Participatory Practices and Journalism: The Impact of User-Generated Content in Making News

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ABSTRACT

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Given the new possibilities for internet users creation of media content, this dissertation investigates the repercussions of these non-professional media production activities in journalism. More specifically, this dissertation is an ethnographic analysis of the effects of different participatory practices in newswork. Drawing from theories on the sociology of news production and Brun's conceptualization of *produsage*, it examines how journalists of three Spanish news organizations deal, in their daily routines, with user-generated content (UGC) created within and outside of the domain of these news outlets. Using the industrial construction of audiences as a theoretical framework, this research also deals with the implications of journalists' integration of UGC in the process of making news for their views about their audiences' roles. In addition, this dissertation explores how the participatory practices held by audience members have impacted journalists' understandings of their function as gatekeepers. In analysing these matters, I have employed a triangulation of methods: newsroom observations, in-depth interviews with 33 journalists, and textual analysis of news media homepages.

This dissertation concludes that UGC are relevant materials whose use raises significant issues for journalists. Moreover, this study argues that different approaches and ways of dealing with UGC mark news organizations' understandings of the practice of journalism as well as their definitions of professional ideologies. In regard to the audiences, this research has found

that audiences currently play a relevant role once a news story has already been published, since they hold the power of acting as proof-readers, fact-checkers, and quality controllers, questioning journalists' decisions at different levels. Lastly, this dissertation indicates that despite these changes, most journalists still believe that they are the final gatekeepers of information. However, even if journalists feel they are still in charge of deciding what news is, they may fear audiences more than they used to. These results add new layers of complexity to previous studies, proposing that since the life cycle of news seems to occur through a two-step process (before and after a news story has been published), future researchers should consider extending their analysis beyond the newsroom.

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Preface

Everything started during the winter of 2010. At the time, back in my home country, Spain, I was working as a reporter for two different news organizations and spending most of my free time on Twitter. Despite the government's repeated denials, the economic and social situation of the country was worsening every day, and social networks became an escape valve for many of us. Twitter allowed us to find a space to share complaints, information and even our visions of a better future. When we were *there*, we felt there was something we could do. Then, the Arab Uprisings began and we followed them with passion: we watched the livestreams from Tahrir Square 24/7, we tweeted Mubarak's resignation speech. When the spring of 2011 arrived, we were ready to follow in their steps, to take to the streets and demand our jobs back, to claim a better future for us, young Spaniards, to dissent. For months, there had been small demonstrations organized on Facebook and Twitter, of people connecting to each other and realizing that they were passing through the same rough times, the same agonies.

In this context, subjectively summarized, the Spanish Occupy movement, known as Los Indignados or the 15M movement, was born. After a series of specific demonstrations in several Spanish cities on May 15, many people decided to gather in the central squares of various cities countrywide. Some of us ended up camping in these squares for weeks as a sign of protest and discontent. Without leaders, communications advisors, funding, or even a name, they, who were mostly frustrated and unhappy citizens, successfully broadcast their messages, using the resources that the internet offered them.

Meanwhile, the news organizations that for many years had been dismissing the relevance of social networking and other forms of online communications found themselves bewildered by the protests, trying to understand a phenomenon that did not conform to the usual guidelines and practices of their discipline. Senior journalists were forced to join Twitter and Facebook, online spaces that they had been ignoring for so long. Suddenly, journalists had to cope with a new set of rules and functioning that were unidentifiable for most of them. Then, from the disbelief and indifference, most journalists became enamoured with the protestors and their methods, their lack of rules and spokespersons, with what was happening on that universe apart that we call *the internet*. Many of the journalists interviewed for this dissertation recall the month that the occupation of squares lasted as a moment of rupture, when all media practitioners had to join the conversation that many of us had been having for some time already.

It is possible to say that the 15M movement changed the communication dynamics between journalists and internet users, shattering journalists' perceptions of social networks as playgrounds or pastimes for people. Journalists became fascinated with the communication options brought about by the new tools introduced by the 15M movement. Thus, for some months after the protests that occurred during the spring, news organizations were obsessed with everything related to Twitter and Facebook: every Twitter trending topic, every relevant Facebook event was considered and checked, and most of the time covered through short news pieces. But as it normally happens with the excitement about novelties, after the storm came a calm.

My PhD journey started when the Spanish journalists' enthusiasm about social networks began to wane, but it remained a relevant input in their work. Monitoring social

networks has become a ritual, an everyday practice that does not always bring exciting news stories to the newsroom, but that is still worthy of examination. This dissertation asks questions about these everyday practices in the newsroom, about how Spanish journalists deal with the materials that internet users' share in the social networks, in order to understand if and how different participatory practices held by internet users (like me and probably like you) have had an impact on how news is constructed.

Chapter outline

This section offers an overview of how this research about the intersections between everyday practices in the newsroom and participatory practices held by internet users have been structured and organized in different chapters. The first important thing to note here is that, following the advice of some of my dissertation committee members, I decided to modify the traditional content distribution across the chapters, in order to make the reading easier and more comprehensive. For instance, the literature review chapter has been eliminated as such and placed as the introduction to the three main chapters, where the research results are presented and discussed. Similarly, there is no discussion chapter; instead, I present a series of discussions of the data in chapters 3, 4, and 5. These three central chapters are dedicated to the analysis of the three research questions that frame this study.

The introductory chapter begins by situating this dissertation in relation to a broader disciplinary conversation. I contextualize this study by sketching how, beginning in the second half of the 20th century, diverse new media technologies permitted new participatory practices that affected various creative industries including software, journalism, music and broadcast.

This contextualization is followed by a brief summary of how internet users' participation in media creation has been approached and investigated in journalism studies. I then finish by situating this dissertation within the disciplines of communication and journalism studies and presenting the study's research questions.

The second chapter reviews the methodology and methods applied in this dissertation. In this study, the methodology isn't just a set of methods, but also part of the theoretical framework. This dissertation belongs to the research tradition called the sociology of news production, which analyses how news is constructed by studying news media professionals. In chapter 2, I situate my research within this tradition, and offer some background on the ethnographic methods followed. Since ethnography also has a history in both journalism studies and other academic fields, it was important to review the themes and results of previous ethnographic studies in order to describe and situate the gaps in these studies that my dissertation is trying to address. In this second chapter, I also introduce my case study and its context: three different newsrooms in Spain. Finally, some explanations on the methods (newsroom observation, in depth interviews, and textual analysis) and the way the data has been analysed are provided.

The third chapter offers some answers to the research question 'how is user-generated content (UGC) being integrated in mainstream journalism?' The first part of the chapter starts with a review of the concept of *produsage* (Bruns, 2007), and a literature review on how the term UGC has been employed over the years. It finishes with the definition of UGC used in this dissertation, based on Wardle and Williams' (2008) categorization. With these categories in mind, I present my results in relation to the first research question, followed by a discussion.

The fourth and fifth chapters respond to the research questions 'how does the integration of UGC in mainstream journalism affect the role of the audiences[1]?', and 'how have the integration of UGC and the new ways of understanding and dealing with the audiences impacted the practice of gatekeeping?', respectively, with the same structure as chapter 3. In order to theoretically frame these questions, in chapter four, I offer some insights on theories and studies about the industrial construction of audiences and their evolution over time. In chapter five, I review the history of gatekeeping theory and explain why the new participatory possibilities for internet users oblige us to revisit this concept. As in the case of chapter three, the results related to the research questions are followed by a discussion.

Finally, in the conclusions chapter, I present the main contributions of this dissertation, including their implications and limitations, as well as some directions for future research.

[1] I use the term audience in plural as a way of acknowledging the fragmentation of audiences and the existence of not a single and homogenous audience but instead multiple and heterogeneous audiences.

