explained that those writings corresponded to a “diary of a different kind, written in a style closer to the journalistic one, but sort of integrated in the space of a paid advertisement”. According to him, those texts were to be seen as “complementary” of the journalistic ones, “serving their sponsor’s interests but also bringing some added-value” to the coverage of the rally offered daily by the newspaper to its readers (*ibidem*).

These arguments didn’t quite convince the newspaper’s ombudsman, who wrote in his weekly column, under the title “**Promiscuidades**” [‘**Promiscuities**’], that the situation, in spite of the explanations given by the executive editor, had not avoided the “confusion between information and commercial propaganda” (Araújo, 2006a: 15). Insisting on the obligation for the newspaper to respect, in every circumstance, the principle of separation between information and advertising, he added that the writing should have been signalled as “PUBLICIDADE” [advertising], in order to prevent any sort of “promiscuities”. That is the rule followed by the newspaper, according to its Style Book – and it is, furthermore, a legal prescription for all the Portuguese media.

A week later, the ombudsman came upon the subject again, because the manager of the company ‘Precision’ (the advertiser, actually) had decided to enter the debate too. He strongly criticized the title “**Promiscuities**” chosen by the ombudsman to his column and insisted that everything in the story was completely transparent for the readers. In his opinion, the column daily signed by that young woman who travelled with the rally, “in spite of being paid by a commercial company” and not by the newspaper, was undoubtedly “a journalistic feature” [“*uma crónica*”] and not at all “an advertising text” (*apud* Araújo, 2006b: 11). That’s why he rejected the ombudsman’s suggestion that the column should have been signalled as “PUBLICIDADE” [advertising], because it wasn’t really (in terms of content) a piece of advertising; so, it would be a wrong sign to the readers and would confuse them in terms of what is information and what is advertising. More: this manager clearly said that his company “would not have been interested in this project” if the newspaper had decided to identify the writings as “PUBLICIDADE” [advertising], because, in his opinion, those columns about the Lisbon-Dakar Rally and its daily happenings “are not, and never intended to be, commercial propaganda” (*ibidem*). And he finally made some ironic comments about the “interesting question” of the need to clearly separate information and advertising, suggesting that much less transparent situations than this one are to be found in nowadays newspapers, and nobody seems to point the finger against them.

Replying to these arguments, the newspaper’s ombudsman reasserted his previous judgement – the title of his column, now, was “**Re-Promiscuidades**” [‘**Re-Promiscuities**’] –

and insisted that the column in question could not be regarded as journalism, but as a piece of commercial advertising, and therefore should have been clearly signalled as “PUBLICIDADE”. “The fact that the text was paid by a commercial company doesn’t allow it to be considered a journalistic *product*’, Araújo wrote (*ibidem*, emphasis by the author). He also contested that the advertising company had produced a piece of reportage or a journalistic feature, since ‘*Precision*’ “is not a media company” and the column’s author “no more works as a professional journalist”. And he concluded: “Journalism serves to inform. Advertising and commercial propaganda serve to persuade. The mixture of these two genres is called promiscuity” (*ibidem*).

5. Discussion

Going back to the dilemmas pointed above, we can distinguish here different questions and levels of discussion. Nonetheless, they all seem to converge to the same point: what is necessary for a given text to be considered ‘journalism’? What ‘*is*’ actually journalism, and what only ‘*looks like*’ it? What really matters is **where** the text is published? Or **what** the text is about? Or **who** puts his/her name at the end of it? Or **how** his/her author elaborated that text? Or **why** he/she did it? Or **what for**?...

1. Let’s look first at the ‘**where**’ question.

This column was published in a well-known newspaper, owned by a media company committed with journalism above any suspicion. And it was presented in the news pages (not in the advertising ones, nor even in the op-ed ones), side by side to other news texts. Is it enough to classify it as a piece of journalism? Not necessarily, although it looks like it at first sight – even in terms of graphic presentation, ‘*mise-en-page*’, lettering and by-line. The fact that the column is totally surrounded by a commercial announcement is troublesome; however, we know that it is not rare, in Portuguese newspapers at least, to find some commercial reference (e.g. from a particular sponsor who paid for the journalist’s trip) at the bottom of news stories, written by professional journalists who were assigned by the newspaper itself. On the other hand, we could easily agree that not everything that appears on the pages of a newspaper is, by itself, journalism. And, nowadays, journalistic information is to be found in various ‘new’ media other than the traditional ones. So, this argument alone (‘where’) doesn’t seem to solve the problem.

