

GATEKEEPING CHANGES IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE THE INTERNET, VALUES AND PRACTICES OF JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT - This article re-evaluates the relevance of the concept of gatekeeping in the 21st century. Sustained in the literature on this subject, it argues that, in an age marked by new media and digital journalism, a classical understanding of the concept of gatekeeper will narrow the scope of the study of journalism and its relationship with the public. Taking into account the predominant trends and lines of research, and analyzing practices and events that, from a political point of view, marked the most recent years, this article seeks to reflect upon new directions with civic value for the practice of journalism and on a reconfigured concept of the gatekeeper in the western world. It concludes by showing the normalization of the new media devices and their appropriateness to conventional values and practices of journalism.

Keywords: Gatekeeper. New Media. Journalism. Digital Journalism. Norms.

TRANSFORMAÇÕES DO GATEKEEPING NA ERA DOS NOVOS MEDIA A INTERNET, OS VALORES E AS PRÁTICAS DO JORNALISMO

RESUMO - Este artigo reavalia a relevância do conceito de *gatekeeping* no século XXI. Sustentado na literatura sobre esta matéria, argumenta que, numa era marcada pelos novos media e pelo jornalismo digital, um entendimento clássico do conceito de gatekeeper cerceará o âmbito do estudo do jornalismo e da sua relação com os públicos. Deste modo, tomando em consideração as tendências e as linhas de investigação predominantes, e analisando práticas e acontecimentos que, de um ponto de vista político, marcaram os anos mais recentes, o artigo procura equacionar novos sentidos, com valor cívico, para a ação do jornalismo e para uma noção reconfigurada do *gatekeeper* no mundo ocidental. Conclui mostrando a normalização e a adequação dos novos dispositivos mediáticos a valores e práticas convencionais do jornalismo.

Palavras-chave: *Gatekeeper*. Novos Media. Jornalismo. Jornalismo Digital. Normas.

TRANSFORMACIONES DEL GATEKEEPER EN LA ERA DE LOS NUEVOS MEDIOS LA INTERNET, LOS VALORES Y LAS PRÁCTICAS DEL PERIODISMO

RESUMEN - Este artículo re-evalúa la relevancia del concepto de *gatekeeping* en el siglo XXI. Sostenido en la literatura sobre este tema, argumenta que, en una época marcada por los nuevos medios y el periodismo digital, una comprensión clásica del concepto de gatekeeper reducirá el alcance del estudio del periodismo y su relación con el público. Teniendo en cuenta las tendencias y líneas de investigación predominantes, y el análisis de las prácticas y eventos que, desde un punto de vista político, marcaron los últimos años, este artículo busca reflexionar sobre nuevas direcciones con valor cívico para la práctica del periodismo y sobre un concepto reconfigurado del gatekeeper en el mundo occidental. Concluye mostrando la normalización de los nuevos dispositivos y su adecuación a los valores y prácticas convencionales del periodismo.

Palabras clave: Gatekeeper. Nuevos medios de comunicación. Periodismo. Periodismo digital. Normas.

Introduction

Several theoretical perspectives try to explain how transformations in journalism impact on societies and on their prevailing practices of citizenship. As far as it concerns the space commonly known as the western world, and considering the first 15 years of this century, a wide literature describes how the technologies of new media came to challenge one of the most fundamental “truths” of journalism, namely the professional journalist as “one who determines what the public sees, hears and reads about the world” (Deuze, 2005, p. 451). In fact, an important body of researchers (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, Bruns, 2011, Hermida, 2011, Papacharissi, Moreno and Cardoso, 2016) describe how the concept of gatekeeping, a concept central to the practice of journalism, indeed journalism’s very essence, was becoming decisively affected in the digital age.

It is known that traditional media have functioned as filters, only producing and distributing information with news value and discarding the rest. In fact, gatekeeping is a practice that results primarily from an environment of scarcity, both of news channels and of space for news within these channels. Therefore, any growth of space available for news necessarily challenges the

operation of this type of practice. As news stories take shape in online environments, where space or duration of content does not limit their depth and breadth nor journalistic coverage, a rigid gatekeeping system should no longer be necessary (Bruns, 2011).

