COMUNICACION Y SOCIEDAD

Participation in Al Jazeera English: integrating witnesses and users to broaden the reach of the news[1]

La participación en Al Jazeera English: integrar testigos y usuarios para aumentar el alcance de la información

SAMUEL NEGREDO BRUNA

snegredo@alumni.unav.es

Profesor de Edición de Medios Digitales/ Lecturer in Online Media Editing. Universidad de Navarra. Facultad de Comunicación. 31008 Pamplona.

ABSTRACT: Eyewitness accounts, expert knowledge, photos, audio, video and data sent by the public give full meaning to interactivity. Al Jazeera English relies on the audience to broaden its news coverage, its programme schedule, and even its reach. This study delves into the technological, professional and editorial aspects of participation on the channel: submission platforms are described; fifty Twitter profiles of journalists are analyzed, as well as the form and function of 600 tweets, and inputs broadcast on The Stream and Listening Post are classified according to their format and origin.

RESUMEN: *Los testimonios, el conocimiento experto, el material gráfico y audiovisual y los datos aportados por el público dotan de pleno sentido a la interactividad. Al Jazeera English se apoya en la audiencia para ampliar su cobertura informativa, su programación, e incluso el alcance de su señal. Este estudio profundiza en los aspectos tecnológicos, profesionales y editoriales de la participación en el canal: se describen plataformas de envío de informaciones; se analizan cincuenta perfiles de periodistas en Twitter, así como la morfología y la función de 600 tweets, y se clasifican, según su formato y origen, aportaciones emitidas en los programas The Stream y Listening Post.*

Keywords: online journalism, Al Jazeera English, participation, user-generated content, convergence

Palabras clave: ciberperiodismo, Al Jazeera English, participación, contenido generado por los usuarios, convergencia

1. *Introduction*

This paper aims to analyse several advanced formulas for the participation of the audience in multimedia news information through the Internet, studying at least one of the aspects in which the work of journalists changes, the technologies that make the process possible and how these contributions are integrated in the editorial output. For that purpose, the case of the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera English (AJE) is analysed in depth. Since its beginnings, this channel based its strategy on the Internet in order to broaden its reach, both in news coverage as well as distribution.

This piece of research explores qualitative and quantitative aspects of the Twitter activity of journalists working for the aforementioned international broadcasting organisation; it describes the different uses of the website for audience input into the newsgathering process, and it examines two shows broadcast by Al Jazeera English, the production of which would be inconceivable without Internet-mediated participation.

In order to start, it is necessary to define just a handful terms, since there are recent reviews of the state of research about user-generated content (UGC), such as that of García de Torres[2]. Following Hermida and Thurman's definition, this study focuses on a process by means of which the audience has the opportunity to participate in professionally edited publications or to collaborate with them[3].

Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger considered participative journalism as that in which newsgathering, production and distribution involve professionals and amateurs, journalists and citizens, users and producers, in equal terms. This would originate identity conflicts in the big traditional media and, for that reason, this kind of journalism was, at first, more frequently found outside them[4]. In this sense, they wrote that convergence culture was a result of the goodwill of both parts. In a theoretical level, Domingo *et al.* connected the emergence of participative journalism with the partial

---

[2] Cfr. GARCÍA DE TORRES, Elvira, "Contenido generado por el usuario: aproximación al estado de la cuestión", *El Profesional de la Información*, vol. XIX, nº 6, November-December 2010, pp. 585-594.
[3] Cfr. HERMIDA, Alfred, THURMAN, Neil: "A Clash of Cultures. The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at British newspaper websites", *Journalism Practice*, vol. II, nº 3, 2008, pp. 343-356.
[4] Cfr. DEUZE, Mark, BRUNS, Axel, NEUBERGER, Christoph, "Preparing for an Age of Participatory News", *Journalism Practice*, vol. I, nº 3, 2007, pp. 322-338.

uninstitutionalisation of the communication process[5].

Before the blooming of social networks and multimedia journalism, Pavlik already defended that convergence has a deep influence in the traditionally conflictive relations among journalists, sources and audiences, with the possibility to make understanding and collaboration easier[6].

1.1. *Participation in the different types of journalism convergence*

The increase of user participation in news production can be explained through the different kinds of journalism convergence that can be identified, accordingly to its nature as a multidimensional process[7]. More precisely, we will explore below the repercussions of convergence within journalism open to participation, in its technological, managerial, professional and content-related aspects.

The *technological* dimension is usually placed at the beginning of all changes, as a trigger and necessary condition; digitisation makes content exchange easier since platforms converge and recording and distribution equipment becomes cheaper up to a point of massive popularisation. Recording newsworthy pictures and sounds, sending them to professional media organisations or publishing them directly is becoming easier and easier.

Regarding the *managerial* dimension, it is worth mentioning the creation of departments and units around interaction with the audience, irrespective of the final platform of gathered materials, with either editorial or commercial functions or both. In fact, social networks open opportunities for cross-promotion, but also for ambitious multiplatform editorial campaigns that aim to draw the public's attention, in order to foster their involvement and engagement with the organisation.

The *professional* aspect of convergence entails journalists becoming multi-purpose, either on a media level, working with several output platforms in mind, or on a functional level, accumulating several tasks that were once assigned to different, specialized members of staff. In the first case, as contents, formats and publishing times may differ, journalists themselves are the common factor in managing participation from one platform to another one. Nowadays, it is easier to contact a particular journalist directly, and her public profile becomes a way to follow and access her work. Regarding the functional level, it is all about adding or, rather, expanding the task of interacting with audiences as part of the daily activities of the journalist.

Finally, convergence in *content* is mainly understood as part of the result of the aforementioned technological, managerial and professional changes. In the field of our study, we talk about the integration of the users' narrative in a journalistic discourse. This kind of enrichment has been traditionally included under the wide concept of interactivity, which, according to Axel Bruns, only exists truly in a medium if it allows real exchanges among users, beyond actions with the interface[8].

We will consider for this study that an integrated newsroom –regarding participation– incorporates the Internet as part of its newsgathering, production and distribution routines, broadening its range of regular news sources, and bringing professionals and users of journalism content closer together.

---

[5] Cfr. DOMINGO, David *et al.*, "Participatory Journalism Practices in the Media and Beyond. An international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers", *Journalism Practice*, vol. II, nº 3, 2008, pp. 326-342.

[6] Cfr. PAVLIK, John V., "A Sea-Change in Journalism. Convergence, Journalists, their Audiences and Sources", *Convergence*, vol. X, nº 4, 2004, pp. 21-29.

[7] Cfr. SALAVERRÍA, Ramón, GARCÍA AVILÉS, José A., MASIP, Pere, "Concepto de converegncia periodística", en LÓPEZ GARCÍA, Xosé, PEREIRA, Xosé (eds.), *Convergencia digital. Reconfiguración de los medios de comunicación en España*, USC, Santiago de Compostela, 2010, pp. 41-64.

[8] Cfr. BRUNS, Axel, *Gatewatching: collaborative online news production*, Peter Lang, New York, 2005, p. 120.

1.2. *The professional debate on the relations among journalists, audiences and media organisations*

There are several levels of intensity in the integration of the audience in the news cycle. In an extreme model, Bruns talks about the step, from publishing news information, to evaluating and *publicising* newsworthy content available on the Internet, in order to offer multiperspectival information coverage[9]. Instead of gatekeeping, he defends the *gatewatching* model, "the observation of the output gates of news publications and other sources, in order to identify important material as soon as it becomes available"[10]. The user that gets involved in a website, both as consumer and producer without distinction, becomes a *produser*[11].

Emily Bell claims a strong alliance with "the publishing public" and encourages understanding it in depth, in order to secure the sustainability of the professional journalism through a "more visible and closer relation with the community that supports it"[12]. Bell argues that amongst the audience there are experts and eyewitnesses of the events; therefore content has to be distributed in a more efficient way in order to reach all audiences and to turn casual users into regular ones.

