Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies

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Audience Interactivity and Participation

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EDITOR

José Manuel Noguera

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**Transforming
Audiences,
Transforming
Societies**

THE "AUDIENCE" AS PARTICIPATIVE, IDEA-GENERATING, DECISION MAKING CITIZENS: WILL THEY TRANSFORM GOVERNMENT?

(SELF-AUTHORED ESSAY)

Name of the Author
Teresa Harrison
Institution
University at Albany
Country
USA

Email Address
tharrison@albany.edu
Keywords
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From a purely technical perspective, no one, including Tim Berners-Lee, has ever been able to pinpoint exactly what makes Web 2.0 unique. What may be most accurate to say is that the enormous popularity of social networking and other Social Media technologies hinges on a radical re-conceptualization of the audience, now routinely incorporated into ICT applications. Once treated as passive consumers of content created by others, designers of these applications now appreciate – and exploit - the fact that new media users (formerly known as the "audience") actively create content online to serve their own goals, frequently as they interact with others. Users of Web 2.0 applications display and tinker with their identities, express themselves on all kinds of topics, invent new products and ideas, and, as Don Tapscott, Tim O'Reilly and legions of other business gurus hasten to remind us, are willing, so far at least, to lend their problem solving, creative efforts, and intellectual products to businesses seeking to innovate, or just looking for free marketing. Hoping to harness this largely uncompensated labor, organizations of all types, both commercial and non-profit, have been quick off the block to find ways to attract these "produsers" to their projects.

Governments have not been the swiftest in this regard, however, they may present the most ambitious and optimistic agenda for involving Internet users. Nations around the world now hope to use new media to engage their citizens in some variation of participatory governance. Where once the prospects for town hall style democracy were doomed by the limitations and inefficiencies of one-way media transactions, the networked interactivity of social media now makes it technically feasible to invite citizen participation on a routine basis. What is not yet clear is how citizens will react over the long term to these invitations and what kinds of social issues and software applications will best attract and immerse them in new citizenship practices.

From Web 2.0 to Government 2.0

Certainly the most compelling political news about Web 2.0 has been the way that social networking has revolutionized the art of political campaigning. But the most enduring political implications of Web 2.0 may lie in what democratic governments seek to achieve in their efforts to engage users in the mundane daily processes of governance. Administrative agencies, persistently bureaucratic and industrial age despite the substantial organizational evolutions of the last three decades, are finally changing as governments reinvent themselves for the information age. One essential part of this transformation to Government 2.0 is the recognition that Social Media enable governments to invite citizens, as democratic watchdogs and collaborators as well as creative do-it-yourself forces, into the administration of government.

Having engineered an election campaign that used Social Media to solicit the work-related and financial contributions of volunteers and to engage voters with wide ranging opportunities for contact with the candidate, Barack Obama quickly translated this experience into a plan for reengineering administration of the US federal bureaucracy. In one of his first executive actions, President Obama issued the Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government establishing transparency, participation, and collaboration as the hallmarks of open government. The Open Government initiative instructs federal agencies to broaden access to government data and other information, create opportunities for citizen participation, and institutionalize a culture of open government with a focus on substantial collaborations with researchers, the private sector, and civil society.

Other countries are moving similarly to adopt features of the Government 2.0 paradigm. Great Britain, Columbia, and Canada have committed to a program of open data as a way to achieve both improved accountability and transparency through the creation of new data products. Australia issued a "Declaration of Open Government" in 2010, with emphasis on informing, which requires the establishment of a "pro-disclosure culture" in Australian government; engaging, which seeks to promote collaboration as a way of improving government processes; and participating, which seeks to make government more consultative with citizens. And as a part of its Government 2.0 planning, Australia is exploring the value of open public sector information in stimulating innovation and expanding knowledge.

Consider also the "Open Government Partnership (OGP)," a program that makes good on a pledge made by President Obama to the United Nations to foster the development of open governments around the world in order to combat corruption and increase accountability. Launched in fall 2011, the OGP is led by an international, multi-stakeholder steering committee comprised of countries (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the US) and civil society organizations such as the International Budget Project and the Transparency and Accountability Initiative. In the last year, 47 additional countries have joined the OGP. In order to do so, countries are required to satisfy a certain number of eligibility conditions, which include establishing the public's legal right to access government information and the creation of mechanisms for citizen participation and consultation.

What Citizens Stand to Gain

Throughout the international discourse of open government and Government 2.0, two complementary themes are evident. The first is a focus on using new technologies to promote e-participation, and is thus a continuation of what, in the annals of new information and communication technologies, can be seen as a historical preoccupation with using new technologies to improve democracy. But what began with Web 1.0 as an effort to engage citizens with their elected representatives has now morphed in Web 2.0 into involving citizens in policy deliberations or actual decision making with public administrators. A case in point is the now famous Peer to Patent project (http://www.peertopatent.org/), which invites reviews by members of the software development community to help assess the claims of pending patent applications in two pilots sponsored by the US Patent and Trademark Office and the United Kingdom's Intellectual Property Office.