The Internet offers many more opportunities for ordinary individuals to interact with each other and with journalists, than the pre-Internet age. Readers can customize a news portal (whether it is an online page from a newspaper or a news aggregator), by choosing categories and sorting them according to their own preferences, effectively acting as gatekeepers for themselves. In most newspapers, current platforms allow any reader to send a message to the editor or indeed to a broader audience. Thus, “this high level of interactivity transforms the audience members into gatekeepers” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, 6) - albeit in an increasingly distorted sense of the term. In a context in which anybody can produce and disseminate information, the function of gatekeeping has changed its nature; for some authors it would cease to make sense since there no longer is a single gate that someone should either keep or guard. (cf. Moreno & Cardoso, 2016, p. 299).

Papacharissi, in turn, points out that the act of “submitting, reading and endorsing a particular news story affirms, contradicts or expands the mainstream news agenda and engages readers as news gatekeepers” (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 153). According to the Greek researcher, audiences in possession of these scheduling privileges will look for ways to negotiate their preferences and individual interests in a gatekeeping currency space. Therefore, in a less definitive sense, changes in the media will not result at all in a diluted concept of gatekeeper, but rather its appreciation under new variables, which, although altering it in an essential way, do not detract from its validity and interest.

This paper seeks to address this debate in an attempt to question the current status of the gatekeeper concept and the role that can be assigned to it from a very specific perspective that takes into account the technological developments that mark the exercise of journalism, and also the social transformations with which it has to deal. In other words, the new forms of participation and interactivity that ordinary individuals have at their disposal and often use, and the consequences that these practices have on the production and dissemination of information.

New guards at the gates

Among the resources of unquestionable relevance in this debate are social media (or social networks). Because of the involvement of a large number of users, it is possible to create through them an agenda of themes, with informative value, that are an alternative to those selected by mainstream media editors. In this regard, the agenda-setting function of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter has been frequently described in the literature in recent history, especially after the Iranian elections of 2009 (Newman, 2011). The process has been replicated with different impact as well as diverse democratic quality. In most cases, it can be summed up as follows: stories show up first in the new media, and then are “contextualized and validated by the conventional media” (Foster, 2012), thus casting the function of gatekeeper in a new light. A number of analyses of recent political developments - some of them at opposite ends of the spectrum - can adequately illustrate the consequences of considering the concept of gatekeeper in a new perspective.

Let us take as illustrations the 2016 referendum commonly known as Brexit (a referendum held in the United Kingdom in 2016 about leaving the European Union, which led to the victory of the “leave” option with 52.8% of the vote against 48.2% for the “remain” side) and the emergence of Donald Trump as the Republican candidate in the 2016 elections for the presidency of the United States - and let us do it through an analysis that does not simply understand them as mere by-products of forms of resurgent populism, but inserts them into the more general framework of the current paradigm of sociology of information. Katharine Viner, *The Guardian* editor, recently wrote (2016) that “when a fact begins to resemble whatever you feel is true, it becomes very difficult for anyone to tell the difference between facts that are true and “facts” that are not.” In her view, the “leave” campaign in the British referendum was aware of this - and will have used to its advantages the fact that, in the context of current liberal democracies, no authority whatsoever has the power to syndicate political claims.

The “leave” campaign felt that it would not be the facts that would determine the outcome of the dispute, wrote Viner. One of the main promoters of the campaign said “Facts would not win the day. (...) The ‘remain’ campaign featured fact, fact, fact, fact, fact. It just

doesn't work. You have got to connect with people emotionally. It's the Trump success". Viner's explanation is simple: "When "facts don't work" and voters don't trust the media, everyone believes in their own "truth" – and the results can be devastating" (Viner, 2016). In both cases (Brexit and Trump), Viner identifies one of the aspects of the growing fragility of the media as the loosening of control of what she calls the limits of acceptable public expression. For decades, journalists from large media organizations had the function of gatekeeper: they exercised it whenever they judged which ideas could be publicly discussed and which were too radical, unduly grounded or could not be considered a civic contribution.

The situation described shows that the weakening of these filters is, simultaneously, positive and negative, with opportunities and dangers. The consequences are present when traditional media follow social media agendas, created and nurtured by the action of individuals, but also by organizations of various kinds (political, partisan, corporate, commercial). As a result, traditional media often end up behaving like digital weathervanes (Newman, 2011) that reproduce an agenda they do not create or control. The gatekeeping function is largely shared with media users, who also aggregate and curate the information they consume. In Jim Hall's words, they construct their own information "diet" (Hall, 2001, p. 18), delivered in the form of text, image and sound files on the screen of any (fixed or mobile) communication device, matching the configuration of each user's interests.