2. Secondly, let’s look at the ‘**who**’ question.

The column’s author is not – according to the Portuguese legal framework – a professional journalist, although she has actually worked as such in the past. Besides that, she

didn't belong to the newspaper's staff and her work was assigned and paid by a commercial company (the same who paid for the advertisement that surrounded the column). Is it enough to deny the story the label of 'journalism'? Apparently, yes. Still, we can easily agree that, in today's mass-communication landscape, it is increasingly common to find examples of public information (either in traditional media, or especially in new online initiatives such as websites and weblogs) that can clearly be considered as 'journalistic' although not written or diffused by journalists. On the other hand, it is not too difficult to find (again in 'old' media, but especially in 'new' media) some writings signed by professional journalists, or presented in a journalistic context, that can hardly be regarded as 'journalism', since they have more to do with commercial interests than with a genuine quest for independent information in the public interest. So, this argument ('who') isn't either, by itself, the decisive answer to our question.

3. Let's look now at the '**what**' issue.

If we only take into consideration the bare content of the column and its writing style, it could easily be classified as a journalistic piece of work. Actually, it was deliberately intended to be so, as the advertiser explained to the newspaper's ombudsman: a person with journalistic experience was hired for the task, and she was asked to make a journalistic report of the daily life at the rally, explicitly avoiding any direct or indirect reference to the commercial mark that was paying for the job (from the advertiser's point of view, it wouldn't be very clever to do otherwise...). Even if we ask the author about her work, she most probably will insist that she was writing a journalistic column, following journalistic principles, standards and techniques. So, regarding the text alone, without any consideration of its controversial context, we can agree that it really '*looks like*' journalism. The question is if journalism '*is*' only the text or, on the contrary, if what comes 'before' and 'after' the text can also be of great relevance to define it as such. And this leads us to the '*how*', the '*why*' and the '*what for*' issues – decisive issues to ascertain if a piece of public information can be trusted in the terms claimed by the journalistic profession.

4. The '**how**' question.

This issue, in the particular case of the columns being discussed here, is not very controversial: written by a former journalist (to whom the journalistic techniques and standards, as well as its *ethos*, are certainly very familiar), the texts show no evidence of breaking sensitive professional norms and values in the process of gathering and presenting information to the public. Moreover, the author was asked to explicitly report and write about the rally participants in a journalistic way (exactly '*as if*' it were journalism), avoiding any

mention to the firm who had hired her and was paying for her work. Yet, this issue – concerning specifically the *process* of doing things, rather than the final outcome, the *product* – seems to be one of the most sensitive and polemic ones when we try to differentiate forms of public communication.

More than the technical procedures (which are more and more accessible to anyone, making it very easy to copycat journalistic forms and genres, often with the intent of spreading some confusion among the readers²), it is the overall procedures of gathering information, of contacting sources and keeping them confidential, of listening to all parts involved in a conflict, etc., that is often in question. That is to say, the question of following ethical principles and standards associated to this profession and worked out for decades in the process of its social legitimization. Situations have already occurred when, for example, bloggers having access to information from a company or an institution didn't respect an embargo for a couple of hours, in spite of being explicitly asked to, because they don't feel bound to those particular commitments as the professional journalists are. And disrespecting some of the basic procedures of journalism (which the readers take for granted, since they always have been told to do so, as a central part of the 'social contract' that legitimizes the particular role of journalism in a democratic society) risks to undermine a trustworthy relationship between the public and some information that actually is not, but '*pretends to be*' – or just '*pretends to look like*' – journalistic.

This question of '*how*' things are done (rather than '*who*' does '*what*' things and '*where*') arguably seems to be, more and more, the touchstone that helps us to identify and differentiate what is, and what is not, journalism. Closely bound to this '*how*' question, two others of the same kind give an obligatory contribution to acknowledge if some piece of information is, undoubtedly, information you can trust, in journalistic terms: '*why*' you did it, and '*what for*'.