The second theme is a Web 2.0 focus on distributing government information previously unavailable to the citizens, either by intention or through neglect. In some cases, the interest is in enabling citizens to use this information as a political tool for transparency. When information and data about government actions and decisions are accessible, citizens can more effectively participate in decision making. But they can also, at least in theory, assess the efficiency and effectiveness of government action, and hold governments accountable for their performance, a condition that is reciprocally expected to improve government performance. And such information is also a key to controlling corruption since the right kind of information enables watchdog citizens and civil society organization to track budget disbursements and expenditures.

In other cases, interest rests more squarely on anticipated economic impact. As our ability to mine and manipulate data increases, speculation increases about the potential for innovation and economic value that might be achieved in liberating "public sector information" from the governments that have collected it, and exploring the ways in which this data might stimulate entrepreneurial activity. Cases in point are the data repositories now functioning in the US (http://data.gov) and the UK (http://data.gov.uk). But even developing countries, such as Moldova and Kenya, are experimenting with opening up their data inventories in an effort to both cultivate citizen trust and stimulate economic growth. It may take some time to appreciate the overall economic impact of government data on business activity. In the meantime, however, efforts such as the US "Smart Disclosure" task force are considering more immediate impacts by asking what information, owned by government or that could be provided by third parties, citizens need in order to make informed decisions about a variety of consumer relevant topics: energy consumption, cell phone plan purchases, medical care, etc. The expectation is that citizens are both ready and willing to use such information, if it is available, to make wise lifestyle and marketplace decisions.

Whither Transformative Government?

It is worth remembering that every new communication technology of the past century has been accompanied by nearly immediate prognostications about how that technology might be used to improve democracy. Apparently, hope springs eternal for democracy theorists. Web 2.0 has been no different in this regard. In response, Frank Bannister and Regina Connolly have recently sought to temper this latest round of "exuberance" over Web 2.0 by noting that, although the technological capabilities have improved, the "assumption that there is a large untapped pool of active citizens waiting to get engaged and stay engaged lacks supportive evidence". This is a sobering and accurate observation.

However, two potentially encouraging differences are worth bearing in mind. First, the active citizens addressed by Government 2.0 are not only the "digital immigrants" of our generation, but also, and perhaps more significantly, the "digital natives" of the Net generation. This is a generation raised on electronic interaction, a generation that plays on the Net, is educated on the Net, follows politics on the Net, and one that may well be inclined to engage with government on issues of interest using the Net. Digital natives have never experienced a world without networked interactivity. Will participation in governance become an expectation of their lifestyle?

Second, this time the wave of democratic enthusiasm is coming from inside government itself. The payoff is an unprecedented array of solicitations and government programs for citizen empowerment – to register ideas and opinions, contribute to policy and decision making, and improve their lives and government itself through new forms of engagement with Government 2.0.

It is of course wise to be skeptical about the extent of the public's demand for and receptivity to such opportunities. But it is also worth attending to the other side of this coin. Equally pressing questions are: Will governments listen? Will they know what to do with the creative products of an active and involved citizenry? Is government willing and able to translate the products of public engagement into observable outcomes? Answers to questions like this will depend on substantial change, not just from citizens, but from within the ranks of government itself. Clearly there is a reciprocal causality at work here. If the time has come for two-way active engagement in the daily processes of governance, both conversational partners must be up to the task.

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i See http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/for-agencies/informing-consumers-through-smart-disclosure.pdf

Name of the Author
Peter Dahlgren
Institution
Lund University
Country
Sweden

Email Address
peter.dahlgren@kom.lu.se
Keywords
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FROM PUBLIC TO CIVIC INTELLECTUALS VIA ONLINE CULTURES
(SELF-AUTHORED ESSAY)

Traditional public intellectuals

In the history of modern democracy, the role of the public intellectual (PI) has had an important place. While the image of the rugged individualist can at times occlude sociological insight into the phenomena of PIs, their capacity to independently address on matters of contemporary concern has played an important role in the dynamics of public opinion. While politically engaged, their commitments have been to the truth (as they see it from their various political perspectives); they for the most part have not sought power or political careers for themselves. At times they have expressed a minority opinion that may then take hold and sway popular sentiment and/or decision-making by elites; at other times he has felt harsh response from both power holders and the general public. The success rate of their causes has been less significant than the fact that they participated in vitalizing democracy and animating the public sphere, even if, of course, success always adds to the heroic status. They have indeed been 'intellectual' – people driven by ideas – and they have had a communicative capacity to reach and engage larger audiences. Yet the contemporary discussions about public intellectuals have a certain quality of lament about them. There is a sense of loss, that things were somehow better in the past, somewhat akin to the notion

of 'community', which is often typecast as another major victim of modernity. Certainly the character, role, numbers, and significance of PIs have evolved over the last century, and perhaps most notably in the last few decades. And no doubt the picture today in some ways looks troubling, as much of the key US and UK literature underscores (see, for example, Etzioni and Bowditch, 2006; Posner, 2003). On the other hand, the phenomenon can be seen from a variety of angles, and while not disputing the evidence for 'decline' and 'loss', I would like in this presentation to offer a somewhat different trajectory.

The traditional model of the PI is in some ways being edged out by institutional changes both within and beyond the university that erode the viability of economic and ideological independence. At what point we should draw the line and say that a particular role or form of activity no longer qualifies as a PI will always be open for discussion. There have long been grey zones, for example, between pundits, in the sense of journalistic commentators, and 'real' PIs. While many intellectuals view pundits as often shallow and superficial, it is also true that many PIs have made use of journalistic formats to express their views in popular and accessible ways. On the other hand, the demarcation between PIs and public relations specialists, spin doctors, image managers, and advertisers becomes less problematic, even if boundaries can never be fully fixed.