The result of this process shares the risks associated with much of the communication through new media, namely the "balkanization of news through the provision of niche information" (Hall, 2001, p. 20), or a kind of "information bubble" (Pariser, 2011), within which each individual moves. From the point of view of the quality of public life, this factor poses a threat that takes shape in an information environment that privileges conformity to the detriment of diversity and plurality of opinions, and exempts individuals from exposure to themes and information contrary to their interests. It is important to emphasize that diversity and plurality are conditions for the proper functioning of civic life, and that these are precisely two of the values socially institutionalized by journalism, which online journalism can threaten (Moreno and Cardoso, 2016, p. 300).

These new gatekeepers are not just different people with new roles. At the same time, popularity sensors, portals and platforms based on a set of values embedded in computer algorithms are also gaining importance as the ultimate gatekeeper (Bro & Wallberg, 2014). In the same vein, the pressure to keep online pages up to date with the primary objective of permanently attracting traffic makes the selection process equally important. Tandoc (2014) proposes the term “de-selection” to characterize the act of deciding which of the articles that passed through the first gates is removed from the site of the news and replaced by a new story, following a process determined by audience metrics. “A dip on website traffic signals a need to replace elements on the homepage. An editor from the second newsroom even specified a particular window of time he gives a story. If it does not perform well within 20 minutes, the story will be replaced. This is motivated by the pressing goal of increasing traffic by giving the audience what it wants” (Tandoc, 2014, p. 13).

Foster (2012) also draws attention to the role of gatekeepers exercised by other digital intermediaries, particularly by news aggregators (such as Yahoo), search engines (such as Google), and social media (such as Facebook), among the most important. All these platforms send content from other news providers to the news users, taking advantage of a wide variety of software, channels and devices for this purpose, and they are all an important means of accessing information - in 2012, between 20% and 30% of information content was delivered through these features and devices. The news aggregators, in particular, operate in a way which is relatively close to that of the information media, by providing information packages duly adjusted to the profile of the user, and even generating - or at least editing - new content. However, they are not bound to similar obligations in terms of plurality, property, or regulation. As far as our issue is concerned it is possible (and relevant) to think of these organizations as gatekeepers, in that they control flows, select, classify and then distribute information. From this we can clearly see how the “gatekeeping function of the media is eliminated” and replaced by a “new generation of outside gatekeepers” who pursue political, commercial, personal or other interests of a particular nature (Bro & Wallberg, 2014, p. 8). By doing so, they potentially have a profound impact on how we integrate, think and, inevitably, participate in our democratic life.

With this impact in mind Foster (2012, p. 6) identifies four aspects in the way these intermediaries operate as deserving careful attention for their potential consequences: 1. the control they exert in the choice of what they distribute; 2. the editorial judgments they make about the content of the news they send; 3. their role in transforming economic models for the provision of news and 4. their propensity and ability to influence the political agenda. Naturally, it is possible to argue that these intermediaries do not assert themselves as a preferred channel for journalism. Conventional media have other (privileged) channels through which they reach the public, and audiences can access the news through various platforms of different types, both analogic and digital. However, with the growing importance of digital media - especially in some key demographic groups - the role of these agents will tend to become progressively more crucial from a social perspective. In other words, decisions of a private nature, generally economically motivated, can have a significant impact on an essential good: the universal access to high quality information.

Another meaning for a renewed concept

This situation as described above has consequences for journalists, and implies both the need to adjust old routines and to integrate and normalize new functions. The main question that emerges is whether these transformations imply a restructuring of the roles and values of journalism.

Despite the risks already identified, we think it is possible to formulate new and positive uses for a revised gatekeeper concept. In a 2015 book devoted to this subject, François Heinderyckx points to the need to rethink the metaphor of the gatekeeper: "The loss of traction experienced by the original metaphor should encourage us, more than ever, to think outside the box. Maybe the surest way to free ourselves from the old metaphor is to come up with new metaphors that would help us look at gatekeeping differently" (Heinderyckx, 2015, p. 265).