Chapter 1: Introduction and research rationale

The main objective of this first chapter is to provide the reader with some theoretical contextualization of the field where this dissertation belongs. Beginning with an evaluation of ideas about the evolution of interaction and participation due to the introduction of new technologies, the chapter moves into a review on how these features, particularly that of participation, have been confronted in previous journalism studies. Moreover, this chapter also presents what, given the introduced context, this dissertation is trying to do and why we should care about it.

1. Internet and buzzwords: Interactivity and participation

The development of digital technologies over the last decades of the 20th century brought about radical changes in the industrial modes of production, distribution, and access to information and knowledge that have affected different cultural industries ever since. In the early stages of the digital technologies evolution, the popularization of computers and the internet – particularly the Web – permitted two relevant differences in the creation and access of information and knowledge: the option for production of contents *à la carte* as well as greater sense of ubiquity for internet users. During the 1990s, these new characteristics of media technologies gave birth to techno-utopian theories and analyses that highlighted the potential of these new technologies for strengthening information access for all, anywhere and at any time (Negroponte 1995). These theories crystallized in the tropes of the information superhighway, a term popularized by United States Senator and later Vice-President Al Gore, and the global village or, as Castells called it, the "global electronic agora" (Castells 138).

Access and interaction were the keywords that surrounded these utopian discourses (Carpentier 113), and so lack of access and the so-called digital divide became the main counterargument of their critics. As explained by Carpentier, the articulation of the digital divide discourse was based on three elements: "(1) the importance of access to online computers, whose use (2) results in increased levels of information, knowledge, communication or other types of socially valued benefits, which (3) in turn, are so vital that the absence of access and the resulting 'digibetism' (or computer illiteracy) will eventually create or maintain a dichotomized society of haves and have-nots" (114).

Over a decade, interaction and interactivity became undefined buzzwords automatically attached to discourses surrounding all computer activity. Hence, certain intellectual effort was made into distinguishing between different forms of interactions (Jensen 1999; Carey 1989; Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Lee, 2000), as a way to explain and comprehend new technologies and their impact and relationship with individuals. The apparent novelty of these features also gave rise to theories about new possibilities for a more direct democracy (Budge 1). These theories, however, were accused of "technopopulism" by critics who argued that government-citizen interactions via computers did not actively engage citizens in decision and policy-making processes (Coleman and Gotze 5).

At the end of the 1990s, the arrival of the so-called Web 2.0[2] brought terms and theories around participation to the forefront, while the idea of interactivity remained largely unexamined. New web platforms for media content creation and distribution provided internet

[2] Alfred defines Web 2.0 as follows: "The intersection of social interaction and digital media is often associated with Web 2.0. Internet entrepreneur Tim O'Reilly used the term to refer to the development of the World Wide Web as a platform that enables dynamic interactions on the web, facilitating the creation, dissemination, and sharing of news and information, rather than passively consuming content that others create" (2012, 310).

users with possibilities for producing and disseminating media, roles that had previously been reserved for media professionals. Furthermore, the evolution of the web also eased collaborative processes of media production, facilitating the co-creation of media content between various users. The articulation of these novel characteristics resulted in concepts such as collective intelligence, participatory culture, and *produsage*.

The term collective intelligence, coined by the French philosopher Pierre Lévy, refers to "a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (13). Collective intelligence is usually invoked when analysing collaborative practices such as article writing in Wikipedia or certain operations within free and open source software, where users regulate and organize themselves towards a common production objective.

For their part, in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, Henry Jenkins and others define participatory cultures, a term popularized by Jenkins himself, as cultures characterized by "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of information mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along the novices" (7). "A participatory culture," they add, "is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connections with one another (at least they care what other people think about what they have created)" (ibid). Again, this term makes reference to collectivity and the possibilities for members to contribute to creation and peer review, which in turn affects or impacts their artistic capacities and their relationship with their communities. Whereas collective intelligence refers to a capacity put into practice in certain operations carried out by computer users, the term participatory culture

deals with the impact of practices pushed by new media technologies – such as the ones that involve the use of a collective intelligence – in a given society.

Lastly, *produsage* alludes to a model of information and knowledge production where "the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge" (Bruns, 2007, 101). In this case, the aim of this term is to describe the practice of using and producing media content by computer users. Thus, while collective intelligence refers to a capacity and participatory culture refers to a society, *produsage* deals with practices. In sum, these three terms attempt to conceptualize different aspects of the new possibilities for participation offered by digital technologies.

Additionally, these three concepts are related to what Carpentier refers to as *maximalist* perspectives on participation, which he considers to be in opposition to those he calls *minimalist*:

> From a minimalist perspective, more emphasis is placed on the ritual and symbolic forms of participation, where the media are seen to be contributing to community. Citizens frequently participate in (semi)-collective mediated rituals and surround themselves with (carriers of) meaning which construct their imagined communities. These meanings are not only communicated through the more obvious channels (e.g., newspapers and documentaries) but also through lesser ones (e.g., literature, soaps, reality TV, cartoons). In most cases, the participatory nature of these receptions (however active they may be) is relatively limited, and one may wonder whether the term (mediated or symbolic) interaction, or even mediated quasi-interaction

(Thompson, 1995), is not more appropriate. From a more maximalist perspective, the focused is placed on the more intense forms of media participation, where non professionals are effectively involved in the media production of meaning (content-related participation) or even in the management and policies of content producing organizations (structural participation) (6)

Within the studies and analyses that belong to these maximalist views, some authors have been especially enthusiastic about the promises of liberation brought about by new media technologies. Their studies are mostly theoretical rather than empirical, and tend to include visions about the near future. For instance, Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* (2008) praises the possibilities for self-organization outside of traditional institutions and organizations (e.g., publishing companies, journalism, research institutes, etc.), as a result of the use of computers and mobile phones. In the case of the institution of journalism, Shirky goes as far as to affirm that "anyone in the developed world can publish anything anytime, and the instant it is published, it is globally available and readily findable. If anyone can be a publisher, then anyone can be a journalist" (71). Following this line of thought, another example of overly optimistic theorization on the effect of new media technologies can be found in the work of Yochai Benkler, who affirms that in the context of what he defines as the "network information economy," individual action becomes decentralized and cooperation and coordination are facilitated outside of proprietary strategies. This new network information economy also generates a network public sphere that "enables many more individuals to communicate their observations and their viewpoints to many others, and to do so in a way that cannot be controlled by media owners and is not as easily corruptible by money as were the mass media" (11).

The excitement about the new opportunities for participation offered by new media technologies and a growing curiosity as to how these new options are changing roles and patterns have spread throughout various disciplines. Democratic theory, development studies, museum studies, communication studies, and journalism studies have all closely examined the repercussions of access to and usage of new media technologies, in most cases from trans or inter disciplinary entry points. In communication and media studies there has been considerable interest in the creation of online communities through online participation, fan participation in TV series or programs, new opportunities for alternative media, and transformations of news organizations and newswork, among other topics (see for instance, Jenkins 2006, Atton 2004, Deuze 2007). Communication studies has also paid close attention to the reconceptualization of the role of the audience and the potential mutations in the power dynamics between audiences and other media actors in the new media scenario (Bruns 2006, Carpentier 2011).

This dissertation tries to contribute to the debates that surround this latter area of study by looking specifically at the new possibilities for internet users' maximalist participation and its impact in news media. Like most studies conducted within this field, this dissertation navigates between different disciplines: communication studies, internet or new media studies, and journalism studies.