The book format has also been a key genre for PI's, and that industry is certainly going through a turbulent period (see Thompson,

2010; Striphas, 2009, for recent analyses); this too impacts on PIs' opportunities to reach the public. The intensified economic pressures for short-term profits lead to strategies aimed at launching bestsellers; this tends to reduce the likelihood of intellectual books aimed at smaller audiences being published, a discouraging development for PIs. However, technological changes also provide new options. Pasquali (2011) argues that digitalization is impacting on the infrastructure of publishing, the social practices of reading, as well as on the 'status' of the book, and not least the relationship between authors and readers. The enhanced possibilities for dialogue between authors and readers, and collaborative writing environments, promote new, participatory forms of online writing. The act of reading, as it evolves more and more into an electronic activity becomes integrated into a broader array of cultural consumption spread over a variety of media platforms. The reader takes on a simultaneous status as a technology 'user', a 'consumer' and member of a 'media audiences'. In this makeover of the culture of books, and print generally, the playing field for PIs becomes modified in ways that can still be promising for those who are willing and able to adapt to the new environment.

Public intellectuals and the digital media landscape

Now, let me just backtrack a bit and pull in a larger perspective. For citizens generally, the affordable and accessible Web 2.0 technologies can be utilized to communicate with each other individually

or in groups/networks. Social media such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter have proven to be very useful for when people have felt politically motivated to engage in debate, to mobilize and to organize for political purposes (see for example, Loader and Mercea, 2012). And within the online mainstream media, discussion forums for the expression of opinion have flourished. The Net has become a central institution of the public sphere; for those citizens who are in fact focused on news and discussion of politics, the possibilities are impressive, (despite the obvious limitations in regard to impacting on power and decision-making). Perhaps most fundamentally, in regard to media, citizens are no longer just positioned as audiences, but can be active 'produsers', as it is sometimes called. This can become empowering, both in subjective and objective terms, especially as citizens generate networks, mini-public spheres, social movements, and engage in mobilizations.

These developments raise the fundamental issue of what the concept of PI means in the contemporary media landscape. To begin with, much remains the same. PIs are being amplified by the web. In the US, Danowski and Park (2009), in analyzing the social network links of 662 'traditional' PIs found that in fact they have higher visibility via Google and Google Groups than in the traditional mass media. Moreover, the authors ascertained that the internet also supports discussion of dead PIs better than the mass media. Turning to online newspapers and major journalistic organizations line CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, The Huffington Post and we can note that

they all have (mostly elite) bloggers, who function much like the commentators of the printed press, and in their ranks we find PIs. And the issue of deciding who is and is not a PI even in this setting remains ever with us; many are journalists and established 'pundits', but some are academics or experts in a special area. Such sites have become the home of digitally enhanced, updated version of traditional, prominent PIs. Their texts are distributed by established media organizations, giving them both status and visibility.

Beyond these largely net-equivalents of traditional mass mediated PIs, however, we find of other developments. For one thing, we can see today a new generation of PIs emerging who differ from traditional PIs in two basic ways, namely their adept use of the new media affordances, and their status as 'intellectuals'. Contemporary PIs whose intellectual formation has been strongly shaped by digital media and thus have late modern 'web roots' – and are therefore generally younger – engage in a variety of media practices. They use the affordances in more technically creative, multimedia ways, with audiovisual productions of various kinds, and even remixing materials from other mainstream or alternative sources. Ideas of course can be expressed in other ways beyond the classic linear text and its particular mode of cognitive activity. People are discovering and inventing on the net new modes in which one can be intellectual.

This is a historically exciting development, even if the challenge of maintaining standards and criteria of evaluation, of

identifying the spurious, and so forth, becomes more still difficult in the web context. We must also accept that there will be less of a consensus on these matters than in the past, given the strong strand of relativism in late modern culture. If 'truth' cannot be guaranteed from any one voice, we will have to hope that the collaborative, participatory, interactive, interventional environment of the internet will at least promote a sense of the open and provisional.

Yet, most PIs today who operate online use the basic blog, which retains the classical form of a text. Generally speaking, even online, traditional PIs go through various filters of quality control in order to gain access to a public. This has been integral to their status; they have not been 'just anybody'. Today, however, just about anybody can in fact put materials out on the net. Thus, an important mechanism of the new media environment is precisely the ease of entry; many are drawn to participate with political blogs, resulting in a larger, broader, and more diverse range of voices.

Towards civic intellectuals

While there is a layer of elite bloggers, many of whom have strong connections with political, economic, and communication centres of power, beyond them there is thus a vast array of bloggers. Some citizens are obviously more intellectual, articulate, and imaginative than others in their political communication than others; they tend to gain recognition for this within their circles and networks. They gain audiences, becoming opinion leaders

of some kind. Among them are no doubt many whom we would classify as PIs, given their commitment to ideas, even allowing for the newer modes of multimedia and/or compressed textual expression. These are people with developed civic identities, who are engaged in political issues. While lacking the elite status of bloggers in the major media, they are nonetheless contributing to the expansion of the intellectual character of the public sphere. To distinguish them from traditional PIs, taking into account the contingencies of late modernity and its media landscape, I propose that we today call them 'civic intellectuals'.