Thomas Pettitt expanded on this, by associating the concept of gatekeeping with a connection capacity rather than a capacity for delimitation - connection versus containment. As he writes (2012, p. 104):

Images of containment versus connection are also invoked in discussion of the role of the journalist, who (having usurped the branching 'grapevine' of pre-print rumour) is modulating from a 'gatekeeper' (deciding what material should be admitted physically into the news medium, or more abstractly into the realm of 'news'), reflecting a 'fortress journalism' mindset, to a 'navigator' (helping customers to find their way around the network of sources on a matter of interest)

Following a similar train of thought, Bardoel and Deuze (2001, p. 94) suggest a reconfigured function for the journalist who would operate as an annotator or advisor, a switch from a watchdog to a guide dog function. In both cases, what is proposed is the shift to a more equal, collaborative relationship between journalists and news users, while maintaining a measure of reserve and distance. A complementary perspective is suggested by Bruns (2011), when he proposes to replace the concept of gatekeeping by the concept of gatewatching, a concept that is not new (it applies, for example, to the practices that journalists have always developed regarding news provided by news agencies, national and international), but now applied to a multitude of users, with diverse interests, scattered over a wider range of topics. The gain is, at first glance, unequivocal: a greater number of sources and materials with potential news value.

All these points of view seek to take advantage of the potential of public participation, and are a continuation of the attempts at public and civic journalism of the 1980s and 1990s, now accelerated and enhanced by social media platforms. But the role of the journalist can also emerge reinforced by several arguments. Underlying them all there is the realization that the view of a democratic agora composed of blogs and tweets, where the news autocorrect themselves as a result of the harmonious coexistence between a vast informed and wise crowd and a willing team of gatekeepers and professional gatewatchers, is nothing but a mirage. "It is impractical to imagine people in the role of editors, proceeding to their own selection from reams of unfiltered information" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 48).

But the reasons for skepticism are more complex than mere availability and competence for content selection. The emergence of the new online platforms was met with a laudatory discourse around the phenomenon known as citizen journalism. In fact, a few years after this model was proposed, several diagnoses point out that "the biggest problem of the idea of citizen journalism is, frankly, that citizen journalism does not really exist" (Charles, 2012, p. 199). Charles (2012) summarizes very clearly what

has happened: successful citizen journalism tends to become professional journalism; for the most part, what has been hailed as citizen journalism is composed of poor pieces of information and opinion pieces that fade away in the obscurity of personal blogs. In addition, there are the testimonies that citizens today easily record in photography and video, and which are later incorporated into informative websites and used by professional journalists - in exactly the same way testimonies of witnesses have always been dealt throughout the history of journalism.

In terms of information consumption, the transformations should be viewed with some moderation. Indeed, although these developments have been a powerful resource in the process of access to and collection of information, they have not yet resulted in a turning point regarding how most people routinely access the day's news. Few users go directly to social media blogs, YouTube or Flickr, for example) to get information. Although a significant and growing number of individuals arrive at the stories through platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, where the mainstream media are also increasingly present and active, what happens is that traditional news media continue to be the main information platforms, providing information that is subjected to professional mediation procedures, namely selection, editing and interpretation, which, although in mutation and under pressure, still define journalism (Charles, 2012). This interpretation should, however, take into account the way in which news aggregators have come to change this situation not through the collection news, but through selective distribution.

More than ever, journalists and the public are imprisoned by opposing forces: truth and rumour, open information and successive filters. The result of all these contradictory forces inevitably is reflected on a critical issue, namely the questioning of the status of truth (at least in its traditional meaning) and, consequently, the redefinition of the functions of journalism.

What should the journalist keep?

It is a famous claim that the journalist's first loyalty is to truth, the first and most confusing of the principles (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 35 et seq.). In fact, truthful reporting is

critical to the quality of information. One of its key attributes is that it is reliable, because that is what allows individuals to use it to interpret and make decisions appropriate to each social context. From the very beginning, the main criticism levelled at digital media has been the uneven quality of the news (or information) available on the Internet. Major challenges are the ability to separate fact from prejudice and rumour, and to detect something with value within a multiplicity of sources with unreliable or inaccurate contents. These concerns have been answered, to an important extent, by the action of mainstream media, by making available on their own platforms resources appropriate to search and identify relevant and reliable information (Foster, 2012).