2. Participatory practices and Journalism

Although audiences' participation in journalism has a long history and, according to Alfred Hermida, "it dates at least to eighteen-century England, when newspapers regularly left space at the end of the third page for comments" (Hermida, 2011, 14), new media technologies

facilitate more extensive participatory practices when compared with previous technologies. As Nielsen puts it, "readers have always had the ability to give journalists feedback, but the new technology made possible instant, global access that could be seen by all users and designers" (473). In journalism studies, these new technological affordances have resulted in novel conceptualizations of that action such as citizen journalism, participatory journalism, network journalism, and reciprocal journalism, among many others. All of these terms try to conceptualize the transformations in the relationship between journalists and audiences, and although sometimes are used interchangeably, they can also be related to different sets of practices, and stress different capacities and roles, as well as other elements involved in the power relations between these two actors. Additionally, in most cases these terms represent in some way the translation of the public or civic journalism dream into the digital world, or at the least the continuation of part of its mission.

The idea of public journalism was born during the 1990s in the United States as a response to the disconnection between the public interest and journalists, in a moment in time when journalists' main focus was on elections, politicians, parties and candidates, leaving aside issues related to civil society. The movement of public journalism aimed to reconnect journalists and the communities they work for and to "engage their citizens in dialogues that lead to problem solving" (Fouhy quoted in Eksterowicz and Roberts 11). As Anthony Eksterowicz points out, "public journalism emphasizes citizen participation as a virtue that eventually enhances representative government. It is a democratic and participatory movement" (17). The objective then was to reform and rethink journalism: instead of

journalism simply informing their passive[3] audiences, public journalism defenders believed in the importance of engaging audiences in the process of creating news and in political and civic debate. After various experiments, conferences, and attempts at theorization and efforts for its implementation, the arrival of Web 2.0 and the discourses around its potential for people's participation in journalism redirected the focus and energy centered on the development of public journalism toward new practices such as the aforementioned citizen journalism, participatory journalism, and network journalism.

Citizen journalism commonly refers to the act of gathering, producing, and publishing content with journalistic value by citizens, without the intervention of news professionals (Gillmor 2004). Citizen journalism also generally implies eye witnessing and audio or video footage (Allan 2013), which in some way involves an unfolding crisis or conflict event. Although broadly used in academia, the loose definitions and characterizations attached to the concept of citizen journalism leave aside, as Luke Goode explains, a significant number of practices and nuances. These definitions mainly allude to "those who capture events on their cameras, break stories about events in their locales ("hyperlocalists"), expose the failings of public and private institutions and their personnel, and sometimes become celebrated opinion leaders, having circumvented the traditional journalistic career path" (1290), forgetting many practices within the creation and dissemination of news in which internet users are currently involved. Goode reasonably states that practices of what he calls 'metajournalism' should be also considered when theorizing about the current activities performed by the news media audiences. That is, while re-telling practices such as rating, commenting, tagging and

[3] Passive in the sense of not interfering in the process of making news.

reposting aren't considered in these narrow descriptions of citizen journalism, they nevertheless affect the processes of meaning making, interpretation and re-articulation.

In this sense, the term participatory journalism has been used interchangeably with citizen journalism, without a clear justification for the use of these terms or consideration of how they may differ in connotation. However, as Singer et al. remark, the term participatory journalism tends to be used as a way of emphasizing the "collaborative and collective –not simply parallel" (2) nature of the activities performed by audiences. Participatory journalism does not only take into consideration the contents created and disseminated by audiences, but also the 'metajournalism' activities that Goode describes. Moreover, while studies on citizen journalism tend to present the contents produced by audiences / citizens / internet users as an alternative to mainstream news, participatory journalism is not necessarily opposed to mainstream journalism but acts as a supplement to it, sometimes even working within its boundaries (Hermida, 2011, 15).

Network journalism focuses on the structures and the interactive spheres within which news outlets operate today (Heinrich 63). And whereas the terms citizen and participatory journalism emphasize the possibilities for audiences' participation and content production, the idea of network journalism highlights the changing relationship between journalists and audiences in the online environment. Network journalism also refers to the digital networks where the journalistic game currently occurs as broad, global and made up of an immeasurable number of information nodes (ibid). As explained by Ansgard Heinrich, "network journalism sets out to outline the changing connectivity modes in today's information sphere and sketches the consequences these societal shifts have for journalism" (64).

Finally, in a recently published paper, Lewis, Holton and Coddington point to reciprocal journalism as a potential answer to the conceptualization of the current participatory practices. Lewis, Holton and Coddington define reciprocal journalism as a form of journalism that "builds upon and yet departs from traditional notions of audience engagement and participation, capturing the range of dynamics through which journalists and audiences may exchange mutual benefit" (230). Their notion of reciprocal journalism departs from the results of previous studies that manifested journalists' reluctance to allow audiences into the news construction processes. Alternatively, they propose "seeing journalists in a new light: as community-builders who can forge connections with and among community members by establishing patterns or reciprocal change" (236). They specifically refer to reciprocal activities such as retweeting content shared by non-journalists, and marking content as 'favourite' or creating Twitter hashtags to help audiences follow a breaking news story. Instead of centering their attention in the possibilities for alternative discourses, their focus is on the creation of virtual communities and on the audiences' engagement.

Apart from all these terms that try to conceptualize the new practices engaged in by internet users and journalists in digital journalism, other studies have made use of the term user-generated content to navigate this terrain. As an alternative to theorizing about the audiences' practices, the term user-generated content permits concentrating on the outcomes or elements that constitute these practices. However, user-generated content (UGC) is a very broad and sometimes confusing term that has not always been sufficiently clarified. For instance, Warde and Williams explain on their report *ugc@thebbc: Understanding its Impact Upon Contributors, Noncontributors and BBC News* that journalists at the BBC did not always recognize the term as familiar or as something they would feel capable talking about. This

means that the boundaries of what constitutes user-generated content are blurred for both the journalists who deal with it and the scholars who study it.

More specific to these kinds of participatory practices are the investigations that look at particular online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Flickr. Flickr has been widely studied as a platform where users share images and videos that in certain cases turned out to be useful for the coverage of breaking news stories and especially of crisis events (Poell et al. 2012, Liu et al. 2009, Li 2008, etc.). Studies on YouTube have followed the same direction, pointing to this online platform for video sharing as a space for alternative discourses and raw news materials available to the public without the intervention of journalists (Antony and Ryan 2010, Reilly 2013, etc.). Facebook and Twitter have been commonly understood as filters of information where audiences share and consume friends' recommendations, or even as news platforms themselves (Ju et al. 2014). Other studies have referred to a combination of these platforms as possible substitutes for news wires in the coverage of international crises (Van Leuven et al. 2013). However, most of these studies do not take into consideration how the political economy of these online tools significantly shapes their possible uses. That is to say, most of these studies do not take into account the corporative political positions or the terms of services and privacy conditions of these online sites (Serrano-Vázquez 2012), in this way omitting a highly relevant actor, the social media corporations, in the configuration of power relations between journalists and audiences.

News comments have also been a frequent object of study in this terrain, sometimes as user-generated content and sometimes as a separate and individual phenomenon, mostly understood as potential spaces for debate, democratic engagement and discussion. While early studies on forums, blogs, and news comments focused on the community formation among

commentators as well as their commenting behaviours, more recent research has tried to understand how journalists are dealing with news comments as well as to measure the quality of these comments. Most of these studies note that journalists tend to be resistant to news comments, relating them to "defamation, incitement, abusive content, racism and hate speech" (Reich 104). In general terms, the abusive nature of comments has been shown to cause suspicion and reticence among media and journalists (Hermida and Thurman 2008, Wahl-Jorgensen 2009, Wardle and Williams 2008). After more than a decade of news comments, news organizations are still wondering how to manage them and it is still an ongoing debate with both supporters and detractors of allowing audiences to comment on the news.

Finally, in *Constructing Participatory Journalism as a Scholarly Object,* Borger et al. conduct a genealogical analysis of 119 articles on participatory journalism[4] where they offer interesting conclusions about previous investigations on the effects and impacts of participatory practices in journalism. This study offers an overview on the different entry points, arguments and conclusions systematically maintained in a comprehensive sample of investigations that analyse audiences' participation in making the news. Borger et al. localize four different claims or focuses that appear in one way or another in the different articles they scrutinize: enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities; disappointment with professional journalism's obduracy; disappointment with journalism's economic motives to facilitate participatory journalism; and disappointment with news users' passivity (124).