The media-audience relationship is set up in terms of human capital, as a long-term investment. Excluding users from online journalism production is, according to Paul Bradshaw, not only democratically deficient, but also commercially inefficient[13]. This author points out that those that discredit user-generated content and question its quality should first reconsider the effort they have put into attracting good contributors and keeping loyal and active users.

There are more concepts that have been contributed to this debate that are worth mentioning. The editor of *The Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger, pleads for the mutualisation of the links between news organisations and their readers, sources and advertisers; at the same time, he considers that this involvement opens up new ways to obtain income through an advertising-based business model, without excluding subscription services[14].

During a transition period, almost all conversations about the news and all audience contributions to their narrative were happening outside story pages, in a decontextualised way[15], not only because users chose to do it that way, but also because, except for some chatrooms, forums and the like, which were hosted by the site but detached from the main news area, it was almost impossible to post meaningful contributions to news websites, either for technological or strategical reasons, up until they opened comment threads for stories and adopted the blog format and an external online presence.

Some leading organisations have created, even if just temporarily, specific profiles in order to facilitate the assimilation of these new functions by each and every journalist, generally as a mere step in the process of newsroom convergence, or more specifically, in the definitive rapprochement of print reporters to online journalism. Virginia P. Alonso, editor of *20minutos.es*, declared in an interview that in her newsroom they intend "that all journalists forge little by little their own relation with their users, even though there is a figure that centralizes and channels the main

---

[9] BRUNS, Axel, *Ibíd.*, p. 2.

[10] BRUNS, Axel, *Ibíd.*, p. 17.

[11] BRUNS, Axel, *Ibíd.*, p. 23.

[12] BELL, Emily, "A new compact between press and public", *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/feb/25/digital-media-social-media, 25-2-2011, retrieved February 2011

[13] BRADSHAW, Paul, "Is Ice Cream Strawberry? Journalism's invisible history – and conflicted future", inaugural lecture, City University London, http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2011/03/03/is-ice-cream-strawberry-inaugural-lecture-part-4-human-capital/, 3-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

[14] RUSBRIDGER, Alan, "The splintering of the fourth estate", *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/19/open-collaborative-future-journalism, 19-11-2010, retrieved December 2010.

[15] BRUNS, Axel, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

interaction with them"[16]. The functions of the person in charge of social media in *El País* relate to all the phases of the news process: access to sources, communication with the audience, narrative construction and distribution, especially in real time, according to the story announcing her designation[17].

If managing participation adds value to news content, British journalist Dave Lee argues that freelance contributors should take care of those interactions themselves and, therefore, they should also charge for that "engagement time"[18], because a general moderator can't take part in a specialised debate with the same expertise as the author of the story would do. Therefore, this professional dimension also comprises the resistence to integration, including those related to claims about labour rights and the honourable exercise of the profession.

1.3. *Al Jazeera English: interest and relevance of the case study*

Al Jazeera English (AJE) is an international continuous news channel, featuring in-depth programmes and documentaries, which was launched in November 2006 with the financial support of the government of Qatar. Its operational base is located in Doha, the capital city of the emirate. The first contact of Al Jazeera with the English-speaking audience dates back to 2003, when an English version of the website was set up. The launch of the channel was announced in 2004, with the signing of widely experienced managers from the BBC[19].

Its development was marked by a series of audacious initiatives when it came to involving the audience in newsgathering and production, and even in distribution, which could be summarized in making it easier to send newsworthy tips and pictures online, starting and keeping contact with reliable citizen sources on the field, creating programmes around audience contributions, and developing a distribution strategy that counts on the community of users in order to broaden the reach of Al Jazeera and its availability in platforms with barriers to entry.

The new media area of Al Jazeera English comprised three departments at the time of writing: Internet, mobile and social media. Esra Dogramaci, a member of the latter, gave an idea of the increasing importance of interaction with the audience: the social media team grew from 8 people in 2010 to 20 employees which were able to work in nine different languages in the first half of 2011[20]. This new media macrosection is integrated in the newsroom of the television channel in Doha, which at the same time shares the space with the TV set where the news programmes are broadcast from[21]. BBC News established the first specific department to process all user-generated content, the UGC hub, back in 2005, although right from the beginning there was a participation section[22] in the website. Across the Atlantic, CNN started its iReport initiative back in August 2006.

---

[16] VARGAS, Esther, "Internet exige al periodista hablar de tú a tú con sus lectores", entrevista con Virginia P. Alonso, *Clases de Periodismo*, http://www.clasesdeperiodismo.com/2010/08/23/internet-exige-al-periodista-hablar-de-tu-a-tu-con-sus-lectores/, 23-8-2010, retrieved March 2011.

[17] "Ana Alfageme, responsable de medios sociales de EL PAÍS", *El País*, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/Pantallas/Ana/Alfageme/responsable/medios/sociales/PAIS/elpepurtv/20100620elpepirt v_1/Tes, 20-6-2010, retrieved December 2010

[18] LEE, Dave, "Journalists deserve to be paid for engaging in comments", *Dave Lee, multimedia journalist*, http://davelee.me/journalists-deserve-to-be-paid-to-engage-in-comments/, 24-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

[19] Cfr. RUSHING, Josh, ELDER, Sean, Mission Al Jazeera. Palgrave Macmillan, Gordonsville, 2007, p. 195.

[20] Cfr. DOGRAMACI, Esra, "Does mainstream media own the news?", author notes, panel at the BBC Social Media Summit, BBC College of Journalism, London, 20-5-2011.

[21] Cfr. ALI, Rafat, "Inside Al Jazeera: The Hottest News Network On The Planet", *Business Insider*, http://www.businessinsider.com/al-jazeera-tour-2011-3, 14-3-2011, retrieved May 2011.

[22] Cfr. NGUYEN, An, GARCÍA, Alberto, "When Public Service Is the Name of the Game: The Evolution of British and Spanish Public Service Broadcasters in Online Journalism", en BURNS, Maureen; BRÜGGER, Niels (eds.), *Histories of Public Service Broadcasters on the Web*. Peter Lang, New York, 2012, pp. 1-16.

AJE's mission, according to Dogramaci, is to give a voice to the voiceless, especially in the global South; and it does not intend to set an agenda, but to amplify undercovered ones[23]. That way, the channel tries to sort out the difficulties to cover the news from certain countries: when the correspondent offices are attacked and journalists are arrested on the ground, citizens become the eyes and the ears of this news organisation.

AJE's website was recognized in September 2011 with an Online Journalism Award from the Online News Association (ONA), in the breaking news category among the large websites, for its coverage of the revolution of Egypt, which was "informed by people affected by what was happening"[24].

While the riots were spreading through North Africa in the beginning of 2011, the governments of Algeria, Morocco, Iraq and Bahrein prevented this organisation's journalists from working on the area, as the director general of the Al Jazeera television network wrote; the same was happening in Tunisia under the Ben Ali regime[25]. However, with the opening to participation and the sensible use of verified information gathered through social media, the images of what was going on in the streets reached an audience of 100 million viewers.

Social media platforms are built on trust, according to Esra Dogramaci. Al Jazeera gave Flip cameras to young people in order to cover the areas to which journalists didn't have any access and therefore, they had to earn the loyalty of those contributors while making sure they were aware of the risks, due to the different journalism culture that exists in the Middle East[26]. Shawn Powers stressed the novelty brought by the 2010 Iraq election: for the first time, it was possible to plan the coverage in a way that the traditional deployment of professional resources was combined with collaborative journalism initiatives, which made it possible to document the process from inside[27]. The same author warned about the risk that such contributions might become propaganda, since activists may take the opportunity to spread their own perspective of the facts.

Regarding verification, Dogramaci pointed out that, in a department which used to receive 400 videos per day, they had to plan ahead and create communities, with members of civil society such as non-governmental organisations or bloggers; for instance, out of 45 active individuals whom the AJE social media team contacted in Iran, they were finally turning only to half a dozen which appeared to be really representative and reliable.