This term seeks to signal the continued importance of intellectual activity for democracy, but involves a shift away from the more distinct and renowned figures we associate with PIs and the print-based public sphere. Instead, the concept of civic intellectual emphasizes the origins of politically motivated intellectual communication in the broad and diversified tapestry of politically engaged citizens. Civic intellectuals are generally less 'grand' than traditional PIs, though some may attain an equivalent stature. They are no less public than traditional PIs, though they are less likely to reach extensive audiences; online public spheres are generally smaller and more fragmented than was the case under the era of mass media. On the other hand, they are more likely to have more interaction with those who read their texts.

Civic intellectuals are thus a larger, more diffuse social category than traditional PIs; there are, by definition, more of them. They engage with politics under a

set of contingencies shaped by the socio-cultural contours of late modernity, the dilemmas of democracy, the character of the media landscape, and not least, the contemporary crises of capitalism. In this sense, the notion of civic intellectuals is emblematic of how the dynamics of democracy are evolving in the face of very difficult historical circumstances. Thus, we should not see civic intellectuals as some new force that will lead democracy forward to a new golden age, but they do signal a potentially positive step in the chronicles of citizens' participation and the evolution of the public sphere.

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MORE THAN A BACKCHANNEL: TWITTER AND TELEVISION
(SELF-AUTHORED ESSAY)

Twitter is a social media service that has managed very successfully to embed itself deeply in the everyday lives of its users. Its short message length (140 characters), and one-way connections ('following' rather than 'friending') lend themselves effectively to random and regular updates on almost any form of personal or professional activity – and it has found uses from the interpersonal (e.g. Boyd *et al.*, 2010) through crisis communication (e.g. Bruns *et al.*, 2012) to political debate (e.g. Burgess & Bruns, 2012). In such uses, Twitter does not necessarily replace existing media channels, such as the broadcast or online offerings of the mainstream media, but often *complements* them, providing its users with alternative opportunities to contribute more actively to the wider mediasphere. This is true especially where Twitter is used alongside television, as a simple backchannel to live programming or for more sophisticated uses. In this article, we outline four aspects – dimensions – of the way that the *old* medium of television intersects and, in some cases, interacts, with the *new* medium of Twitter.

Tweeting about TV

Television has always been a highly Social Media form; it has consistently provided key 'talking points' for western societies. And, ever since notions of the 'active' audience became firmly entrenched in media studies several decades ago, it has been recognized as a medium that readily catalyses audience discussion, interaction, fandom and other social activity. Twitter has become an important backchannel through which such social activity is sustained and made more widely visible: Deller (2011: 225) notes that television shows, or topics related to them, frequently appear in Twitter's 'trending topics', for example, and recent market research suggests that viewers now use Social Media with considerable enthusiasm to engage with television programs, particularly where there are explicit on-screen prompts, such as dedicated hashtags (Broadcast Engineering, 2012).

Used this way, Twitter – and similar services – becomes a kind of virtual loungeroom, connecting the active audiences of specific TV shows at an unprecedented scale and thereby amplifying audience activities even further. This is the case especially for live television (from first-run drama and reality TV screenings to politics and sports), where the shared sense of watching a show together is especially heightened; here, Twitter becomes a metaphorical 'watercooler' in the cloud, but one where the watercooler conversations take place instantly, rather than at work the following morning. For audiences with access to Social Media on a second screen, the experience of watching television thus becomes an even more communal one.

Tweets as TV audience research

This instant audience feedback, intended in the first place for other viewers, but also available to broadcasters and researchers, in turn provides a potentially very rich stream of data – representing "empirical evidence … of how other people make sense of the world" (McKee, 2003: 15) –, growing at an exponential rate. This data stream presents a significant opportunity for researchers seeking to understand the processes of television "audiencing" (Fiske, 1992), in addition to more conventional approaches to audience measurement. The in-depth, minute-by-minute, quantitative and qualitative data which now surround television in the form of tweets is ripe for analysis, and provides the basis for a more sophisticated, immediate measurement and understanding of audience activity.

A number of obvious opportunities emerge in this context: first, it becomes possible simply to track the total Twitter activity surrounding a show (and its associated hashtag) over the course of the screening; this provides insight into the audience reaction to key moments of the show at a temporal resolution which cannot be matched by most other audience measurement approaches. (Bruns, 2011a, shows user activity around the #royalwedding hashtag during the global telecast of the British royal wedding, for example). Such measurements may also be used to explore audience reactions to candidates during televised political debates, for example. Second, the major contributors to the Twitter debate may be identified, and these key enthusiasts may be harnessed for the further promotion of future episodes. Finally, qualitative analysis of key themes and topics of discussion over the course of the show provides important feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of a program, well beyond what may be identified through the inherently artificial device of audience interviews and

Name of the Author
Harrington, Highfield & Bruns
Institution
Queensland University
Country
Australia

Email Address
s.harrington / t.highfield / a.bruns@qut.edu.au
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focus groups (see e.g. Bruns, 2011b, for an indication of audience reactions to the contestants on Australian reality TV show *Go Back to Where You Came From*). Such analysis may also be usefully combined with conventional audience ratings and feedback tools, and in combination, these techniques enable researchers to understand audiences in an increasingly converged media environment (Simons, 2011): they constitute audience research tools fit for multi-platform, transmedia content (Jenkins, 2006).