Within the studies that belong to the first category, Borger et al. find a tendency to "adhere to the idea that participatory journalism harbours the potential to democratize both

[4] Articles in which the term participatory journalism appears do not always refer to the definition provided here, instead using the term in a much broader sense that includes some of the practices described earlier in this chapter.

journalism and society at large" (125). These studies, which form the majority, use as a reference the optimistic theories of what Borger et al. describe as "founder fathers": Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, Dan Gillmor, Jay Rosen, Jeff Jarvis, Clay Shirky, Henry Jenkins and Axel Bruns.

The articles that belong to the second category share the disappointment with professional journalism's reluctance to embrace participatory practices, arguing that despite the new possibilities for content creation and dissemination offered to audiences, journalists still maintain total control over the news-making process to the extent that the intervention of audiences is almost nonexistent. These articles tend to conclude that it is up to journalists to change how journalism works and that this change "requires that they commit themselves to structurally listening and responding to citizen contributions and even to sharing control over content with them" (127).

A third type of article on participatory journalism criticizes the strategic and economic reasons behind the participatory spaces and opportunities they offer to their audiences. Finally, Borger et al. also find a tendency in a smaller but significant number of articles in blaming the audiences for their passivity, concluding that "news users act differently than scholars hoped" (128).

3. Research rationale and contribution

Since the advent of the internet and especially since the early years of the so-called Web 2.0, multiple scholars and information technologies gurus have been announcing the end of the press as an institution and the end of journalism as a profession. The new possibilities for information creation and distribution gave rise to speculative theories that predicted that in the

near future people would report news and share their own stories without intermediaries, leading to the downfall of professional journalism. Years later, this illusion has been proved as such, an illusion. While some media outlets have disappeared, others have been created and these movements have no relation to the new possibilities for audiences' participation and media content creation. The current crisis in journalism is not related to an absence of audiences but to an exhaustion of the business model, as it has been the case for other cultural industries with the arrival of digital technologies.

User-generated content has arrived in a moment of severe economic crisis and profound changes in newsroom structure, organization, and working conditions (Singer et al. 4). And while the number of journalists per newsroom is decreasing, the responsibilities of journalists are increasing; they are now required to multitask and deal with multimedia products as well as with audiences and their contributions (ibid). Additionally, traditional or legacy news organizations have been struggling with their business models for some time. Already in 2009, the authors of a report on U.S. media wrote: "Even before the recession, the fundamental question facing journalism was whether the news industry could win a race against the clock for survival: Could it find new ways to underwrite the gathering of news online, while using the declining revenue of the old platforms to finance the transition?" (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, n. pag.). Five years later, in the Tow Center For Digital Journalism report, *Post- Industrial Journalism*, Anderson, Bell and Shirky go as far as to affirm that "there is not such a thing as the news industry anymore" (1).

In the same line of reasoning as previous reports, Anderson, Bell and Shirky argue that in this new media ecosystem, the internet has wrecked advertising subsidies and since "good journalism has always been subsidized… restructuring is, therefore, a forced move" (2). Yet,

most media outlets have responded very slowly and inefficiently to these transformations, which has resulted in the disappearance of an increasing number of mastheads. As Anderson, Bell and Shirky put it: "Traditional news organizations have tended to conserve both working methods and hierarchy, even as the old business models are collapsing, and even when new opportunities do not fit in those old patterns" (ibid).

Still, while many journalists working for traditional news organizations have lost their jobs, a significant number of online news sites have been inaugurated around the world. Without the heavy structures and working routines in need of a transformation, these news sites are implementing new strategies and experimenting with journalism at different levels: from a new business model to the use of sources and the integration of user-generated content (UGC).

Looking for instance at Spain, the case study of this dissertation, from 2008 to 2013, 11,151 journalism-related workers lost their jobs, 284 media outlets closed and 265 new media outlets were inaugurated,[5] which means that at the same time many jobs and publications are being destroyed, new journalistic enterprises are being created and are trying to figure out how to survive in the new media ecosystem. A recent report of the Pew Research Center about the State of News Media in the U.S shows a similar trajectory: while traditional news media outlets are still suffering staff and budget cuts, new digital players are growing in news staff numbers (Buzzfeed counts 170 news staff and Mashable, 70) and various entrepreneurs, mainly tech industry insiders, are investing in news media.

[5] Source: http://www.apmadrid.es/noticias/generales/informe-de-la-profesion-periodistica-2013-11151-empleos-perdidos-y-284-medios-cerrados-desde-2008

Thus, instead of journalism being replaced by user-generated content, the present information model is migrating to digital, and journalists are generating their own content, and considering and integrating user-generated content as well. That is to say, journalists and journalism still matter as main source of information. However, the way journalism is practiced is changing, as it is changing the audiences' consumption habits and roles. Audiences are turning from print and television to online media and as a consequence media outlets are reinforcing their online presence. The aforementioned report of the Pew Research Center mentions that "half of Facebook users get news there even though they did not go there looking for it" (Pew Research Center 2014). Yet, at the same time news consumption habits are moving to online social networks, the report highlights that this new way of accessing the news does not promote engagement with the mastheads the stories consumed belong to, which is a considerable change from previous and more loyal-to-a-brand forms of consuming information.

These novelties also mean that journalists' work, routines and goals are mutating: journalists are dealing simultaneously with new practices, new mediums, new platforms, and new information cycles. As Deuze (2005) explains, journalists in elective democracies share value systems about the practice of journalism that give meaning to what they do. Over the years, the continuity in the way journalism was practiced allowed journalists to create a solid ideology of their profession. However, the new participatory activities engaged in by internet users have potentially affected journalists' perceptions about their roles, their values, and their ideas about what it means to be a journalist.

For instance, as we will see in the course of this dissertation, nowadays journalists have to cope with user-generated content. In some instances, user-generated content is being used

as a source to start new stories, to complete information under development, and even to question certain information already published. User-generated content has been particularly relevant in the development of breaking news stories and crisis events. During the London bombings in 2005, Hurricane Katrina along the American Gulf coast in the same year, the earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tōhoku, in Japan, and the various citizens' uprisings that took place in 2011 in diverse Arab countries collectively known as the Arab Spring, witnesses of these newsworthy events shared images, information, and words of anger and consolation through the internet. In most cases, these pieces of information became key to understanding the scope and evolution of breaking news stories.

The fact that internet users are selecting, publishing, and distributing their own content raises many questions about traditional journalistic ideologies, logics and values, as well as questions about the role of the journalist. Journalism studies have been particularly preoccupied about the effects of participatory practices in the gatekeeping capacities performed by journalists and news organizations. For instance, already in 2000, Williams and Deli Carpini remarked that the dissemination possibilities offered by new media technologies were calling into question the gatekeeping role:

> The new media environment, by providing virtually unlimited sources of political information (although these sources do not provide anything like an unlimited number of perspectives), undermines the idea that there are discrete gates through which political information passes: if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers. (61-62)

This dissertation starts tackling these issues by wondering about the relevance of user-generated content in journalists' daily routines. Contrary to the positive investigations about the utilization of UGC during breaking news or crisis and conflict events, studies from the

early 2000s emphasized the reluctance of journalists to include in a meaningful and definite way the audiences' contributions in the selection, filtering, processing and editing stages of the news production process (Singer et al. 3). However, the increasing number of users of online social networking sites and the increasing pressure for transparency, as well as the current demand for audiences' engagement might have altered the journalists' perceptions and practices. In addition, a new generation of digital-only news organizations that understands both journalism and audiences' participation in unconventional manners is gaining space in the market, which in turn may be pushing new practices among more traditional actors. In the era of online social networks, what is the relevance of user-generated content in mainstream journalism[6]?