Nevertheless, the inexorable fact that information has become significantly more abundant and easily shared, deriving from a much more diverse number of sources came to complicate rather than simplify the definition of “truth”. Let us consider that during the 500 years after Gutenberg the dominant form of information was the printed page: knowledge of the “facts” was delivered to readers in a fixed format, which encouraged them to believe in stable and definitive truths. We have now moved to a different reality, to a framework that implies the redefinition of concepts and practices central to the values of journalism.

Two decades ago, when he initially assessed the impact of the shift from an industrial to an information society, Bardoel (1996) considered factors such as the fragmentation of audiences, a greater dependence on new technologies, the greater control of users through interactivity and the advances towards non-mediation, to conclude on the emergence of two types of journalism: the orientation journalism and the instrumental journalism (Bardoel, 1996, p. 296-7). The instrumental journalism provides specialized and functional information to an interested audience; the guidance journalism, on the other hand, provides the public with a general orientation (contextualization, commentary, and explanation). Other scholars agreed to frame the functions of journalism in not too distant terms. Bruns (2011) undertook a similar exercise proposing two lines of action for journalism: 1) the first is the development of original and valuable news content, embedded in a shared, distributed and decentralized space present in multiple online platforms, including social media; 2) the second is the curatorship of materials available from internal

and external sources, thus giving to this function an added value that legitimates it in the eyes of the news consumer.

In both cases, the authors equate journalism to an activity no longer occurring in the isolation of media organizations: on the contrary, it has to be undertaken in plain sight of the information consumers (and even in cooperation with them), setting aside the aloofness and sometimes condescension that journalists often showed audiences in the past (Bruns, 2011).

Despite these changes, the search for truth (the journalist's first loyalty) remains the goal – but the conditions under which this will be achieved have changed. As described above, greater ease of access to the production of information means that more entities (both individual and collective) are able to produce and make it available on digital media. This leads to a type of journalism that tends to take into account as many points of view as possible, even the most marginalized and extreme. If journalism was previously produced in newsrooms by journalists considered to be authorities and specialists, who wrote the news in accordance with a set of professional values, it is assumed that the move to digital media carries with it, in different ways, a direct relationship with the public, who demands that its views be taken into consideration.

This change has implications for the structure of the news, which, to a certain extent, come to be considered as a form of dialogue. In this light, news ceases to be considered a finished product, becoming instead an ongoing process – which includes not only what journalists and experts write, but also the comments, feedbacks and reactions from the wide and varied public that consumes the news (see Siapera, 2012, p. 139).

It is in this framework that emerges the need for a conceptual and practical adjustment of both truth and objectivity. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2004, p. 80-81), as journalists spend more time trying to synthesize the endless flow of data that comes through the new information portals, they run the risk of becoming more like passive recipients rather than information collectors. At worst they run the risk of becoming mere spokesmen of all sources (or of some), even if remaining impartial and balanced. To counter these risks, these researchers remark on the need to improve the discipline of verification as the most important step to upgrade the quality of information and the public

debate. According to this perspective, verification would distinguish journalism from other fields and create the economic justification for its continuance. In other words, as individuals are confronted with a growing diversity and abundance of information sources, constructing an intelligible whole from this torrent of information precisely requires journalists who can and do exercise curator functions committed to truth. People need sources they can turn to that will tell them what is true and relevant. They need an answer to the question, "What can I believe in here?" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 48).

To this extent, objectivity, the classic value of a closed journalism in which the journalist determined the story from a reduced number of data, lies now less in the capacity of a journalist to stick to the facts and more in his capacity to be transparent, referring to the digital location of the data or facts used in the news, thereby transferring to the common individual the judgment of reliability (cf. Moreno & Cardoso, 2015, p. 288 et seq.). By using these tools in a transparent narrative (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 90), the journalist provides the public with important information (databases, full testimonials, sound recordings) otherwise inaccessible in the conventional work model – thus reinforcing the factual integrity of his work. Lastly, it should be added that by being more open and transparent about his work, the journalist is compelled to be more careful in his research, organization and presentation of the news.