4. The '**why**' and '**what for**' questions.

Why did that ex-journalist, fashionable young lady, go to the desert and report (in a journalistic form) about the day-by-day happenings and anecdotes of the Lisbon-Dakar Rally? She did it because she was paid to do so – and to do so in such a manner – by an industrial

² A very peculiar form of 'reporting' is to be found in some Portuguese publications under the bizarre name of '*publireportagem*', a concept that seems contradictory in its own terms, since it mixes 'publicidade' (commercial advertising) with 'reportagem' (one of the most characteristic and noble genres of journalism). It explicitly intends to confuse the reader's eyes, for example when promoting a new hotel or a vacation resort, deliberately using the journalistic way of doing and presenting things but with an obvious commercial purpose. The author can, for example, take the text of a press-release prepared by the promoter of that particular business and turn it into an 'interview', with the 'reporter' writing both the questions and the answers, '*as if*' the promoter had been actually interviewed about a matter of public and journalistic interest...

firm (not a media one), interested in advertising its image, its products and its services during an outstanding sportive event. What for? Clearly, with a commercial purpose: to promote the brand '*Precision*' and its business. The use of a journalistic report, presented together with an announcement, was the strategic mechanism chosen by the firm to give the newspapers' readers a nice and sympathetic kind of 'gift', thus falling into their good grace and, at the same time, avoiding the 'crude' image of a salesman just trying to sell his products. The obvious purpose of this commercial strategy was to advertise '*as if*' it was not really a piece of advertisement, and to show it '*as if*' it was only a journalistic message. The hidden intention is, of course, to gain the credibility usually attached to the journalistic texts, by mixing that text with others of the same kind, and to overcome the comparative lack of reliability sometimes associated to persuasive, strictly commercial messages. Furthermore, this particular kind of rally coverage was not made for its own sake, because of some public interest, but clearly with a business purpose (even in a subtle, indirect way).

Why did the newspaper accept that proposal and publish those materials in that form? Apparently, just because it was good business as well. With no costs at all, the newspaper 'had' someone of its own covering the rally – or, at least, it would *look like it* in the readers' eyes – and so, besides saving money in the editorial department, it would even make some extra profit in the commercial department. Nevertheless, the editors accepted to publish in the news pages, '*as if*' it were a journalistic work made by a professional reporter, some texts that obviously didn't follow the usual steps of the internal proceedings, namely the editorial supervising and control. In this sense, they themselves disregarded their editorial responsibilities and dealt with it as if it were a text from an advertising section (where only the advertiser is responsible, not the editor). In short, the newspaper sold news space for an advertising initiative.

As for the purpose of this trade, we stress once again that the newspaper's choice was not primarily driven by reasons of public interest, decided according to journalistic criteria, but by reasons of commercial interest, decided according to business criteria. If it were not like that – that is to say, if the newspaper considered the Lisbon-Dakar Rally an important event to be covered by a reporter –, of course the task would be assigned to a member of its own staff and his/her work would be handled according to the general procedures of the editorial area. It could be sponsored by a commercial company, of course, but the direct responsibility for the journalistic work would be, in any case, totally assumed by the editor – not by the sponsor.

6. Conclusion

As Singer has written, in the new environment of ‘our networked world’, where ‘millions of people gather, organize and disseminate timely information every hour of everyday’, and where ‘virtually any bit of information, misinformation or disinformation is just a google search away for the online user’, the very concept of journalist is challenged, since ‘while all journalists still publish information, not all publishers of information are journalists’ (Singer, 2006a: 2-3). This idea – although developed in a different context, the one of the online diffusion of public information – meets our argument that the decisive borderline separating journalistic from non-journalistic practices and writings seems to be no longer placed in ‘*who*’ is responsible for them (or what professional title he/she carries).

The fact that some texts like the ones in question here are published in newspapers, and in the news area, doesn’t seem either to grant them automatically the classification of ‘journalism’. In an information environment where “public-relations messages of all sorts are routinely offered as news” (Singer, 2006: 11), often because of economic dependencies or commercial arrangements, the medium where a text is published or the subject it deals with are not, apparently, the good criteria to decide if it is ‘journalism’ – that is to say, trustworthy information in terms of its supposed public interest, and information selected, gathered, handled, edited and published according to the basic ethical values and norms of the journalistic profession.

The very definition of the profession deserves, therefore, more reflection and debate. As we wrote at the beginning of this paper, ‘traditional’ journalism is strongly challenged particularly by the new technological environment (Internet, online, broadband, general access to the public sphere...) and by the economical pressures derived from an increasingly competitive communication market (scarcity of advertising, proliferation of public-relations services and communication agencies, etc.). All this somehow risks reducing the space of autonomy either for individual journalists or for media companies, while it opens the domain of public information to many new actors, with the most different purposes and backgrounds. The fact is that, as Heinonen said, “the ‘loci of journalism as a practice’ are moving”, and “these ‘new loci should be embraced’” (*apud* Josephi, 2005: 588). Nevertheless, re-defining concepts, roles and rules in this vast field of communication and of communicators is not always an easy task, since the old categories we used to rely upon probably do not give us enough answers to the present challenges. As Singer puts it,

“Access to sources of information is open to anyone. Anyone can disseminate his or her views instantly and globally with a few keystrokes. (...) That makes everyone a publisher, but it does not make every publisher a journalist. Professional journalists increasingly will be defined by the degree to which they choose to adhere to the normative goals of their professional culture” (Singer, 2006: 13).