Tweeting for TV

Not only do audiences tweet about what they see, but television programs themselves can be structured in part or in full around the input provided by viewers via Social Media. In such cases, producers leverage the audience conversations that occur on Twitter, and to some extent incorporate those tweets back into the show itself. Twitter becomes not only a backchannel to the show proper, in other words, but becomes part of the show itself.

This has become increasingly common practice, and is facilitated largely through the promotion of dedicated hashtags relating to a show, and/or through the show's dedicated Twitter account. Australian breakfast television shows such as *Sunrise*, for example, which has a history of incorporating viewer voices and feedback that predates Social Media (Harrington, 2010), now regularly ask people to provide their thoughts about daily news topics through Twitter mentions

of their official account. Similarly, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's live talkshow *Q&A*, which focuses mainly on political themes, asks its audience to use the #qanda hashtag, and promotes the best tweets (often the most clever, incisive, or funny) by displaying them at the bottom of the screen. Such activities raise the potential of making television a more interactive, dialogical experience (beyond the traditional broadcast model). The extent to which such interactivity might be incorporated into live television formats has yet to be explored in full; indeed, entirely new television formats may arise to leverage such interactivity more effectively.

New, Twitter-enhanced ways of watching TV

Clearly, then, increased uses of Twitter alongside television – as a simple backchannel, or in more sophisticated, transmedia contexts – may add a new dimension (and new pleasures) to the experience of being 'an audience' for television. At the very least, Twitter provides a new channel for the conversations that have always occurred around television – but in doing so, how might the platform affect and change television itself, and the audiences who watch it? To begin with, it is interesting to note that the importance of synchronous co-presence in Twitter-based Social Media discussions could well re-entrench synchronicity in television viewing, and make viewers less likely to use time-shifting technologies (PVRs etc.): Twitter-enhanced television viewing privileges the live event because it requires the gathering

of a Social Media community on the same platform, at the same time. The impact here is similar to that of the unauthorized distribution of shows: television networks may be increasingly less inclined to delay broadcasts and series, as this would serve to dissipate the Social Media 'buzz'. Conversely, a strong Twitter resonance may also be a boon to advertisers: as Twitter-enhanced TV watching is incompatible with time-shifting, Twitter television audiences are more likely to be exposed to commercials.

But beyond this enhancement of shared, live television experiences, Twitter may find its uses in a much greater range of television contexts which have yet to be fully explored. Transmedia content does not need to be live to make use of a wide range of media channels and platforms, and Twitter can play a role also in the anticipation and follow-on discussion of television shows; it may be used to maintain a show's momentum in between weekly screenings or between the seasons, for example. Here, Twitter would be used more to sustain a community of enthusiasts and to facilitate their interactions with the program-makers, rather than for (or in addition to) live interaction during the broadcast itself.

Conclusion

The relationship between television and Social Media is very complex one, but the point of this article is to sketch out the possible forms of that relationship, and its implications for the engagement between

audiences and television content. A wide range of additional questions emerge from this, including:

• What Social Media strategies can and should television networks employ to facilitate and manage audience interactions?

• If networks make overt attempts to catalyse Twitter discussions, what resistance tactics against such takeovers might some audience members engage in?

• What programs are not conducive to this form of engagement, and therefore limit the potential applications of Social Media as television enhancements?

• How does research into television audiences' Social Media activities compare and connect with more conventional television ratings and market research approaches?

Such questions are necessarily well beyond the scope of this brief introduction. They are, however, questions that television and Social Media researchers are beginning to confront in their work, as Twitter and other social networks become more popular and normalized as platforms for our everyday interactions, and as networks and producers begin to further embed Social Media initiatives into their content and programming strategies.

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Name of the Author
Elvira García de Torres
Institution
University CEU-Cardenal Herrera
Country
Spain

Email Address
egarcia@uch.ceu.es
Keywords
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AUDIENCE TERRITORY
(SELF-AUTHORED ESSAY)

In two recent studies,[1] an analysis of participation in a sample of 80 Latin American and US newspapers and a qualitative research on the use of Twitter and Facebook by regional news media in the region, we found clear patterns of a defensive strategy regarding the management of online audiences in the websites but also no strategy at all and open movements in the Social Media arena (García de Torres, 2011; García de Torres et al. 2011). Despite the eminent proofs of how news media promote civic engagement and freshen up the news, little efforts have been made in the realm of traditional media to effectively intertwine past and present. Plainly stated in the Terms of Service by a prominent Spanish company: "This Portal will just enable a space, but will not participate in it at all" (or this is *audience territory*).