From the very beginning, Al Jazeera English distanced itself from the strategy of such competitors as CNN International or BBC World News with regards to the availability of its live stream and opted for offering it in as many platforms as possible, ranging from its website to external apps and social media. In early 2011, at the moment of the fall of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, 71% of the traffic to the Al Jazeera website was coming from social media[28].

The organisation took advantage of the interest generated by its coverage of the revolutions in the Arab world in order to launch the campaign #DemandAlJazeera, promoting a Twitter hashtag for viewers in the United States to ask for the inclusion of Al Jazeera English in the lineup of their multichannel television providers, which had been mostly reluctant to do so because of the negative views of the general US public towards the Al Jazeera channel network[29]. At the same time, the

---

[23] Cfr. DOGRAMACI, Esra, *op. cit.*

[24] "CBC Palestinian interactive site nabs online awards", *CBC News*, http://www.cbc.ca/news/story/2011/09/25/ona-exile-prize.html, 25-9-2011, retrieved September 2011

[25] KHANFAR, Wadah, "US viewers seek Al Jazeera coverage", *Al Jazeera English*, http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/02/201121121041735816.html, 1-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

[26] Cfr. DOGRAMACI, Esra, *op. cit.*

[27] Cfr. POWERS, Shawn: "From Broadcast to Networked Journalism: The Case of Al-Jazeera English", en BURNS, Maureen, BRÜGGER, Niels (eds.), *Histories of Public Service Broadcasters on the Web*. Peter Lang, New York, 2012, pp. 214-215.

[28] Cfr. SCHONFELD, Erick, "Al Jazeera's Social Revolution (In Realtime)", *TechCrunch*, http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/13/al-jazeeras-social-revolution-in-realtime/, 13-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

[29] Cfr. ELLIS, Justin, "#DemandAlJazeera: How Al Jazeera is using social media to cover Egypt—and distribute its

hints to tune into the Arab version of the channel in Egypt, despite the obstacles caused by Mubarak's regime, soon found their way through the Internet, too[30].

Nevertheless, the steps that Al Jazeera took in order to involve users into distribution were not limited only to the access of the live stream. In January 2009, they released videos of their almost exclusive coverage of the events in Gaza with a Creative Commons license[31], both for commercial and non-commercial use[32]. Mohamed Nanabhay, head of Online at Al Jazeera English until mid 2012, made explicit references to the use that media, documentaries and blogs could make of them, including both rebroadcast and reuse.

When embracing free culture, according to Nanabhay, control is traded for the encouragement of the creative community, which is rather unpredictable[33]. Later on, video of the Tunisia and Egypt revolutions was also offered under this same license. Content can only be created once, but that same content might be distributed many times and that is what it makes a brand, Esra Dogramaci stated[34].

Since December 2008, Al Jazeera English has offered the pictures hosted at its Flickr account[35] as well as all the content of its blogs under a Creative Commons license with certain restrictions. AJE blogs were launched in October 2009, with a certain delay when compared to other large media organisations[36]. Not only has Al Jazeera fostered dissemination; it has also tried to be useful to those active members of the audience previously tagged as *produsers*.

2. *Methods and context of the three analyses*

Below we will deal with the approach taken for the combined analysis of professional profiles and messages of Al Jazeera English journalists on Twitter; the study of technological tools to send eyewitness accounts, pictures and documents and the integration of the contributions of the public to the contents of two specific programmes. In addition, we will position the study in its academic context as well as within the development of the participation strategy of the channel object of research.

Although AJE accepts comments in most parts of its website, this study does not specifically deal with this basic and very popular level of participation, since it has already been addressed in works about many other media organisations; for instance, through content analysis[37] or with ethnographic methods[38]; both of the aforementioned works focus additionally on the guidelines and editorial policies that were implemented in order to channel the flow of opinions in the comments section.

---

content in the US", *Nieman Journalism Lab*, http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/02/demandaljazeera-how-al-jazeera-is-using-social-media-and-hopes-to-use-twitter-to-get-on-us-tv/, 4-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

[30] Cfr. KHANFAR, Wadah, *op. cit.*

[31] http://cc.aljazeera.net/

[32] Cfr. AL JAZEERA, "Al Jazeera Announces Launch of Free Footage Under Creative Commons License", CreativeCommons.org, https://creativecommons.org/press-releases/entry/12166, 13-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.

[33] Cfr. DOMICONE, Allison, "Commoner Letter #1: Mohamed Nanabhay of Al Jazeera", *CreativeCommons.org*, http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/18213, 7-10-2009, retrieved May 2011.

[34] Cfr. DOGRAMACI, Esra, *op. cit.*

[35] http://www.flickr.com/photos/aljazeeraenglish/

[36] http://blogs.aljazeera.net/content/al-jazeera-blogs-attribution-policy

[37] Cfr. RUIZ, Carlos, MASIP, Pere, MICÓ, Josep Lluís, DÍAZ-NOCI, Javier, DOMINGO, David, "Conversación 2.0. y democracia. Análisis de los comentarios de los lectores en la prensa digital catalana", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXIII, nº 2, 2010, pp. 7-39

[38] Cfr. ROBINSON, Sue, "Traditionalists vs. Convergers. Textual Privilege, Boundary Work, and the Journalist–Audience Relationship in the Commenting Policies of Online News Sites", *Convergence*, vol. XVI, nº 1, 2010, pp. 125-143

2.1. *Profiles and messages of AJE journalists on Twitter*

"Asynchronous, light and always connected" communication systems such as Twitter are for Hermida a fragmented and polyhedral way to keep track of events[39]. In recent years, many different works on the use of Twitter in media have joined the wide bibliography about social networks, media organisations and audiences[40]. For instance, there have been studies on its adoption comparing the corporate accounts of Latin American regional newspapers[41] or those of media outlets based on different platforms and geographical scopes in the United States[42]. Some studies have focused on the accounts of journalists; for example, one content analysis examined the tweets sent by staff members of a local television station[43] and another one, a comparative study among journalists of different media, delved into the differences in transparency, the expression of opinions and the redistribution of user-generated content[44]. Also, several surveys about the motivations of people to follow certain journalists or media brands have been carried out[45]. Another piece of research asked reporters of Spanish news companies about their use of social networks[46]. Beyond the journalism field, yet another study published in Spain measured the uses, agendas and overall impact of opinion leaders on Twitter[47].

In this piece of research, we focus on the personal-professional continuum of the individual profiles of Al Jazeera English journalists on Twitter, analyzing the extent of their identification with the media for which they work and attending to the function and content of their tweets.

The aim of this analysis is to test two working hypotheses, which could help to complete the characteristics of the opening of the information process in this medium. The first hypothesis is that Al Jazeera English journalists that include Twitter in their newsgathering and production routines link their profiles with the organisation for which they work in an informal manner, identifying their connection in different ways, but freeing the channel from the responsibilities regarding what they post online. The second hypothesis establishes that AJE journalists give their Twitter accounts a wide range of uses which include participative production, but that are not limited to it.

The population of the study included both the accounts of AJE journalists with recent activity on Twitter and the latest messages they published, so there were two different kinds of units of analysis: the sample comprised 50 profiles and the latest 12 tweets sent in English by each of them, adding up to 600 tweets. A pre-test was carried out in September 2011, which allowed to improve

---

[39] HERMIDA, Alfred, "Twittering the News. The Emergence of Ambient Journalism", *Journalism Practice*, vol. IV, nº 3, 2010, p. 301

[40] Cfr. PÉREZ-LATRE, Francisco Javier, PORTILLA, Idoia, SÁNCHEZ BLANCO, Cristina, "Social Networks, Media and Audiences: A Literature Review", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXIV, núm. 1, 2011, pp. 63-74.

[41] Cfr. GARCÍA DE TORRES, Elvira, *et al.*, "See you on Facebook or Twitter? The use of social media by 27 news outlets from 9 regions in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela", 12 International Symposium on Online Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1/2-4-2011.