According to these thoughts, Singer adds that “journalism’s strongest claim to professional status may lie on the normative dimension” (not on the cognitive or evaluative ones), which implies providing an unquestionable public service, and doing that according to strict, clear, transparent “norms of conduct, standards of practice and ethical guidelines” (Singer, 2003: 144-145).

This is said in response to the doubts and confusions raised by a lot of different information practices which can be found nowadays in the online environment, but we suggest that it can also apply to the commercially-driven initiatives (as the one we analysed here) that increasingly seduce the media, given their economic weaknesses.

Summing up, again with Singer’s words:

“As the nature of the media environment changes, the definition and self-conceptualization of the journalist must shift from one rooted in procedure – the professional process of making information available – to one rooted in ethics – the professional norms guiding determinations about which information has true societal value” (Singer, 2006: 15)

The most important characteristic of this information with societal value is that it is **information that people can trust**. And you hardly can trust information that is not **transparent**, either in what concerns its motivations (‘why?’) or its ethical procedures (‘how?’), or its more or less assumed purposes (‘what for?’).

References

- ARAÚJO, Rui (2006a), “Promiscuidades”, *PÚBLICO*, ed. 15th January, pp. 15-16.
- ARAÚJO, Rui (2006b), “Re-promiscuidades”, *PÚBLICO*, ed. 22nd January, p. 11.
- BRIN, Colette & CHARRON, Jean & BONVILLE, Jean de (dir.) (2004). *Nature et transformation du journalisme – Théories et recherches empiriques*. Quebec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval.
- HALLIN, Daniel & MANCINI, Paolo (2004). *Comparing Media Systems - Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- JOSEPHI, Beate (2005). “Journalism in the global age – Between normative and empirical”, *Gazette*, vol. 67 (6), pp. 575-590.

- KOVACH, Bill & ROSENSTIEL, Tom (2001). *The Elements of Journalism – What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York : Three Rivers Press.
- NORDENSTRENG, Kaarle (1997). “The citizen moves from the audience to the arena”, *Nordicom Review*, n° 18 (2), pp. 13-20.
- NORDENSTRENG, Kaarle (1995). “The journalist: A walking paradox”, in LEE, Philip (ed.) (1995), *The Democratization of Communication*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 114-129.
- SINGER, Jane (2006a). “The socially responsible existentialist – A normative emphasis for journalists in a new media environment”, *Journalism Studies*, vol. 7, n° 1, pp. 2-18.
- SINGER, Jane (2006b). “Partnership and public service: normative issues for journalists in converged newsrooms”, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, n° 21 (1), pp. 30-53.
- SINGER, Jane (2003). “Who are these guys? – The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism”, *Journalism*, vol. 4 (2), pp. 139-163.

* * * * *

(Picture)

14 RESPOSTA | **KALI** | **ISBOA-DAKAN 2006**

O OUTRO LADO DO DAKAR

4

Da 1.ª edição de 2006

Maria João Pinheiro Figueira

Ca técnica a melhoradora Sainz (direita), depois de uma vitória no Dakar que valeu o título de campeão do mundo, ganhou a terceira posição no Dakar. O piloto espanhol venceu o primeiro dia da corrida em La Oued, no deserto saariano, e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor. Mas não se desanimou e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor. Mas não se desanimou e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor.

Terceira vitória e nova liderança para Sainz

Espanhol continua a ganhar, num triunfo marcado pela terceira vitória de Miguel Ángel Suárez e pela liderança de Sainz. Com a vitória, o piloto espanhol venceu o primeiro dia da corrida em La Oued, no deserto saariano, e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor. Mas não se desanimou e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor.

Uma vitória em La Oued, no deserto saariano, e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor. Mas não se desanimou e conseguiu chegar ao fim da etapa com um problema no motor.

PASSATEMPO PRECISION

ESTE ANO, O DAKAR NÃO LHE SAI DA CABECA.

Ligue para 750 305 610* e habilite-se a ganhar um capacete do Miguel Barco e muitas mais prendas.

CLASSIFICAÇÃO

1.º Miguel Ángel Suárez (Espanha)

2.º Miguel Ángel Suárez (Espanha)

3.º Miguel Ángel Suárez (Espanha)