It does not come as a surprise. The takeaway findings of our first study were: spaces are open to participation but without supervision, direction or resources; users' data gather in formats that freeze the conversation; citizen channels are conceived as a playground; finally, chaos is governing the architecture of conversation (the lack of harmony being particularly present in control features). As a result of this study, we decided to focus on social expectations and media policies regarding UGC.[2]

Later, when examining the practices of 24 outlets on Twitter and Facebook, we found motivation, enthusiasm and a drive to collaborate with the users in very small media outlets: editors travelling to congresses or meetings to learn and teach the staff on coming back, reporters urging editors to take up the social networks, voluntary shifts to keep up with immediacy on Twitter... Also, disenchantment related to the inability to build a community or, sometimes, the lack of answer by the users, in some cases due to technological gaps.

As researchers, we are challenged everyday both by the developments in new platforms and the weight of old theories frameworks. The clear picture of the quasi-petrified reader is replaced by that of the more ambiguous "produser" (Bruns, 2005) and a breeze of common knowledge and untutored practices hits basic journalistic principles as reporters behave as users do on social news platforms (Lasorsa et al., 2011).

We have this new process "...whereby ordinary people have an opportunity to participate with or contribute to professionally edited publications" (Hermida and Thurman, 2008:2) but still not the answer to important questions such as "How does UGC impact on the quality of journalistic content?", "Which is the safer approach to UGC in view to obtain meaningful insights of events?", "What does trigger interesting participation? Or "Which are the dynamics of conversation in a large, medium and small size outlet?" Most important of all: What is the audience summed up for in the XXI century?

Reasons for discouragement can be found in almost every study regarding the quality of UGC or the motivations that lie in the editors´ minds, regarding the audience status in their website. In these times of turbulence, we have verified failure, but failed to point out innovative practices involving users and news media, as in Muthukumaraswamy (2010).

The citizens´ faults as real-time interpreters are well documented (Ornebring, 2008; Reich, 2008; Acosta, 2009; Pew Research, 2009, Ruiz et al., 2010). This is why the powerful concept by Hermida (2010), "ambient journalism", requires a careful examination. Not only because partiality and verification when associated to citizen online publishing go frequently hand in hand; also, because the sphere of personal interests is growing online, the audiences´ performance on a large scale is still under examination and the "ambient" metaphor does not match findings on the consistency of citizen journalism (Lacy et al., 34-46).

On the other hand, news editors comply and adopt the new participatory formulas for the practical component, despite severe objections mentioned by them such as the lack of ethics by the users, poor knowledge of the legal consequences or the professional routines or being too opinionated, instead of fact-friendly (Lewis et al., 2010).

Participation is a valuable asset for news media: very recently, the blog of Martha, a 9 year old girl, went viral because of a picture of her daily meal at school, resulting in a worldwide trend and a serious debate over health that has made headlines in many countries. Young reporter Martha achieved

in a week more traffic than reputed pundits in a month. Worst of all, Marta´s tray is news in a very right sense.

To sum up, over the past decade, participatory tools on the newspaper websites have been added either as a trend or as a technology asset in view of, as Vujnovic and others (2010) have pointed out, traffic or e-branding results; but rarely as a means to achieve what in essence constitutes the ultimate goal of a journalistic entrepreneurship: to enlighten the audience, to provide facts, context, meaning. This is a call for applied research and innovation, stronger interdisciplinary collaboration, original basic research and a new approach in order to fuel the search for answers to conversational Journalism.

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Name of the Author
Carlos A. Scolari
Institution
Universitat Pompeu Fabra
Country
Spain

Email Address
carlosalberto.scolari@upf.edu
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LOST IN THE BORDERLINES BETWEEN USER-GENERATED CONTENTS AND THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY
(SELF-AUTHORED ESSAY)

Twenty-first century convergence processes (industrial convergence, professional convergence, technological convergence, and narrative convergence) have completely changed the media landscape. Today convergence is one of the key concepts for understanding what's happening in the media ecology. In this short essay I'll focus on media narrative convergence, or in other words, transmedia storytelling.

What do we mean by *transmedia storytelling*? According to Henry Jenkins (2006) many contemporary works are characterized by expanding their narrative through different media (film, TV, comics, books, etc.) and platforms (blogs, forums, wikis, social networks, etc.). For example, the Fox series *24* began as a TV show but ended up including mobisodes, webisodes, video games for consoles, mobile games, comics, novels, board games and a plethora of official and fan websites. We can add a second feature to this transmedia dimension of storytelling evidenced by Jenkins: the creation of user-generated contents. Transmedia narratives begin in a Hollywood studio or in the comic book editor's office in Manhattan but continue, for example, in a blog written by a Finnish girl or in a parody video uploaded onto Youtube by a group of Brazilian fans.

This description of transmedia storytelling is very clear: on one side, we have the commercial production (the canon). On the

other side, the user-generated contents (the fandom). Both environments –the industrial and the handcrafted- produce different texts, with different production logic and a different aesthetics. In this essay I'd like to demonstrate that the borderline between user-generated contents and culture industry is not clearly defined. Let's see an example.

The Pardillos experience

Pardillos is a webcomic[1] created by the Spanish student Carlos Azaustre that follows the events of ABC *Lost*'s TV seasons step by step. The first webcomic was released in 2007 after a promotional trailer that announced its arrival. The author introduced his particular version of the story on the blog:

> *When parody overcomes fiction*… February 30, 2004. An airplane of Naufragic Airlines starts the Flight 3.1415 from Ibiza Island to Cuenca. The flight never arrives to its destination. In the midst of the journey a fatal accident causes the plane to crash on a mysterious island in the Mediterranean Sea. Fourteen survivors, including a doctor, a butcher boy-scout, a fugitive, a spunky, a robot, a video game geek, a pregnant girl … will face many dangers and will have to survive on the island.