[42] Cfr. ARMSTRONG, Cory L., GAO, Fangfang, "Now Tweet This: How News Organizations Use Twitter", *Electronic News*, vol. IV, nº 4, 2010, pp. 218-235.

[43] Cfr. BLASINGAME, Dale, "Twitter First: Changing TV News 140 Characters at a Time", 12 International Symposium on Online Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1/2-4-2011.

[44] Cfr. LASORSA, Dominic L., LEWIS, Seth C., HOLTON, Avery E., "Normalizing Twitter. Journalism practice in an emerging communication space", *Journalism Studies*, vol. XIII, nº 1, 2012, pp. 19-36.

[45] Cfr. GREER, Clark F., FERGUSON, Douglas A., "Following Local Television News Personalities on Twitter. A Uses and Gratifications Approach to Social Networking", *Electronic News*, vol. V, nº 3, 2011, pp. 145-157.

[46] Cfr. CARRERA, Pilar, "Join The Conversation: How Spanish Journalists Are Using Twitter", IAMCR 2011 Conference, Istambul, 13/17-7-2011, http://www.pilarcarrera.es/imgs/jointheconversation.pdf, retrieved September 2011.

[47] Cfr. SAÍD, Elías, ARCILA, Carlos, "Líderes de opinión en Colombia, Venezuela e Irán. El caso de los 20 usuarios más vistos en Twitter", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXIV, nº 1, 2011, pp. 75-100.

the reliability of the tool since it helped to remove one of the identifying features, because of its difficult codification and poor relevance[48]. It also helped to define clearly the differences among the varying functions of the tweets and to establish univocal criteria in order to show the circumstances under which the presence of such elements as links, tags, mentions and retweets were coded.

The first criterion to select individual accounts that were suitable for the analysis was being included in a Twitter list maintained by the AJE new media team itself[49]. We chose to follow the order of seniority in membership to the list; therefore, starting from the bottom, the first 50 accounts that fulfilled all the requisites were selected among the 118 profiles featured on the list both at the beginning of the pre-test and at the beginning of the definitive observation.

The following four criteria were applied consecutively: 1) to be owned by a journalist that covered or supervised general news for AJE at the moment of observation, excluding non-personal accounts –e.g. generic AJE accounts or those representing a programme– and those belonging to people with non-journalistic positions; 2) to feature at least one of the five indicators of professional relation with AJE that were analysed; 3) having sent at least three tweets during the last two months prior to observation, and 4) that at least 12 out of the 20 most recent tweets were published in English.

In addition to assigning unique identification numbers, eight parameters were registered from every account, with just the purpose of proper identification: username, real name, biography, location, website, and the number of tweets, accounts being followed, and followers[50]. The presence or absence of five variables regarding the identification of the profile was also coded; the main functions of the 12 latest tweets by every journalist were also determined, and the messages were also classified according to their composition, depending on the inclusion of links, tags, mentions or retweets. Tweets published in languages other than English and those sent automatically by other applications or those that could be considered involuntary spam were excluded.

Table 1. Indicators of the connections of the journalist with the organisation in the profile details

Indicator	Explanation and delimitation
1. Reference to AJE in the username	Inclusion of acronyms or abbreviations which make reference to the medium (in this case, for instance: AJ, AJE or AlJaz) in the username or the real name displayed.
2. Design in accordance with AJE brand guidelines	Harmonization with the visual identity of the company, using corporate colours or including identifiable features in the background.
3. Mention to AJE in the biography	Information on the professional relationship with Al Jazeera English in the short biography.
4. Opinion/RT disclaimer	Many journalists that indicate their connection to a medium add an explanatory notice so personal comments won't be attributed to the company and that retweets and links are understood as merely diffusion due to the interest of the content and not necessarily as direct support.
5. Link to AJE in biography or URL	Link to any web presence of the organisation, either to any page of the site, including profiles or blogs hosted there, or to any corporate account which belongs to the company in social networks or sites such as YouTube.

---

[48] La presencia o ausencia de fotografía de perfil profesional o en el desempeño de su trabajo.

[49] http://twitter.com/#!/AJEnglish/al-jazeera-english-aje/members

[50] El dato del número de listas que siguen la cuenta no se contabilizó en la observación definitiva, al haber desaparecido de la interfaz pública en la versión más reciente de Twitter.

This first group measured the degree in which journalists link their account with the organisation for which they work; this is also relevant for any user, since it allows them to determine at first sight if and how the professional is connected to the channel. For every profile, the presence or absence of each indicator was coded. All the analysed profiles therefore displayed any or some of the five identification elements, given that this is one of the criteria for being included in the body of the sample. The aim is to find out which ones are adopted the most often.

Table 2. Type of functions present in the tweets

Functions	Explanation and delimitation
6. News reporting and coverage on the ground, diffusion and promotion of their work	Diffusion of information on events that the journalist covers on the ground, in situ narration of events in development, announcements and comments on the work that they do or links to their news pieces already published.
7. Interactions related to their work or to other news and current affairs	Mentions, questions and answers to information sources, readers/spectators or other journalists, regarding topics of current affairs in their area of specialization.
8. Generalnews aggregation and diffusion of other people's work	Headlines, comments and links on news elaborated by other journalists or published by other media, including "via" and retweets.
9. Other uses, outside professional topics or news and current affairs	Off-topic messages, with strictly playful, personal or interpersonal character. Including sports and the weather forecast, when not analysing accounts of journalists of these sections.

Even if just one tweet amongst the last twelve featured a certain function, it was enough to register its presence (1). If a function was not present in any of the last twelve tweets of the account, its absence was be coded (0). The functions were not exclusive among each other; if indeed all of them occured in at least one tweet, the presence of all of them was be marked.

Table 3. Typology of present elements in each one of the tweets

Element	Explanation and delimitation
10. link	Link to any external content. Photographies and videos are also considered as link, since this is their only possible way of inclusion. Any link is taken into account, even the contents in native retweets, those which are re-broadcast via the retweet button.
11. tag	Expression preceded by the hash sign (#), which works as a search link that allows to articulate a conversation around it. Tags present in native retweets –those made by using the button for that purpose– are also accountable, since they are totally functional.
12. mention	Reference to a user name, preceded by the @ sign. Mentions included in native retweets are not considered, since the repetition is not notified to the user. Mentions to the institutional account of the tweeted link are not included either (even though it is done by means of a manual retweet or via), since they don't have a relational function.
13. retweet or via	Literal or modified re-diffusion of a tweet, containing or not a link, or diffusion of a content with reference to the source.

Unlike the record of the functions which were present in the messages, in this case the exact presence of these four elements in the last twelve tweets was entered; therefore the value that was registered for each profile ranged between 0 and 12 for each one of the elements.

The parameters of the first group are confined to the scope of the professional and corporate identity and are relational: they indicate the connections of the profile to the organisation. The parameters of both last groups include the purpose for which the journalists use the tool, and the interaction and linking resources that they rely on in order to compose their messages.

2.2. *Platforms to submit eyewitness accounts: authorship attribution and content verification*

It would be necessary to distinguish, according to Sanchez-González and Alonso, between the "formulas of communicative interactivity", which facilitate the dialogue among users, and those that allow them to send newsworthy material which was produced or obtained directly by them[51]. This part –and the equivalent in the results section– deals only with the latter. From observation, the most outstanding features of the platforms will be described, in terms of the possibilities of submitting eyewitness accounts, pictures and documents. The terms and conditions for participating will also be dealt with, and some of the most noteworthy cases to date will be also documented.

No matter if the organisation proactively garnered the contents or if it was the user who sent them to the journalist or the newsroom, there is a need to verify their authorship and veracity, and to clear the rights to broadcast or publish them. In a first step, this process means identifying the sender: finding out what she has sent or published previously, how big a following she has built, and if any authoritative media outlet has already made any references to her work. These indicators can be confirmed by means of direct contact, either via public interactions or through private messages. The EXIF or XMP information of the image files or the metadata of PDF files offer a way to make a preliminary check about the authorship of the material and the circumstances in which it was obtained or manipulated.