A deeply emblematic case is the WikiLeaks platform (see in this regard Siopera, 2012, whose analysis we follow). Briefly, this is a platform free from any governmental, economic or other pressures to filter or censor contents, which makes available a collection of sensitive information that someone intends to make public without the risk of incurring any sanctions. In July 2010, WikiLeaks published online a series of US military records related to the Afghan War, known as the Afghan War Diary. It contained about 91,000 records of military incidents between 2004 and 2009, revealing a large number of incidents involving civilians and casting an unfavorable image of the military performance. The last years witnessed the emergence of more phenomena with a similar profile. Of these the most striking was perhaps the case of the Panama Papers, despite its complexity and particularities. Cases of this nature become especially relevant and illustrative of the point we have been making: examining thousands

of documents is an immense task that ordinary citizens can hardly afford. Therefore, they require the intervention of professional journalists, with the skills and time to analyze, assess and synthesize the documents, to extract their meaning and implications and, finally, to demonstrate their importance in an understandable and transparent way.

We find, therefore, that it is in the news media that the news continues, despite everything, to crystallize as such. That is, to acquire its dignity and to completely fulfil its social function. Despite countless surveys revealing public distrust of journalists, their claim to legitimacy as news builders (offline and online) remains effective. With this legitimacy the journalist acquires a new role: it is up to him to fulfil the missing links in terms of authority and systematic organization. Ultimately, it is the revaluation of the framing and contextualization functions of all the loose and scattered voices present in the news of the day. Professionally trained to assess material and to curate information, journalists are in a privileged position to contribute significantly to the collaborative efforts of working the topics that inflame social media - and may even be instigators of these efforts, in spaces such as their own platforms.

We agree with Kovach and Rosenstiel (2004) when they observe how citizens have more need – and not less – of sources dedicated to verify information, to point out what is important to know and to eliminate what is not. This is how verification and synthesis became the backbone of the journalist's new role as gatekeeper: the role of sensemaker (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2004, p. 49).

However, in order to fulfil these possibilities, we must accept something hopelessly lost in the field of journalism, that is, the role of journalists as gatekeepers of information and the positioning of the news media (whether printed, radio, television or even online) as the unique spaces for coverage and engagement with news (Bruns, 2011). In other words, journalists have no longer the exclusive right to produce and distribute information, and the news agenda is no longer under their control. Audience members work as secondary gatekeepers, with the ability to convey the information they choose to share, giving rise to what some call a “two-step gatekeeping” process (Singer, 2014).

For Mark Deuze (2006, p. 30) there is no doubt that “the

professional identity of the journalist” is no longer based on the monopoly of content and narration. The classic functions of journalism, namely newsmaking or agenda-setting, are either over or subject to at least a reconfiguration and a relativization of the value they had once had, a value that is actually “historically relative, culturally relative and technologically relative” (Moreno & Cardoso, 2016, p. 297). And, if it is true that only the information produced with journalistic criteria is worthy of being considered as journalism, it is society (the public), in its plurality, that determines what information has or not social relevance, value of use or, in the perspective that guided us, civic interest.

Final notes: transformations and continuities of a profession

As mentioned in the beginning of this text, the object of our analysis is a relatively specific spatio-temporal framework, a somewhat restrictive designation that encompasses the western world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although the literature review and the empirical elements provide an essentially European insight, the transformations described underlie the civilizational framework covered by this designation. However, we need to assume that, even within this space and time, we find very different and particular contexts, different states of evolution and development, which may give different shades to the conclusions that this work suggests. These limitations should not, however, prevent us from outlining trends of a more general order, which are set forth below.

Assessing developments in online journalism will not be very different from assessing those in new media and society. In fact, what is pointed out is the need for research in the field of online journalism to question continually the extent to which journalism, the Internet and society interact, and how meaningful these interactions are for journalism as a profession (Deuze, 2006).

In 1999, Michael Schudson defined journalism as a relatively conservative professional environment. Public journalism urges journalists to put citizens first, to bring new voices to the newspapers, even to share the agenda setting with individuals and groups in communities. But the authority over what to write, and even what to print, remains with the journalists (Schudson, 1999,

p. 123). On the other hand, journalists are not exactly known for the exuberance of their enthusiasm with technology. Studies show that when adopting new technologies, such as blogs and social networks, journalists tend to normalize them, adjusting and adapting them to their norms and to the existing routines (Lasorsa et al., 2011). In the same way, journalists are now integrating web analytics and using audience metrics to optimize traditional gatekeeping functions. “News judgment now includes acute awareness of what stories did well in the past based on traffic. Headlines are now being tested in terms of which version attracts more clicks” (Tandoc, 2014, p. 14).

