

Changes in journalism: the role of gatekeeping

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ARTICLE

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Journalism is a continuous journey, in fact in English is quite evident: «The English words «journalism» and «journey» are cousins». With this magnificent sentence begins the book *Participatory Journalism: Gates Open at Guarding Online Newspapers* published this year by Singer, Hermida, Sun and others to demonstrate this idea, the idea of continuous evolution of this profession.

Seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently and be accountable; these four points are the leading in the Code of Ethics of journalists proposed by the Society of Professional Journalists in 1996.

Meanwhile Jane Singer in her article «The political j-blogger» listed the following as key points of journalism:

- non-partisanship.
- gatekeeper role.
- independence.
- accountability.

Non-partisanship, independence and accountability (explain where the information is obtained) are beyond doubt, but for some time the role of gatekeeper is questioned, or at least minimized, as Alfred Hermida suggests the following sentence:

Social media technologies like Twitter are part of a range of Internet technologies enabling the disintermediation of news and undermining the gatekeeping function of journalists. - Hermida, A. (2010): «Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism»

The gatekeeper function is to select the information that is considered newsworthy to the audience with the objective to work later on it and end up publishing if it were the case.

The internet has challenged virtually all aspects of this journalistic gatekeeping concept. Online, almost anyone can send news and views around the world, and sometimes it seems as if almost everyone does. In a media environment with unlimited sources of information, the concept of discrete gates through which such information passes is obliterated; if there are no gates, there is no need for anyone to tend them (Williams y Delli Carpini, 2000) – read in (Singer 2005).

In fact once the information passed through the press and was in the newsroom where it was selected, if a citizen

had a story to tell, he or she send it to one or more newspapers, but that changed in Spain has a date and place: Universidad de Navarra , October 30, 2008.

That day, ETA detonated a car bomb with 40 kilos of explosives injuring 17 people¹, students began to use Tuenti instead radio or other traditional media to share and disseminate that information, and a sector of the population reported to the social network.

«They were broadcasting on Tuenti. Their fears, experiences, questions or messages of peace. Almost everything was being posted via Tuenti». - Noguera, 2010.

That day, witness of this attack opened a new stage in the processing of information leaving the press aside.

«They have not called radio stations, neither published photos on services citizen journalism neither major newspapers or countless blogs» (Lopez and Rodriguez, 2008) read in Noguera, 2010.

At that terrible moment we can say there was a change, at least in Spain, and the gatekeeping function was, at least in this case, away from the press, something began to change, that day in Spain many people began to keep a mental model of news and events around them, something called ambient journalism by Hermida inspired on the concept of Hargreaves «*ambient news*» explained in his book «*Journalism: Truth or Dare?*» published in 2003 .

In the Spanish case was Tuenti, but Twitter Iran, ultimately the emergence of these awareness systems are allowing many people begin to learn regardless of the gatekeeping function that the journalism had.

The way of reading news is on the line, applications such paper.li² showing us a website that might seem any online newspaper offers a page of headlines (and the corresponding sections) or information obtained from Twitter or Facebook, not media. This would be a very interesting example that eliminates the gatekeeping role of journalists, the gatekeeping in this case is performed by the application following the preferences of each user.

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² <http://paper.li>

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