A senior producer at Associated Press stated that the reliability of an eyewitness account does not depend on the means by which it is obtained, but on the reliability of the contact itself, on the actual person[52]. This journalist pointed out that a YouTube user is like an alternative stringer, and argued that a Twitter contact can be just as useful as one that the journalist has met in person –and thus they should be treated and maintained in an equally careful manner–. Other authors are in favour of attributing the identity of the best Twitter news sources, as a way to improve the perception of value towards this social network –and towards the news organisation, it would be worth adding–[53].

The organisation in our case study, Al Jazeera English, usually scripts and airs a disclaimer during its breaking news broadcasts, in which they say that they can't verify one by one the eyewitness accounts or pictures gathered through social media that they air, but they claim that those contributions that make it on air are coherent with the facts confirmed by their own journalists on the ground.

2.3. *User contributions in participative AJE programmes*

As it has been already mentioned, participation nourishes the general breaking news output, but it also brings about the creation of specific programmes and segments. Al Jazeera English maintains a

---

[51] SÁNCHEZ-GONZÁLEZ, María, ALONSO, Jaime, "Propuesta metodológica para el análisis de las tecnologías de participación en cibermedios", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, nº 67, pp. 148-178.
[52] Cfr. BELL, Fergus, "A true journalist is a tweeting journalist", *Fergus Bell blog*, http://fergb.blogspot.com/2009/08/true-journalist-is-tweeting-journalist.html, 10-8-2009, retrieved May 2011.
[53] Cfr. NILES, Robert, "It's time for journalists to promote a better 'Twitter style'", *Online Journalism Review*, http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/robert/201103/1953/, 16-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

very active channel in YouTube since April 2007, six months after its launch on the air[54], and it immediately asked the audience its opinion on the programming, in 30-second videos to be broadcast on television[55]. The Arab-language channel started up a similar initiative later on. Since its inception, the channel airs a show that combines videos with user opinions, and more recently it added another one that features multimedia and social media contributions.

2.3.1. *Listening Post*

Listening Post is a 25-minute weekly programme that is recorded in Al Jazeera's London production centre. It analyses and reviews the coverage of the main international events in mass media. Viewers' videos complement the contents of the programme, which is built upon clips of broadcast news and interviews with journalists, academics and other experts in the field of communication, as well as on popular online content. When setting out official versions and mainstream media approaches with the vision of other people outside that system, the programme contributes to the multiperspectival journalism that is one of the signs of identity of Al Jazeera[56].
The sample included six consecutive editions of the show, broadcast during the second fortnight of January and the whole month of February 2012. All of them were selected since they dealt with different subjects in different countries. The content analysis was limited to the *Global Village Voices* segment, which appears twice in each episode. The unit of analysis was each one of the contributions in video form, from which the registered data were the programme in which they appeared (from 1 to 6), the name of the participant, his/her profession, his/her country of origin and the recording technology; these four identification details appeared permanently on screen while the testimony was played. In addition, the length of the contribution –in seconds– is also noted.

2.3.2. *The Stream*

The Stream, in its hybrid TV and web show version, is not limited to media analysis, but also convers current affairs directly with newsmakers, experts and those directly affected. It airs Monday to Thursday and it is presented as "a social media community with its own daily TV show on Al Jazeera"[57]. It aggregates sources and conversations, with editorial criteria "in search of unheard voices, new perspectives of citizens on the ground and unreported angles on the most interesting stories of the day".
Activists, bloggers, community media organisations or individual citizens are welcome to the programme; this diversity of voices, even the most controversial ones, is one of the foundational hallmarks of Al Jazeera, as it has already been mentioned: the channel tries to integrate social media aggregation in the programme schedule in a way that is coherent with its overall mission[58], although it gives priority, in this case, to those topics that generate enthusiastic and lively debate.

---

[54] Cfr. IVRY, Sara, "Now on YouTube: The Latest News From Al Jazeera, in English", *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/16/business/media/16jazeera.html, 16-4-2007, retrieved May 2011.
[55] Cfr. NANABHAY, Mohamed, "AlJazeera English wants your feedback!", *Mohamed Nanabhay's Blog*, http://www.mohamedn.com/2007/07/10/aljazeera-english-wants-your-feedback, 10-7-2007, retrieved May 2011.
[56] Cfr. RICCHIARDI, Sherry, "The Al Jazeera Effect", *American Journalism Review*, March-April 2011.
[57] http://stream.aljazeera.com/about
[58] Cfr. KELLER, Jared, "A web community with a TV show: Inside The Stream's efforts to turn broadcasting into a social medium", *Nieman Journalism Lab*, http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/04/a-web-community-with-a-tv-show-inside-the-streams-efforts-to-turn-broadcasting-into-a-social-medium/, 25-4-2011, retrieved May 2011.

In addition, it can be regarded as a way to access the American market, since the programme was produced in Washington D.C.[59], at least up until the date of this analysis; indeed, approaching audiences is part of the distribution strategy of this channel.

The sample included the first ten first editions of *The Stream* broadcast in the month of February 2012 (episode numbers 163 to 172), corresponding to two weeks and a half, once it was verified that all of them covered different main topics in different countries.

In order to obtain comparable results among programmes, the analysis focused only on the coverage of the main topic of the day, without taking into account two brief segments of irregular appearance in which the community of viewers set the agenda: *Feed the Stream*, at the beginning of some editions, and *Leads*, towards the end of the broadcast segment of others. The video greeting by a user, which usually separates the opening segment from the main part, was not considered either.

Each analysis unit comprised both the video of the full broadcast, including the online-only post-show, and the webpage with the story corresponding to the topic of the day, compiled with the Storify aggregation tool, as published to the website of *The Stream*[60]. When reviewing each edition, the number of in-studio guests, contributors who appeared through Skype and interviewees via satellite were coded separately. The number of participants by means of recorded YouTube videos, live Google+ video hangouts and tweets read during the show were also entered. Participants taking part several times on the same show were counted only once.

Afterwards, the all elements in the related Storify article were registered, discerning among six types of contents: 1) news items or direct quotes; 2) tweets or other microblogging messages; 3) photographs; 4) illustrations, web captures, maps or graphics; 5) videos; 6) audios. The YouTube video included at a later stage at the beginning of each Storify stream was not registered, because it didn't reflect any external content that made it into the show, but the broadcast programme itself.

3. *Results*

3.1. *Professionals: professional identification, form and function of their messages on Twitter*

Table 4. Indicators of the connections of the journalist with AJE in the Twitter profile details (N=50, absolute values, non-excluding categories)

	Profiles
Reference to AJE in the username	14
Design in accordance with AJE brand guidelines	1
Mention to AJE in the biography	49
Opinion/RT disclaimer	23
Link to AJE in the biography or the URL	22
TOTAL PROFILES	50

No account, among the 50 considered for the analysis, presented all five features that identify them as belonging to Al Jazeera English professionals, and only 8% featured four of the five indicators. This result is reasonable, since the presence of all of them could be reiterative, even if featuring one does not exclude others. Only one account's design showed some familiarity with Al Jazeera English brand guidelines[61].

---

[59] Cfr. FERENSTEIN, Gregory, "Al Jazeera's Social Media Experiment "The Stream" Launches Online Today", *Fast Company*, http://www.fastcompany.com/1748034/al-jazeeras-social-media-experiment-the-stream-launches-online-today, 18-4-2011, retrieved May 2011.