Tandoc Jr. and Vos (2015) even go as far as identifying an approximation between the gatekeeper function and marketing. In their view, gatekeeping is not just about how events go beyond the gates and become news. “First, publication is no longer the culmination of gatekeeping, as dissemination in an overcrowded information environment has become equally important. Second, given the focus on delivery, gatekeeping now also includes how gatekeepers push news through gates” (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2015, p. 13).

In the debate on the role of gatekeeper, rather than a loss, journalism is confronted with a complex dilemma: “But the dilemma for newspapers is how to open up a closed profession to people who have traditionally been kept outside of the journalistic process – taking advantage of the new opportunities without undermining traditional values and practices. What emerged is a view of news organizations that are seeking to provide more avenues for audience involvement but simultaneously to protect the professional status of the journalist”, writes Hermida (2011a, p. 189). Asking journalists to share decision-making power or simply listening to ordinary people has never been easy: “sometimes it seems like a losing battle” (Witt, 2004, p. 51). A recent empirical study of local Portuguese media (Ferreira, 2013) has revealed how news organizations offering avenues for public involvement, at the same time, seek ways to protect the journalist’s professional status. Data from this study show that, while professionals, especially in the regional context, acknowledge that they often receive contacts from ordinary citizens, most journalists devalue them, giving a preferential approach to elites, to the detriment of ordinary individuals. This undervaluation may be due to the fact that the information is often focused on personal issues and without general

interest. But, as common practice, this mode of relationship between journalists and citizens can contribute to a move away from the newspapers. The data of this study also show that journalists value some of the principles that underlie movements of public and deliberative journalism, in particular, the valorisation of the relationship with citizens and their importance as sources (which suggests that deliberative awareness is emerging). Nevertheless, the results show a conventional journalistic stance that persists, evidenced mainly by low levels of relevance attributed to the functions associated with participatory journalism and by the valorization of functions associated with conventional journalism. These results in the production of journalistic contents too focused on elites and on commercial concerns (see Ferreira, 2013).

These data are consistent with those obtained by other studies, which more explicitly integrate the use of new media tools. Bentivegna and Marchetti (2017) analyzed in Italy the extent to which traditional norms and practices of journalism (and among them gatekeeping) were challenged by the use of Twitter by journalists. The results revealed an understanding of the gatekeeper's role as the action of aggregating content produced by other journalists or by conventional media - rather than the openness to content produced by people outside the traditional news world. They also showed little interaction with actors outside the traditional political and media elites, and reduced interest in expanding the variety of sources, namely those that allowed the input of information produced by individuals not belonging to the traditional elites.

In short, we note that "the public may be at the gates, but the gates are still being kept by the traditional authorities" (Charles, 2012, p. 199). Which leads us, just as it did Mark Deuze (2006, p. 30) a decade ago, to consider valid the appreciation of journalism as being rooted in its 'old guard' ideology, but quickly adopting new ways of connecting with preferences and priorities in constant mutation of users - "if you like, a kind of monitorial journalism."

If the problems with which journalism grapples are known and deep, it is equally true that, regardless of its practical limitations, the interaction with audiences has seen its centrality strengthened in the normative self-definition of journalism in the digital age. However, any

analysis of journalism drawn from ideal type-values (which naturally vary and acquire new meanings, appropriate to social, technological, cultural, and other circumstances) is predicated on the myth of a journalist who acts purely, as a watchdog, a civic journalist or otherwise. In fact, a definition elaborated in these terms will be not only ingenuous but also one-dimensional and, probably, nostalgic of a past that has never existed (Deuze, 2005). In the present context, we can admit that digital journalism (to adopt one of its various designations), while not being the miraculous panacea that responds to the numerous disappointments that mass journalism imposes on democracy, may contribute to strengthen a conversational journalism, that uses non-elitist sources, by proposing a balance between dialogue, participation and deliberation.

In this domain, as in many others of social life, the individuals do play a crucial role - in this case, in determining the extent to which the new communication technologies modify journalism. In fact, journalism's use of new media technologies will reflect not so much the technological developments, but primarily the socio-cultural developments and the citizenship practices they can incorporate.

*Translated by the author.

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