This question forces us to wonder as well about the implications of UGC for the two main actors involved in journalism: audiences and journalists. Firstly, if audiences, as internet users, have the capacity to create and distribute media content, it is important to put forward questions such as what is the audiences' role in mainstream media? Secondly, it is also necessary to wonder what all these changes mean for the profession of journalism and the traditional activities attached to it such as gatekeeping. My dissertation begins its inquiry into these matters by looking at journalists' practices and how user-generated content is included in mainstream journalism, in an attempt to determine the actual impact of participatory activities in the news ecology.

[6] Mainstream journalism is used here as opposed to alternative journalism.

4. Research questions

Given this context, and based on the premise that UGC might be affecting how news is constructed as well as the traditional understandings of the audiences and journalists' capacities, the main research questions of this dissertation are:

Q1. How is UGC being integrated in mainstream journalism?

Q2. How does the integration of UGC in mainstream journalism affect the role of the audiences?

Q3. How have the integration of UGC and the introduction of new ways of understanding and dealing with audiences impacted the practice of gatekeeping?

As it has been introduced in the chapter outline and will be explained in depth in the following chapter, this dissertation is theoretically framed by sociological approaches to news production, which study news media professionals in order to analyse how news is constructed. This, in short, means that these three questions will be analysed through the journalists' lenses, taking into consideration their own practices and discourses.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This second chapter is dedicated to the exploration of the methodology and methods pursued for this dissertation. This chapter not only describes and enumerates the techniques applied in this investigation, but it also situates the methodology and case studies, offering a detailed overview of both subjects of study and how they have been approached. In this dissertation, the methodology (newsroom ethnography) is especially relevant since it defines part of the theoretical framework (the sociology of news production). For this reason, this chapter is longer than usual, as it contains a literature review that helps to place this dissertation within a broader conversation. It also includes a detailed contextualization of the object of study, mainly to assist the Canadian reader, but also because, as will be discussed, the context in which a technology is introduced restricts the possible changes that this technology might usher in.

1. Introduction

In order to explore the research questions that guide this dissertation, I have used the sociology of news production as a framework of study. The sociology of news production seeks to understand the various forms of logic behind the construction of news – that is, how and why news is selected, organized and presented – by examining those in charge of producing the news – mainly journalists, but also camera operators, photographers, marketing departments, etc. In this case study, I have examined journalistic practices, routines, and discourses in order to comprehend how UGC is impacting the news as well as the changes in journalists and audiences' traditional roles. The study of journalistic practice and the

discourses attached to it allows me to grasp the dynamics and tensions between structured work and routines, and journalists' agency in a technologically disruptive moment.

Dan Berkowitz differentiates three ways of approaching the sociology of news production: political economy of news, social organization of newswork and culturological approaches (9-10). The political economy of news "relates the outcome of the news process to the economic structure of the news organization" (9). That is, the political economy of news seeks to understand "the fundamental consonance between a profit-seeking industry and conservative, system-maintaining news" (ibid). Culturological approaches, on the other hand, while so far under-developed, emphasize "the constraining of broad cultural symbol systems regardless of the details of organizational and occupational routines" (10). Or to state this in a different manner, the culturological approach investigates how cultural assumptions and conventions affect and shape the presentation of all of the news the media produces (20).

Finally, the social organization of newswork, the approach followed in this dissertation, "takes as the central problem the journalists' professed autonomy and decision-making power and tries to understand how journalists' efforts on the job are constrained by organizational and occupational routines" (10). Thus, in this dissertation, questions which relate to uses of UGC by journalists and how these uses impact the roles and capacities of audiences and journalists have been investigated by attending to how journalism is practiced in three different news organizations. That is, this dissertation examines the changes produced in journalism due to the increasing participation of internet users in media production by looking at journalists' practices, opinions, and working routines.

2. Newsroom ethnography: a methodology

How is the news constructed? Who decides what is relevant and what is not? What is the reasoning behind the treatment of news stories? Over the last forty years, different scholars have investigated how media is produced observing media workers' practices by following some of the methods used in sociological and anthropological ethnographies. These media production ethnographies have permitted a better understanding of how media organizations function, how decisions in relation to content are made, and what the role of journalists is in decision-making. The first part of this chapter offers some theoretical and historical insights into these newsroom ethnographies, which comprise the methodology applied in this dissertation.

a. A brief introduction to ethnography

Ethnography as a research methodology has evolved over the years, permeating across various disciplines, changing from one study to another as it acquires different dimensions and meanings depending on the particular context in question. Bonnie S. Brennen explains very generally that ethnography "is used to answer questions about people's beliefs, rituals, attitudes, actions, stories and behaviours, emphasizing what people actually do rather than what they say to do" (159). Although ethnographic studies are conducted nowadays in fields as dissimilar as newsrooms, virtual worlds or aboriginal communities, the origin of the methodology can be traced to the contexts of anthropology and sociology.

Its early beginnings can be found in the documents produced by Europeans who traveled to distant lands during the 13th century. Missionaries and explorers produced an extensive amount of written texts describing their impressions about what they perceived as

exotic and rare foreign cultures (Neuman 364). Prior to the popularization of ethnography as a methodology in anthropological investigations, academics used to read reports written by explorers and based their own studies on these texts, without any direct, personal contact with the culture they were studying (ibid). And, as W. Lawrence Neuman points out, these reports were generally based on racist and ethnocentric observations of travelers who most of the time did not even speak the language of the communities they were visiting. It was not until the last decade of the 19th century that European anthropologists began to actually go abroad to study different cultures.

Ethnography emerged with the "disillusionment of the Enlightenment" (Boellstorff et al. 14), in a moment when positivism was starting to be questioned by some scholars. The most recognised and relevant figure of the early years of ethnography is the British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who in the 1920s "presented intensive field work as a new method and argued for separating direct observation and native statements from the observer's inferences" (Neuman 365). For his part, German scholar Paul Gohre, another relevant figure in the development of ethnography, was probably the first researcher to become involved in a participant observation study; in 1890, Gohre worked and lived as a factory apprentice in order to study factory life. At the institutional level, the Chicago School of Sociology was also central in the establishment of ethnography as a research methodology.

Neuman distinguishes two different phases in the work of the Chicago School of Sociology that impacted the definition of what constitutes field research. First, from the 1910s to the 1930s, the Chicago School conducted a series of descriptive studies of street life, although with little analysis, resulting in remarkable publications such as *The Hobo* (Anderson 1923), *The Jack Roller* (Shaw 1930), and *The Gang* (Thrasher 1927). This first phase was

marked by the application of research methods that belong to the journalism and anthropological disciplines. Secondly, from the 1940s to the 1960s, the Chicago School advanced in the application of participant observation as a method to study people in their natural environments in order to comprehend their world while moving towards a more theoretical analysis.

Finally, a third notable figure in the development of ethnography as a methodology is the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who declared *thick descriptions* as a necessary component of ethnography. By *thick descriptions*, Geertz referred to the requisite of detailed illustrations of pertinent attributes of the studied culture. This means that a "three-minute event may go on for pages" (Neuman 367), if this event is relevant enough in the understanding of the culture at hand. Geertz believed that the object of ethnography is "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted" (quoted in Boellstorff et al 16).

b. Ethnography of media production

Some methods that belong to the ethnographic tradition such as ethnographic observation began to be applied in the study of media production in the 1970s. Following the intuition of early investigators about the relevance of professional practices and news production in the understanding of the functioning of the information industries, scholars from North America and Europe started to examine journalists' work practices in different news organizations (Willig 1-2), applying the same methods used by anthropologists and sociologists in their studies of foreign and specific cultures.