[60] http://stream.aljazeera.com

[61] An informal observation of professional Twitter accounts of journalists working for other media companies shows that the results for Al Jazeera English in this variable differ with what can be considered to be regular practice among

Table 5. Present functions in at least one of the last 12 tweets of each analysed account (N=50, absolute values, non-excluding categories)

	Profiles
News reporting and coverage on the ground, diffusion and promotion of work	33
Interactions related to their work or to other news and current affairs	24
General news aggregation and diffusion of other people's work	43
Other uses, outside professional topics or news and current affairs	21
TOTAL PROFILES	50

The predominance of the function of general aggregation and diffusion of stories that have not been produced by the journalist shows a news-related use of the tool by AJE journalists. Nevertheless, only the first two functions, present in 66% and 48% of the accounts respectively, correspond to the use of Twitter with the purpose of maintaining professional relations and spreading each journalist's own work. The last figure, on the contrary, shows that 58% of the accounts did not contain any off topic message among the last twelve tweets.

Table 6. Present elements in tweets analysed (N=600, non-excluding categories)

Tweets with…	% (absolute value)	Average per profile	Median per profile
link	41,7 (250)	5	5
tag	49,5 (297)	5,9	6
mention	18,8 (113)	2,3	1
retweet or via	33,2 (199)	4	3
TOTAL TWEETS	600	12	12

The moderate presence of mentions shows, partly, the use of Twitter as research tool and the purpose of contacting sources during the newsgathering process, as well as the search for opinions and interactions based on each journalist's own work, whereas retweets and links are more related with the dissemination of information products, whether they are the journalist's own or other people's stories or pictures. In addition, it is necessary to emphasize that, in 24% of the profiles, ten or more tweets out of the last twelve contained tags. Among all of them, observation shows an outstanding presence of those tags that designate locations, particularly those refering to a country.

3.2. *Technologies: platforms to send information and testimonies*

In addition to the contacts that its reporters may establish through social media, Al Jazeera English proposes several ways for users to send organized and classified information and content to the newsroom, and therefore, they are more useful and easier to process for the journalists when the try to turn them into stories, in case they are worth it. Three are described here: a general contact form, a classification and geolocation platform developed externally, and a space for leaking documents that allows the source to remain anonymous.

First of all, the general contact form for user contributions[62] is an example of how to process submitted information, facilitating its verification and later use. The first required step it is to classify the content according to the country of origin, and to give it a subject title. First name and surname, email and telephone of the sender are also required, and there are also imput fields for the

---

BBC journalists, who usually set the BBC News globe and graphics as the background for their accounts. Many RTVE reporters, presenters and correspondents even display customized backgrounds, in line with the visual identity of the Spanish public broadcasting corporation and that of the channels and programmes they work for.
[62] http://yourmedia.aljazeera.net/

date of birth and mailing address. The user is also suggested to describe the content that she is going to send, and before uploading it, the system asks whether it was taken directly by the user, and what the equipment was used for that: a cell phone, a video camera, a webcam or a digital photo camera. This general submission platform allows users to upload files of up to 100 MB.

When sending something, the user gives her permission for the unlimited and non-exclusive use of the content by Al Jazeera through any means, as well as for sharing it with other organisations, although the author keeps the copyright. The terms and conditions point out the intention to mention the author of the images on air or online whenever it is possible, as long as the author does not ask for the opposite. In addition, the usual cautionary remarks are included, such as that nobody should take risks, infringe the laws or put others in danger in order to take pictures[63].

The first great event after the launch of this service in November 2008 was the conflict in the Gaza Strip at the beginning of 2009, hence why numerous Palestinians sent their testimonies and images to the channel by this means, feeding the emission as much as the website[64].

Secondly, it is worth mentioning Ushahidi[65], a tool to gather eyewitness accounts developed in Africa under open source principles[66], and used experimentally by Al Jazeera English during the events of Gaza[67]. Ushahidi allows the participation of anyone through text messages or a contact form, and offers visual representations, both chronological –on a timeline– and geographical –on a map–.

Each information submission, known as a *report*, contains several sections: title, description, date and time; the user must select the relevant categories; in the case of the war on Gaza, the options were: deaths, Israeli casualties, Palestinian casualties, military casualties, civilian casualties, protest demonstrations, international aid, aerial or rocket attacks… The location can be indicated directly by selecting the city in a drop-down list or clicking on the map, besides introducing it as plain text. The eyewitness account can be supported with a link to a news source or a video, and by adding pictures. The identification of the sender, with name, last name and email, is optional[68].

The detail page of each user submission to Ushahidi, which is known as a 'report', features an indication on whether it has been verified or not, and it allows to add new details, to comment on them and to assess them. However, the platform was unfruitful when trying to obtain contributions on the ground: many opinions and some materials on protests arrived, but there were not any precise contributions that shed light on the damages caused[69].

Finally, at the time of its launch in January 2011, the Al Jazeera Transparency Unit (AJTU)[70] was received as the Wikileaks for the Arab world, but it is possible to describe it more precisely, according to what Al Jazeera stated, as a platform to send documents, multimedia content or plain clues and pieces of evidence, for the newsroom to consider using them in the editorial output. In their declaration of intentions, they encouraged uncovering questionable government and corporate practice around the world. They stated their committment to investigate all the proposals, no matter if they were related to human rights or to the environment, for instance.

The terms and conditions[71] clear Al Jazeera of any responsibility towards the individual who decides to send files or evidence. The user makes a commitment to send truthful information, and a

---

[63] http://yourmedia.aljazeera.net/terms
[64] Cfr. POWERS, Shawn, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.
[65] http://ushahidi.com
[66]   HERSMAN,   Erik,   "Al   Jazeera   Labs   is   Testing   Ushahidi",   *Ushahidi   blog*, http://blog.ushahidi.com/index.php/2009/01/02/al-jazeera-labs-is-testing-ushahidi/, 2-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.
[67] http://labs.aljazeera.net/warongaza/
[68] http://labs.aljazeera.net/warongaza/reports/submit
[69] Cfr. COHEN, Noam, "Al Jazeera provides an inside look at Gaza conflict", *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/technology/11iht-jazeera.4.19256575.html?pagewanted=all, 11-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.
[70]http://transparency.aljazeera.net/
[71] https://upload.ajtransparency.com/TOU_AJTU.pdf

disclaimer states that it is impossible to guarantee 100% security and anonymity for submission on standard Internet networks, although the organisation declares to take all the precautions, such as cleaning the metadata of any document that is going to be redistributed[72]. Sent files are encrypted, only available to the journalists of this transparency unit, and no details of the sender are kept.

The implementation of this platform coincided with the dissemination of "The Palestine Papers", about 1,700 documents on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that had been leaked to Al Jazeera[73]. Nearly half a year later, no other great investigation, special coverage or editorial campaign had been presented explicitly as related to this platform for whistleblowers, or as a result of it.

3.3. *Contents: the voice of the audience in specific programmes*

3.3.1. *Listening Post*

28 testimonies were registered in the *Global Village Voices* segment in 6 editions of *The Stream*, somewhere between 4 and 6 per show, with an average length of 23 seconds each; the briefest contribution among all those registered was 8 seconds long, and the most extensive ran for 35 seconds. The most popular recording technology was the webcam (23), followed by the cell phone (4) –half of them were iPhones–; only one contribution was recorded with a Flip camera.

The participants belonged to the following professional groups: journalism and mass media (16), education and research (5), technology and web development (2), students (2) and NGOs (1). Therefore, the prevalent collectives were professionals, students and fans of the thematic scope of the programme, the mass media.

The country of origin of the participants in the analyzed editions was: United Kingdom (9), USA (7), Nigeria (2), Iran (2), and there was one person from 8 other countries (Australia, Cyprus, Sweden, Spain, Guatemala, The Netherlands, Belgium and Libya). At least one of the two or three broadcast comments usually came from the country that was the object of the discussion. Some participants could have been born in the focus country, but participated from another one.

These video comments usually lasted for around two minutes in each programme. At the end of the first segment, the presenter invited to follow the programme's social media profiles to get to know about the topic of the next week and to participate. Two reasons may explain the high proportion of comments from the United Kingdom: in addition to being the place of production of the programme, Al Jazeera English already had a greater audience share than in other countries, due to its daily free-to-air broadcasting window, from 18:00 to 23:00, through the standard digital terrestrial television service (Freeview). This was later expanded to 24 hours a day.