Why '*Pardillos*'? The title of the webcomic is just part of the parodic spirit of the story. In Spanish *Lost* is translated as *Perdidos*, from which we arrive to *Pardillos*, the Spanish word for *bumpkin, yokel*. Azaustre continued the publication of his parody on the web until 2008, when he decided to take the big step and print it. As the publishers refused, he compiled the first season's comics and

self-released the volume *Pardillos: Primera Temporada* (*Pardillos: First Season*).

Pardillos is a comic in which the fictional world of *Lost* (its characters, their narrative programs, the relations between them and the sequence of events triggered on the island) is reinforced by a complex intertextual network of links with contemporary Spanish popular culture. The parody is not only in the jargon used by characters or in the transformation of their names (i.e., *John Locke à Yon Locko*) but in the intertextuality that does not hesitate to poke fun at the island's TV show hosts and reality show contestants very well-known to the Spanish public. A couple of examples show this intense intertextual game. During the first season the Iraqi Sayid Jarrah (an ex-torturer in the Republican Guard of Saddam Hussein and telecommunications expert, represented in the comic as a robot) meets Danielle Rousseau, the only survivor of a French expedition that sank off the island 16 years earlier. In *Pardillos* Danielle Rousseau becomes Carmen Russo, the Italian actress that won the Spanish edition of *Sobrevivientes 2006* (*Survivors 2006*), the reality show located precisely on a tropical island in which contestants competed to survive. On another page of *Pardillos* the presenter of the Dharma Initiative orientation video is Mercedes Mila, the host of the Spanish version of *Big Brother*. This kind of intertextual play is found throughout the comic and adds a further level of complexity to the narrative interpretation: to understand *Pardillos* it is not enough to be a faithful follower of *Lost*, the reader must also be steeped in Spanish mass culture and its characters.

A few months after its publication, *Pardillos: Primera Temporada* was available at major book stores in Spain. In 2009, coinciding with claiming the prize for Best On-Line Comic at the Comic Exhibition in Madrid, the third album was released. The forth and fifth albums arrived in 2010. By the end of 2011 *Pardillos* had sold over 27,000 copies… This experience leads us to question the boundaries between user-generated content and the culture industry. What started as the webcomic of a college student ended up as a product that is distributed and sold through commercial channels like FNAC.

As we can see, the borderline between user-generated contents and the culture industry's production is very porous. Contents born on the margins may end up being taken over by large communication systems, in the same way that the culture industry pays close attention to the prosumer's productions and has no scruples about distributing these contents and even making a profit from them.

The DIY narrative

Many *Lost* fans were disappointed with the last episode of the series. From the beginning it was clear that not all viewers would be satisfied with the show's conclusion. *Lost* fits perfectly into a subgenre that the Argentine writer Ricardo Piglia defined as *paranoid fiction* (1991), that is, a story dominated by a conspiracy climate in the context of a continuous interpretative delirium.

The interpretation of the whole transmedia world of *Lost* (not just the TV show) is founded on Pierre Levy's collective intelligence (1994). The construction of possible worlds

and the creation of narrative hypotheses about the future development of a plot are basic elements of the interpretive process; *Lost* and many other transmedia productions demonstrate that nowadays this interpretive process is no longer an individual activity: possible worlds and hypotheses are built in online communities, in a technology-mediated global discussion. This radically new situation is a challenge to traditional semiotic theories, which are mainly based on the individual reading or watching experience.

In the specific case of *Lost*, what should be a 'normal' interpretation process has transformed into a frenetic search for the meaning of *everything*. Even the most standard ellipses of the narration must be fulfilled and explained. The army of *Lost* fans has developed an interpretive *horror vacui*: the dynamics of the plot spread a paranoid epidemic in which the consumers are always looking for new clues, hidden codes, and puzzles to solve from one coast to another of *Lost*'s transmedia fictional world. From their perspective *Lost* is a complex network of *Easter eggs* waiting to be deciphered. Paranoid fiction.

If anything characterizes transmedia narratives it is that they tend to drag on into eternity and it is almost impossible to stop them. As much as J. J. Abrams and his team of writers have tried to finish it, *Lost*'s narrative engine is still working on. Transmedia storytelling teaches us that if producers don't want, don't know or can't generate new contents, prosumers will create and distribute them. You don't like *Lost's* ending? Create your own The End.

DIY: Do It Yourself. In this context the new seasons of *Lost* are being cooked up in the social networks, in the conversations of their fan tribes that continue the debate about alternative endings and hypothetical spin-offs that make them dream of a Seventh Season.