As Simon Cottle writes, studies of news production and related professional practices "provide in-depth understanding of the nature of journalism in contemporary societies" as well as the part media plays "in the circuits of social and cultural power" (1). In addition, Cottle remarks that ethnography allows more grounded findings for challenging common generalizations made about news media. Among these frequent generalizations in relation to news media, Cottle highlights the

> instrumental arguments about elite control over news media and output, media conspiracy claims involving news media complicity, social compositional accounts of media performance based on the demographic characteristics of journalist recruitment, political economy arguments about how the news is shaped and limited by market forces, cultural studies theorization of the discourses and identities embedded into news texts, as well as postmodernist speculation about the implosion of meaning via mediated spectacle. (1)

In sum, newsroom ethnographic research provides a more accurate illustration of the complexities at work in media production while helping to avoid conspiracy theories. This, in turn, allows us to gain a better sense of the role the media occupies at a given moment in history, something particularly relevant in the light of the new technological transformations and the establishment of online journalism.

For this reason, David Domingo's (2003) identification of the benefits and weaknesses of using an ethnographic approach in the research on online journalism is especially intriguing. Among the advantages, Domingo highlights the significant amount of rich, firsthand data that it is possible to collect through ethnographic methods: the direct witnessing of actions, routines, and definitions of technology and social relations; the status of 'confidant'

that the researcher can gain among the actors, thereby obtaining insider's perspectives; the observation of conflicts and processes of evolution; and the opportunity for comprehensive description of the social use of a technology and the insights that help to understand the factors involved in its social construction. Additionally, Domingo is also aware of disadvantages such as how time-consuming the process of observation is for both the researcher and the actors / journalists; the impossibility of recording everything that has been witnessed; the risks of taking an anecdote as a rule; and the request of some actors not to be quoted after making relevant confessions (10).

However, for all its benefits and weaknesses, two different waves of ethnographic studies of news production conducted in two different and relevant periods in the history of journalism have demonstrated the pertinence of this methodology. As it will be shown in the following sections, newsroom ethnographies have improved our knowledge of how information is professionally constructed, and have allowed us to identify the broader implications of this *news-making* process.

c. First wave of ethnographic research in journalism

During the 1970s and the 1980s an important number of ethnographic newsroom investigations were conducted, mainly in the USA and Great Britain, with the objective of grasping the organizational and professional nature of news manufacturing. Scholars such as Altheide (1976), Bantz et al. (1980), Epstein (1973), Ericson et al. (1987), Fishman (1980), Gans (1979), Gitlin (1980), Golding and Elliott (1979), Murphy (1976), Tuchman (1979), Schlesinger (1978), and Soloski (1989) spent long periods in different newsrooms of different media outlets around the world, observing journalists in action and interviewing them. These

studies stressed the relevance of routines and organizational directions in the journalists' work and how this organizational character had ideological consequences (Cottle 3).

For instance, Epstein affirmed in *News from Nowhere: Television and the News* that "the organisational imperatives of network news, and the logics that proceed from these demands, irresistibly shape the picture of society in consistent directions," while in *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News,* Schlesinger concluded that "the routines of production have definite consequences in structuring news. The doings of the world are tamed to meet the needs of a production system in many respects bureaucratically organized" (both quoted in Cottle 3). Furthermore, in his study *Deciding What's News,* Hebert Gans questioned what was at the time the established academic vision of the relationship between journalists and their audiences, a vision that assumed that journalists take into account their audiences when selecting and producing news, motivated by commercial interests. During the ethnographic study that he conducted of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Times in 1979, Gans found that journalists

> had a little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected the feedback from it. Although they had a vague image of the audience, they paid little attention to it; instead, they filmed and wrote for their superiors and themselves, assuming… that what interested them would interest the audience. (qtd. in Anderson 2012 79)

Gans's study concluded that professional values prevail over commercial imperatives and audience preferences. Furthermore, Gans argued that journalists were unable to imagine the size of their audience and that it was also common among professionals of the information industry to distrust the audiences' judgment.

In general terms, it is possible to affirm that this first wave of ethnographic studies in newsrooms challenged previous studies' assumptions about news selection. While in 1950 David Manning White affirmed that the selection of news was based on the individual and subjective criteria of journalists (the journalist as a gatekeeper), these first ethnographic studies emphasized the connections between how journalism is organized and the process of news construction. Cottle offers four relevant observations/conclusions that could be extracted from this first wave of ethnographic research on newsrooms (5). First, news production was strongly determined by temporal routines and 'event orientation,' which means that breaking news stories were more relevant than long-term processes of change. Second, newsrooms were characterized by a division of labour, which made it possible to monitor specific areas of current affairs and sources for specialized journalists. Third, this type of routine based on the division of labour privileged the discourses of official sources, since those were the ones that were regularly monitored. Fourth, routine was also present in the journalists' employment of a 'vocabulary of precedents' that shaped their selection and treatment of news stories. That is to say, according to the first wave of ethnographic studies, journalism depended on routines and bureaucracy, which in turn influenced the final selection and consideration of news stories.

Furthermore, these first studies also stressed the relevance of a shared professional idea of objectivity. Both Soloski (1989) and Hall et al. (1978) maintained that objectivity guided journalists' decisions regarding the selection of sources and the structure of news beats. This shared claim of objectivity, in addition to the idea of 'authoritative' sources, also privileged hegemonic discourses when constructing news stories, since these two premises encouraged the use of official sources. In sum, "these studies argued that the organisational requirements of news combine with the professional ideology of objectivity to routinely privilege the voices

of the powerful, and this further reinforces the tendency towards the standardised and ideological nature of news," as Cottle puts it (4).

At the time, these findings enabled a better understanding of how the news was constructed, something that, as we have seen, had been surrounded by a great amount of speculation.

d. How online journalism changed everything

The advent of new technologies in the newsrooms at the end of the 1990s provoked deep transformations in the routines and practices of journalists. Most importantly, journalists assisted in what has been described as newsroom convergence, "a change from single-platform journalism – creating of content for a newspaper or a television news program, for example – to cross-platform journalism involving more than one medium" (Singer, 2008, 157). This media convergence, in the case of organizations that own each of these media, has obliged journalists to multitask and generate content for different media, including newspaper, website, and television. And as Deuze remarks, the new demands of multitasking have resulted in reasonable complaints among journalists, who argue that they are expected to carry out additional tasks for the same salary as before (144). Meanwhile, in smaller enterprises, the necessity to expand content into different media has generated partnerships between unaffiliated newsrooms (Singer, 2008,158). Furthermore, the news cycle has been accelerated, and, according to some scholars, there has been a collapse of the twice-a-day news cycle (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 569) that has now become a 24-hour news cycle.

Apart from these changes in how journalism is practiced, journalists have also assisted in the reconfiguration of the role of the audiences, a process introduced in chapter 1. New

media technologies permit internet users to create and share their own media content in a way that was previously reserved for media professionals. In recent years, several scholars have asked how these new possibilities for content creation are affecting the role of the audiences, the journalistic practices and the process of news creation. For instance, Axel Bruns (2008b) affirms that audiences currently function as gatewatchers, "observing the many gates through which a steady stream of information passes from these sources, and... highlighting from this stream that information which is of most relevance to one's own personal interests or to the interests of one's wider community" (177). These practices challenge the journalist's role as the gatekeeper of information, as well as the routines based on observation of official sources.

If, as the ethnographic research conducted during the 1970s and the 1980s concluded, journalism was based on organized routines and a clear division of labour, the question now is how have the new, messy media convergence, the partnerships between unaffiliated newsrooms, and the current 24-hour news cycle affected the production of news? How are the new possibilities for internet users' participation and interaction affecting the gathering of news and the selection of sources? And how has this new scenario in turn impacted the journalistic premise of objectivity?