3.3.2. *The Stream*

Each broadcast version of *The Stream* was 25 minutes long and led by a presenter and an on-set digital producer, but continued as a web-only post-show for another 10 or 15 minutes. In addition, the stories appeared on the website through the external service Storify, developed to find and aggregate testimonies and materials published on social networks and news sources, with an insertion and attribution mechanism. All the analysed programmes (10) had a live interviewee on

---

[72] http://www.ajtransparency.com/how-submit
[73] CARLSTROM, Gregg, "Introducing The Palestine Papers", *Al Jazeera English*, http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers/2011/01/201112214310263628.html, 23-1-2011, retrieved May 2011.

set. Remote interviews were held via Skype in 8 programmes, and through satellite in other 2. In four of the editions, the producer of the programme that had proposed the topic joined the post-show. In another one, technical problems led to the remote interview having to be finished on the telephone, with a photo of the guest.

Table 7. Audience participants in the programme *The Stream* according to platform (N=96)

	Participants
Recorded video, available on YouTube	15
Live video through Google+	19
Tweet read in the programme	62
TOTAL	96

Out of the analysed programmes, all of them (10) included the live reading of tweets. Audience contributions in video form were recorded only in 6 editions, whereas they were live only in 3 of them, and only one combined both formulas of audiovisual participation.

Table 8. Types of media included in stories in *The Stream* website through Storify (N=221)

	% out of the total of elements (absolute value)
Links to news or quotations	2,3 (5)
Tweets or other microblogging messages	18,6 (41)
Photographs	19 (42)
Illustrations, web captures, maps or graphics	26,2 (58)
Videos	33,9 (75)
Audios	0 (0)
TOTAL	100 (221)

Many of the contents added to the Storify web articles were partially broadcast or shown in the screens on set, supporting the conversation; this is how they were presented in the initial explanatory text of almost all the stories. Photographs and videos were the only formats featured in all the analysed stories; the categories of illustration, web capture, map or graphic were present in all of them, except for one. It should be pointed out that there were no audios in the sample. It was also established that only some tweets that had been broadcast because of their documentary value were included on the site, as opposed to those that channelled audience participation.

4. *Conclusions*

The equation of responsible journalism is about clearing the noise around events and adding context; being at the centre of an informed conversation[74]. This case study shows how journalists and news organisations can count on the users in all the phases of the information process, from uncovering topics and covering them on the ground, to amplifying distribution as active viewers, without giving up neither the professional criteria nor the identity that distinguishes the medium.

In a stage in which the relations of journalists and media companies with their audiences is being reconsidered and adjusted, the integration of newsworthy contents coming from varied sources allows to add a greater diversity of perspectives to the discourse of the medium, if they are combined and edited following professional standards that guarantee their veracity and rigour. Wadah Khanfar, Director General of the Al Jazeera network up until September 2011, wrote that, as long as these practices kept contributing to enriching and spreading their editorial output, they would continue to broadcast images taken with pocket cameras given to citizens on the ground and

---

[74] Cfr. DOGRAMACI, Esra, *op. cit.*

they would keep turning to Internet users to help their output reaches any corner of the world[75].

An integrated broadcast newsroom in terms of participation makes the Web an integral part of its newsgathering, production and distribution phases. Audience participation in newsgathering fills some gaps of scope and depth in the coverage of distant or complex subjects. The technological factor of convergence facilitates the exchange and the treatment of user-generated newsworthy content. In the managerial dimension of convergence, some opportunities emerge, from cross-promotion to multiplatform editorial campaigns on certain topics. Professional media convergence is based on the journalists' bylines and their presence on social networks, which become a new access point to their work; the functional aspect of this dimension means that the journalist extends pre-existing tasks. Finally, convergence changes journalistic content by facilitating a better integration of the voices of users in the overall discourse.

In view of the reality that some users of the news media have become producers of content that is suitable for being processed by journalists, forming alliances with this sector of the audience and incorporating their contributions has potential positive repercussions: it may not only improve the editorial output, but also the loyalty, commitment, identification and involvement on the part of these users towards that specific news organisation. Strengthening this facet of journalism secures and facilitates the fulfilment of its function in society, by incorporating professional practices that open new ways to obtain information, avoiding or limiting the overuse of official sources and other channels of routinary use.

Al Jazeera English turns intensively to the citizens on the ground to reach where journalists cannot. This organisation allows to send and to treat testimonies and contents in a journalistic way, with systems that raise the necessary questions from the beginning, in order to classify and identify the contributions. The Qatari channel also involves the users in the distribution, asking for their support so that the channel will gain presence in some markets, and facilitating the reuse of their contents, since they include them in repositories with flexible licenses. The described strategy has its natural reflection in the programmes that are broadcast and that rely on participation as a basic element.

Al Jazeera English journalists perform a professional and news-related use of Twitter, indicating their link to the channel, but communicating from an individual perspective. There is a strong predominance of journalistic messages over those that could possibly be considered off topic. Nevertheless, the diffusion and recommendation of news, the promotion of their own work, and socialization occur more often in the Twitter profiles of AJE journalists than the functions of newsgathering and live coverage, which, even if they are more demanding tasks, are also more directly related to collaborative journalism.

Maintaining a long-time journalist-source relation with people on the ground and taking care of the development of platforms for collecting information sent by the users are two good practices that move forward the first and fundamental stage of identifying the sender, and facilitate those that follow: verification of the authorship and the veracity of the content. In addition, configuring adequately the platform to send materials can simplify clearing the rights for broadcasting and reusing user-generated content. Necessarily, journalists adopt external tools in which users are already present, but the most ambitious news organisations also develop their own platforms or reach certain agreements to customise and adapt the features of others to their own needs.

---

[75] Cfr. KHANFAR, Wadah, *op. cit.*

References

AL JAZEERA, "Al Jazeera Announces Launch of Free Footage Under Creative Commons License", CreativeCommons.org, https://creativecommons.org/press-releases/entry/12166, 13-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.

ALI, Rafat, "Inside Al Jazeera: The Hottest News Network On The Planet", *Business Insider*, http://www.businessinsider.com/al-jazeera-tour-2011-3, 14-3-2011, retrieved May 2011.

ARMSTRONG, Cory L., GAO, Fangfang, "Now Tweet This: How News Organizations Use Twitter", *Electronic News*, vol. IV, nº 4, 2010, pp. 218-235.

BELL, Emily, "A new compact between press and public", *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/feb/25/digital-media-social-media, 25-2-2011, retrieved February 2011.

BELL, Fergus, "A true journalist is a tweeting journalist", *Fergus Bell blog*, http://fergb.blogspot.com/2009/08/true-journalist-is-tweeting-journalist.html, 10-8-2009, retrieved May 2011.

BLASINGAME, Dale, "Twitter First: Changing TV News 140 Characters at a Time", 12 International Symposium on Online Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1/2-4-2011.

BRADSHAW, Paul, "Is Ice Cream Strawberry? Journalism's invisible history – and conflicted future", inaugural lecture, City University London, http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2011/03/03/is-ice-cream-strawberry-inaugural-lecture-part-4-human-capital/, 3-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

BRUNS, Axel, *Gatewatching: collaborative online news production*, Peter Lang, New York, 2005.

CARLSTROM, Gregg, "Introducing The Palestine Papers", *Al Jazeera English*, http://english.aljazeera.net/palestinepapers/2011/01/201112214310263628.html, 23-1-2011, retrieved May 2011.

CARRERA, Pilar, "Join The Conversation: How Spanish Journalists Are Using Twitter", IAMCR 2011 Conference, Istambul, 13/17-7-2011, http://www.pilarcarrera.es/imgs/jointheconversation.pdf, retrieved September 2011.