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(Endnotes)

1 See http://perdidos-comic.blogspot.com.es

Name of the Interviewer
Rocío Zamora
Institution
University of Murcia
Country
Spain
Email Address
rzamoramedina@um.es

Name of the Interviewee
Wayne Wanta
Institution
University of Florida
Country
USA
Date of the interview
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Keywords
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THE INFLUENCE OF A MEDIATING SOURCE – MY FRIEND – IS NOW SPREADING THE INFLUENCE TO OTHERS WHO MAY NOT HAVE SEEN THE NEWS REPORTS
(INTERVIEW ESSAY)

Wayne Wanta works as professor and chair of the Department of Journalism at the University of Florida, and was also professor at Oklahoma State University and University of Missouri. His research experience is focused on Mass Communication Theory and Public Opinion, especially on Agenda-Setting media effects. He is a past president of AEJMC, and twice represented AEJMC as a delegate to the World Journalism Education Congress. He is author of more than 150 research articles and papers, many in the area of sports, political and visual communication. During this interview, Wanta explains how social media are representing new spheres for civic engagement and democratization of influence.

What´s your opinion about the idea that Social Media are really encouraging civic engagement? Does Social Media represent democratization for civic participation?

Social Media are clearly encouraging civic engagement. People post news links on their Facebook pages, or tweet links on Twitter. With the added sources of information, there is no reason for a Social Media user to be uninformed on any issue. However, this was also the predictions when television first

became popular. Television would be hugely educational. Viewers would be so much better informed than in the past. Well, there is research that suggests people who watch a lot of television is actually less informed than people who watch less television. This could eventually happen with Social Media. One important aspect in the favor of Social Media, though, is credibility of source. If I see a tweet from a friend or a journalist, I know immediately whether I can trust the source of the information. Also, if enough of my friends tweet information about an issue, I may feel compelled to pass that information on to others. In other words, I may think that, since my friends are actively participating in society, I may feel that I too need to participate. If enough people feel this way, individuals in society would certainly be better informed.

What is the influence of interactivity and participatory communication on agenda building process?

Social Media are bringing back the idea of the two-step flow of communication effects. In the 1940s and 1950s, researchers thought that media first influenced opinion-leaders who then filtered news content down to opinion followers. One author called opinion-leaders "influentials" because they played an important role in influencing society. Social Media are allowing individuals to connect with hundreds/thousands of their friends. So one of my friends might see a news story on the website for CNN and put a link to the story on his/her Facebook page. I'll see it, and think the issue must be important. A good example: Shortly after a major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico by BP Oil, a friend of mine "liked" a page called "Boycott BP". I saw it

and immediately thought the oil spill must be a pretty important issue. I had no personal involvement in the oil spill, and neither did my friend. The news media, however, set the agenda for my friend. He read about the oil spill and spread the information to others by liking the Boycott BP page. My friend was influenced by media coverage. And since I think my friend is a very credible source of information, I was influenced by my friend. Notice that the news coverage still had an agenda-setting effect, but the process of how the effect occurred is different. So it appears that the news media will continue to have an agenda-setting effect. The news media are credible sources of information. But the influence of a mediating source – my friend – is now spreading the influence to others who may not have seen the news reports.

In your opinion, nowadays, Social Media play a better role as agenda setters than traditional media?

Traditional media have one huge advantage over Social Media: Traditional media have access to important news sources. This access allows reporters to gather information with fewer barriers than a typical individual. For example, I happen to be a very big sports fan. I can read lots of information on the internet dealing with my favorite team, the Green Bay Packers. Some of the information is created on the internet by young kids who happen to have a computer. Some of the information, however, is created by reporters who have covered the team for years and have access to the players and locker rooms. Who has the more credible information? Obviously, the traditional media. Some Social media, though, have access to traditional media. I

may see a friend who tweets a link on his Twitter account to a story dealing with the Packers. If I haven't seen the story, I may follow the link.

In this case, Social Media are providing me with additional information about a topic that I'm very interested in. So while the source of the story is a traditional medium, Social Media are helping me gain additional knowledge that I might not be aware of. There is a danger here, however. If I use Social Media for additional information on one specific topic, I may have a great deal of knowledge about this topic, but I may have very little knowledge on other topics. In this example, I may know lots about the Green Bay Packers, but I may know very little about oil spills in the Gulf, or the unemployment rate. Plus, if I know a whole lot about one topic, I may become polarized on that topic. For example, if I am politically conservative, and only follow Social Media for information about the conservative side of issues, I may become even more conservative because of this exposure. The constant exposure through Social Media of conservative opinions reinforces my previously held positions, making my positions even more conservative.

How is the influence of audience fragmentation on public opinion shaping process in a cross-media landscape?

I think fragmentation in society is a result of information overload. We have so much information at our disposal that we can be extremely selective in what information we process. We can selectively choose information that only agrees with our

previously held positions. That wasn't the case pre-internet, when we had limited information choices. Selective exposure is causing disparities in our knowledge of important issues so much so that we are becoming polarized in our opinions. The abundance of information has caused another negative effect. Individuals can't possibly read and view all possible information on all issues so that we can make an informed decision about the issues. We just don't have the time. Instead, we are creating a society that wants to be "told" and not "shown".

A perfect example of this happened in the 2004 U.S. Presidential election. The Democratic candidate, John Kerry, was a hero in the Vietnam War. He had won medals for saving people's lives. This was a fact. However, Republicans ran a serious of commercials claiming Senator Kerry had lied about his war record to get the medals. Kerry could have run commercials to counter these attacks by including some of the men he had saved during the war. But this strategy would not have worked. People just wanted to be told – here, that Kerry had exaggerated his war heroism claims. Voters didn't want to see evidence because they were being bombarded with too much information.