During the first years of the 21th century, these questions remained unasked since the focus of journalism studies was on the revolutionary effects that interactivity and hypertextuality were expected to have over journalism, utopian visions which were also shared among the media professionals (Paterson 4). In addition, a significant number of scholars from various disciplines have speculated over the last several years about the (im)possible future of journalism in the information society, where anyone can publish and distribute their own content (see Shirky (2008), Benkler (2006), Lessig (2001), etc.). With time, these early studies

about the repercussions of new media technologies in information dissemination and journalism have been proven unrealistic (in most cases, simply utopian) and it has become necessary to conduct more empirical research.

e. Second wave of ethnographies in journalism

In the same way that the first wave of ethnographic studies came to question speculative and conspiracy theories about the construction of the news, the second wave of ethnographic research, currently under development, is trying to overcome utopian theories about the impact of the internet on news production. In their two volumes of *Making Online News* – titled in honour of Gaye Tuchman's pioneering ethnographic study, *Making News* – Chris Paterson and David Domingo collect a compendium of the latest and most relevant ethnographic research conducted in times of online journalism. Their books cover a great range of topics that can be grouped as convergence, professional identity, online news values and formats, news agency wires and online journalism, multimedia production, blogs and journalism, participatory journalism, journalism under pressure, and methodology and epistemology of online journalism research (Paterson and Domingo ix-xi). These topic clusters relate to some of the most relevant changes and challenges that were mentioned in the previous section. What follows is a review of the most relevant topics in relation to online journalism covered in these two books. This dissertation is built upon these recent newsroom ethnographies and attempts to address gaps and underdeveloped areas within this second wave of ethnographic studies.

Regarding newsroom convergence, Colson and Heinderyckx's study of the Belgian masthead *La Libre Belgique* reflects the tensions that the implementation of websites for print

newspapers created between journalists producing contents for each medium, the lack of synergies between the print and the online versions, and the resistance of the print journalists to understand the particularities of online information. For her part, Anja Bechmann questions in *Closer Apart? The Networks of Cross-Media News Production* if the implementation of the 'superdesk,' "special workplace arrangements where editors from different media are placed next to each other to enhance knowledge sharing and coordination across media" (15), in Northern Denmark does create *per se* the ideal scenario for media convergence. In contrast, Bechmann argues that there are other, non-space and proximity related factors that determine the success of media convergence. In general terms, through the ethnographic observation of media production, these two studies included in Paterson and Domingo's edited volumes show that media convergence, rather than providing the revolutionary solutions claimed by early studies, has created more issues in journalism. The transition between print and online has not occurred as simply as it was supposed to and numerous issues have emerged, complicating and slowing down the development of interactive and participatory online news.

The introduction of new technologies has also affected the professional identity of journalists, something that was not considered in the early studies of online news. Cawley and García's ethnographic research in two different newsrooms, one in Ireland (*The Irish Times)* and the other in Argentina (*Clarín*), encapsulates the differences between print and online journalists and their divergent ways of understanding and working with information. Cawley observes that in the online newsroom of *The Irish Times* the atmosphere is much more dynamic and informal and that online journalists "within the company [have] a lower rank than print journalists," a position that is "embodied institutionally in their general employment status: lower pay, fewer benefits, fewer permanent positions" (Cawley 53). García notices

similar conditions in *Clarin.com,* where the "digital newsroom's subordinate position is also clear in the self-deprecation of online journalists" (73). García explains that online journalists see themselves "as 'half stupid' and 'minor brothers'" (ibid). The senior journalists refusal to recognize and contribute to online newsrooms, in addition to both the institutional and personal image of online journalists, leaves online news on a level that impedes its evolution.

The migration to online has also had an impact on the news format and news values. In this respect, David Domingo's study of four Catalan online newsrooms reflects how immediacy is one of the most important values for online journalists. During the time Domingo spent in the online newsrooms, "journalists tried to publish a story as soon as possible and the news agency wire services were the perfect source for that purpose" (116). He also observed that special in-depth coverage of events (also known as 'specials') and pre-planned features and concepts were the exception. "They (the specials) were the space for utopian experimentation: participatory publishing where users could become content producers, multimedia-rich reports, and complex hypertext structures with in depth background of an issue," writes Domingo (119). Regarding traditional online journalistic genres, Steen Steensen notes in his study of the Norwegian online newspaper dagbladet.no that the texts produced on this site are "hybrids, as something with both generic and discursive characteristics of both traditional feature journalism and mainstream online journalism. It is therefore difficult to assess what kind of *exigence* they address, and therefore they do not constitute a clear-cut genre" (98). It is possible to extract from Domingo and Steensen's chapters that new practices and cycles of production of information in online newsrooms have had a particular influence in the creation of new and hybrid genres. By observing journalists'

practices, Domingo and Steensen are able to explain some of the whys and hows of these new genres.

Recent newsroom ethnographies have also inquired into the new relationship between audiences and journalism. For instance, Williams et al. (2011) have considered the different methods in which the BBC deals with content produced by audiences, sometimes integrating them as if they were products of professional journalism, sometimes rejecting them. They conclude that the bigger picture suggested by their ethnography "reveals that competing priorities and interests shape the use and views of UGC (user-generated content), and that the terms itself provides the grounds for contesting the meaning of journalistic work and identities, and the audience's place within these" (126). In this regard, C.W. Anderson suggests in *Blowing up the Newsroom: Ethnography in the Age of Distributed Journalism* (2011) that in order to understand the complicated new relationship between journalists and their audiences it is necessary to look both at newsrooms and, more generally, at digital news ecosystems, that is, at the peripheral actors distributing news content. Anderson maintains that although the newsroom is still a "central locus," fragmented actors are also in some way affecting the work that happens within the boundaries of a newsroom (160). These two recent ethnographies demonstrate the increasing interest in how user-generated content is intervening in the making of news. If journalism has shifted "from a lecture into a conversation," as Dan Gillmor and others would say, it is of course necessary to look at how this conversation is impacting and influencing the news construction processes.

Finally, even though it is possible to find general patterns in regards to how journalism is mutating since the advent of new media technologies, this evolution is of course determined by the context, the specific penetration of the internet in different places, and how the state

apparatus exercises control of the media. For instance, Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara's investigation of Zimbabwean newsrooms concludes "the Internet censorship environment prevailing in the newsrooms and the country at large (...) also impacts on its appropriation by journalists" (68). That censorship is even stronger in Chinese journalism, where Lagerkvist has observed that online news production is determined by state propaganda and self-censorship (139-141). In addition, Amira Firdaus explains that in the case of the Malayan news agency BERNAMA, marketing logic interferes in the development of a more critical online journalism, distinct from its print counterpart. That is, while in studies conducted in Western democracies the internet is seen as an alternative to corporate journalism and as a tool for contestation, these possibilities are found to have only minimum expression or no visible presence at all in regions with authoritarian governments.

To summarize, the second wave of ethnographic research in newsrooms, born to challenge the utopian visions of early studies of the possibilities of online journalism, is trying to enable a critical understanding of the complicated process of integrating the internet as a tool for publication and distribution and as a source of information for newsrooms. These studies reveal the difficulties of developing online news in all its capacities due to the effects of the new medium on working conditions, the new tasks journalists have to perform and need to be taught, the new roles of the actors at play, and the format specifications of online news. These studies manifest the complications of the changing nature of work that, as previous research demonstrated, is determined by routines and bureaucracy. That is, the implementation of new technologies deeply depends on individuals' understanding of and adaptation to these technologies.

This dissertation contributes to this second wave of newsroom ethnographies by studying three different newsrooms that represent three different ways of understanding journalism, three different ways of integrating digital tools and three different ways of relating with their audiences. This dissertation looks specifically at how these newsrooms work with UGC on a daily basis and it does so in a moment when participation in online social networks has grown exponentially. A moment when digital journalism has proven necessary and not only an extension of its print counterpart. Instead of investigating the unusual, the exception, the crisis, the unexpected, this dissertation tries to understand the impact of participatory practices in ordinary routines and common practices. These three newsrooms are located in Spain, an interesting place for such a study for several reasons, as I will explain in the following section.