COHEN, Noam, "Al Jazeera provides an inside look at Gaza conflict", *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/technology/11iht-jazeera.4.19256575.html?pagewanted=all, 11-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.

DEUZE, Mark, BRUNS, Axel, NEUBERGER, Christoph, "Preparing for an Age of Participatory News", *Journalism Practice*, vol. I, nº 3, 2007, pp. 322-338.

DOGRAMACI, Esra, "Does mainstream media own the news?", author notes, panel at the BBC Social Media Summit, BBC College of Journalism, London, 20-5-2011.

DOMICONE, Allison, "Commoner Letter #1: Mohamed Nanabhay of Al Jazeera", *CreativeCommons.org*, http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/18213, 7-10-2009, retrieved May 2011.

DOMINGO, David *et al.*, "Participatory Journalism Practices in the Media and Beyond. An international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers", *Journalism Practice*, vol. II, nº 3, 2008, pp. 326-342.

ELLIS, Justin, "#DemandAlJazeera: How Al Jazeera is using social media to cover Egypt—and distribute its content in the US", *Nieman Journalism Lab*, http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/02/demandaljazeera-how-al-jazeera-is-using-social-media-and-hopes-to-use-twitter-to-get-on-us-tv/, 4-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

FERENSTEIN, Gregory, "Al Jazeera's Social Media Experiment "The Stream" Launches Online Today", *Fast Company*, http://www.fastcompany.com/1748034/al-jazeeras-social-media-experiment-the-stream-launches-online-today, 18-4-2011, retrieved May 2011.

GARCÍA DE TORRES, Elvira, *et al.*, "See you on Facebook or Twitter? The use of social media by 27 news outlets from 9 regions in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela", 12 International Symposium on Online Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1/2-4-2011.

GARCÍA DE TORRES, Elvira, "Contenido generado por el usuario: aproximación al estado de la cuestión", *El Profesional de la Información*, vol. XIX, nº 6, November-December 2010, pp. 585-594.

GREER, Clark F., FERGUSON, Douglas A., "Following Local Television News Personalities on Twitter. A Uses and Gratifications Approach to Social Networking", *Electronic News*, vol. V, nº 3, 2011, pp. 145-157.

HERMIDA, Alfred, "Twittering the News. The Emergence of Ambient Journalism", *Journalism Practice*, vol. IV, nº 3, 2010, p. 297-308.

HERMIDA, Alfred, THURMAN, Neil: "A Clash of Cultures. The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at British newspaper websites", *Journalism Practice*, vol. II, nº 3, 2008, pp. 343-356.

HERSMAN, Erik, "Al Jazeera Labs is Testing Ushahidi", *Ushahidi blog*, http://blog.ushahidi.com/index.php/2009/01/02/al-jazeera-labs-is-testing-ushahidi/, 2-1-2009, retrieved May 2011.

IVRY, Sara, "Now on YouTube: The Latest News From Al Jazeera, in English", *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/16/business/media/16jazeera.html, 16-4-2007, retrieved May 2011.

KELLER, Jared, "A web community with a TV show: Inside The Stream's efforts to turn broadcasting into a social medium", *Nieman Journalism Lab*, http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/04/a-web-community-with-a-tv-show-inside-the-streams-efforts-to-turn-broadcasting-into-a-social-medium/, 25-4-2011, retrieved May 2011.

KHANFAR, Wadah, "US viewers seek Al Jazeera coverage", *Al Jazeera English*, http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/02/201121121041735816.html, 1-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

LASORSA, Dominic L., LEWIS, Seth C., HOLTON, Avery E., "Normalizing Twitter. Journalism practice in an emerging communication space", *Journalism Studies*, vol. XIII, nº 1, 2012, pp. 19-36.

LEE, Dave, "Journalists deserve to be paid for engaging in comments", *Dave Lee, multimedia journalist*, http://davelee.me/journalists-deserve-to-be-paid-to-engage-in-comments/, 24-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

NANABHAY, Mohamed, "AlJazeera English wants your feedback!", *Mohamed Nanabhay's Blog*, http://www.mohamedn.com/2007/07/10/aljazeera-english-wants-your-feedback, 10-7-2007, retrieved May 2011.

NANABHAY, Mohamed, "Announcing Al Jazeera Blogs", *Mohamed Nanabhay's Blog*, http://mohamedn.com/node/596, 13-10-2009, retrieved May 2011.

NGUYEN, An, GARCÍA, Alberto, "When Public Service Is the Name of the Game: The Evolution of British and Spanish Public Service Broadcasters in Online Journalism", in BURNS, Maureen, BRÜGGER, Niels (eds.), *Histories of Public Service Broadcasters on the Web*. Peter Lang, New York, 2012, pp. 1-16.

NILES, Robert, "It's time for journalists to promote a better 'Twitter style'", *Online Journalism Review*, http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/robert/201103/1953/, 16-3-2011, retrieved March 2011.

PÉREZ-LATRE, Francisco Javier, PORTILLA, Idoia, SÁNCHEZ BLANCO, Cristina, "Social Networks, Media and Audiences: A Literature Review", Comunicación y Sociedad, vol. XXIV, núm. 1, 2011, pp. 63-74.

POWERS, Shawn: "From Broadcast to Networked Journalism: The Case of Al-Jazeera English", in BURNS, Maureen, BRÜGGER, Niels (eds.), *Histories of Public Service Broadcasters on the Web*. Peter Lang, New York, 2012, pp. 207-221.

RICCHIARDI, Sherry, "The Al Jazeera Effect", *American Journalism Review*, March-April 2011, http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=5077, retrieved May 2011.

ROBINSON, Sue, "Traditionalists vs. Convergers. Textual Privilege, Boundary Work, and the Journalist–Audience Relationship in the Commenting Policies of Online News Sites", *Convergence*, vol. XVI, nº 1, 2010, pp. 125-143.

RUIZ, Carlos, MASIP, Pere, MICÓ, Josep Lluís, DÍAZ-NOCI, Javier, DOMINGO, David, "Conversación 2.0. y democracia. Análisis de los comentarios de los lectores en la prensa digital catalana", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXIII, nº 2, 2010, pp. 7-39.

RUSBRIDGER, Alan, "The splintering of the fourth estate", *The Guardian*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/19/open-collaborative-future-journalism, 19-11-2010, retrieved December 2010.

RUSHING, Josh, ELDER, Sean, *Mission Al Jazeera*. Palgrave Macmillan, Gordonsville, 2007.

PAVLIK, John V., "A Sea-Change in Journalism. Convergence, Journalists, their Audiences and Sources", *Convergence*, vol. X, nº 4, 2004, pp. 21-29.

SAÍD, Elías, ARCILA, Carlos, "Líderes de opinión en Colombia, Venezuela e Irán. El caso de los 20 usuarios más vistos en Twitter", *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. XXIV, nº 1, 2011, pp. 75-100.

SALAVERRÍA, Ramón, GARCÍA AVILÉS, José A., MASIP, Pere, "Concepto de converegncia periodística", in LÓPEZ GARCÍA, Xosé, PEREIRA, Xosé (eds.), *Convergencia digital. Reconfiguración de los medios de comunicación en España*, USC, Santiago de Compostela, 2010, pp. 41-64.

SÁNCHEZ-GONZÁLEZ, María, ALONSO, Jaime, "Propuesta metodológica para el análisis de las tecnologías de participación en cibermedios", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, nº 67, pp. 148-178.

SCHONFELD, Erick, "Al Jazeera's Social Revolution (In Realtime)", *TechCrunch*, http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/13/al-jazeeras-social-revolution-in-realtime/, 13-2-2011, retrieved May 2011.

VARGAS, Esther, "Internet exige al periodista hablar de tú a tú con sus lectores", interview with Virginia P. Alonso, *Clases de Periodismo*, http://www.clasesdeperiodismo.com/2010/08/23/internet-exige-al-periodista-hablar-de-tu-a-tu-con-sus-lectores/, 23-8-2010, retrieved March 2011.