3. Mapping the field: News Media in Spain

As mentioned in the previous section, the political, cultural and economic contexts in which a technology is introduced restrict the possible changes that this technology might bring in. For this reason, it is crucial to situate my object of study. Thus, this section is dedicated to the review of relevant data in relation to the political economy and the media conditions of Spain.

a. The political economy of Spain

Spain is a relevant case study for various reasons. First of all, in terms of internet connectivity, Spanish connection rates are average for European countries. In 2013, according to the INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 69.8% of the Spanish population had a point of

access to the internet in their homes; 70.9% of them with an ADSL connection in their homes; and 92% of users accessed the internet at least once a week. Moreover, according to the same study, 64.1% of internet users participated in online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tuenti. Students were generally the ones who participated in the online social networks the most (94.8%) as well as youth aged 16 to 24 years (94.5%). Interestingly, women's participation was slightly higher (65.6%) than men's (62.8%). In addition, within the context of the European Union Spain is the ninth-ranked country for ICT (Information and communications technology) usage and users. That is to say, in general terms, Spain is representative of internet use in general in Europe, attending to its citizens' possibilities and current uses of online participation platforms.

Second, Spain is immersed in an economic crisis that its government, under pressure from the European Union, is confronting with deep and strong austerity measures that are affecting citizens' rights, such as education and healthcare. Public sector pay has been frozen over the last three years;[7] welfare payments for the elderly and disabled have been cut by 20%;[8] healthcare coverage that until recently was considered one of the world's most progressive, has been reduced for immigrants and the unemployed;[9] and university tuition fees will be increased by up to 25% over the next several years.[10] Moreover, the unemployment rate during the first months of 2014, when the fieldwork for this study was conducted, was

[7] Spain budget imposes further austerity measures http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19733995
[8] Spain introduces 'crisis budget' of savage austerity cuts http://www.ibtimes.com/spain-introduces-crisis-budget-savage-austerity-cuts-796715
[9] Spanish doctors: Austerity cuts are prompting medical 'apartheid' http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/spain/120913/Spain-doctors-austerity-euro-crisis
[10] Spanish school and university protest at education cuts http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18156931

around 25.93%,[11] with more than half of the nation's younger populations unemployed. In other words, Spaniards are facing complex social circumstances due to decisions taken without public consultation at a moment when citizens' participation seems to be technically easier than at any other time in history.

Due to this political and economical context, Spain is experiencing a climate of social discontent that has been translated into different social movements and continuous protests, most of them organized on the internet. A great example of this is the social movement of Los Indignados. The source of the social movement known as Los Indignados or 15-M can be traced to a Facebook group where citizens with different concerns and backgrounds were united under the name Platform of Coordination of Groups Pro-Citizen Mobilization (in Spanish, Plataforma de Coordinación de Grupos Pro-Movilización Ciudadana). This Facebook group brought together members of diverse groups that advocated for, among many other things, the neutrality of the internet, decent jobs for young people, and affordable housing. The original Facebook group then evolved into a new Facebook group under the name of Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now), which expanded into a blog and an email list (Castells 111). In association with 200 smaller groups, Real Democracy Now demanded changes in economic and political systems as well as policies that, they considered, are the cause of the high unemployment rate in Spain, the increase in the level of poverty, and the rise in the number of homeowners losing their properties because of risky mortgage agreements.

Inspired by the Arab Uprisings and the movements for the political regeneration of Iceland, Democracia Real Ya organized different demonstrations around the country on May

[11] España sigue destruyendo empleo en el primer trimester de 2014 http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2014/04/29/actualidad/1398754752_267733.html

15th, 2011, without the support of any political parties, labour unions, or civil society associations. Despite the fact that the mainstream media ignored the call and all the information regarding the demonstration was diffused through alternative channels, mainly the internet, "tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Madrid (50,000), Barcelona (20,000), Valencia (10,000) and 50 more cities" (Castells 112).

The night after the demonstration, a group formed by a dozen people who participated in the mobilization in Madrid decided to camp in Puerta del Sol, the most representative square of the city, as a sign of protest and disagreement with the current democracy and political parties. Many other citizens joined them the following day and from a dozen they became hundreds and then thousands. The situation was replicated in other cities around the country, and it is estimated that there were occupations of public spaces in over 100 Spanish cities. For almost two months, every night thousands of people slept in the occupied squares. Although most of the occupation of public spaces ended in early July, the conversations, debates, and protests have continued online (Castells 110-115).

Furthermore, during the months of the occupation, large amounts of information about the movement – that at the time was labeled by the press as Los Indignados – circulated through online social networks under the hashtag[12] #spanishrevolution. This information was available worldwide to the press and was used in their coverage of the occupations and their aftermath. As Javier Torret, one of the first members of the network that created Real Democracy Now, explains, they "became a collective that had the capacity to speak each one

[12] Twitter help center defines hashtag as follows: "The # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages." Retrieved from: https://support.twitter.com/articles/49309-using-hashtags-on-twitter#

for themselves without the filters of the media. The media outlets amplified what (they) did, be it for better or worse" (quoted in Castells, 121).

The internet also helped to circulate information about abuses committed by the police in public places and out of the reach of journalists. In various instances, videos that showed police violence against protesters resonated so loudly in online social networks that the mainstream media included them in their publications. Sometimes, journalists even followed these cases, interviewing those affected and digging into their cases. And as a result, various governmental investigations were conducted. Additionally, members of Los Indignados exercised strong control of what was published. News stories related to the protests were contested in online social networks and these responses were occasionally included in further news stories published by mainstream media.

The Los Indignados case is therefore a good example of how new media is being utilized by citizens. The uprising of the social movement of Los Indignados and its aftermath definitely constitutes a turning point in the relationship between Spanish journalists and their audiences. Additionally, it is also probably the best recent example in the Spanish context on how the press is dealing, in certain situations, with pertinent user-generated content. But was this the exception that makes the rule? What happened in the Spanish newsrooms after the protests? How are Spanish journalists dealing with user-generated content in their daily routines?

b. The media in Spain

Spain is a very young European democracy and therefore its democratic media is also young. In order to understand the current situation of news media in Spain, it is necessary to provide some contextualization and a brief genealogy highlighting its relevant history, events,

and attributes. A good starting point or event for that genealogy is the civil war that took place in Spain between 1936 and 1939. After the war, a dictatorship led by Francisco Franco governed the country until his death in 1975; democracy wasn't officially established in the country until 1978. During these four decades, control and censorship characterized the mainly official press, with a few private press initiatives subordinated to the totalitarian government. The dictatorship's official press, the *Prensa del Movimiento* (Press of the Movement), was published for the last time in 1984. Television arrived in 1956 and color TV wasn't available until 1972. Spaniards only had access to a single channel –owned by the government– until almost 1982, when finally all the territory had access to a second public channel, TV2. The licenses for the three first private channels, Antena 3, Telecinco and Canal Plus, were conceded in 1989.

In regards to the printed press, the majority of the current mastheads were created after Franco's death, with the exception of the ABC newspaper that was founded in 1903 and worked in favour of the dictatorship during the forty years that it lasted. The first media conglomerates appeared in the late 80s, at least twenty years after the explosion of media conglomerates in the USA (Seoane and Sáinz 251-316).

Artero argues (2010) that there are currently three types of media conglomerates in Spain: national, specialised, and regional. National conglomerates reach audiences within the whole country and are present in various industry sectors. Artero includes in this category Prisa (that owns *El País*, one of the case studies of this dissertation), Planeta, Vocento, Unedisa, Zeta, Medapro, and Godó, Prisa being the most influential. In terms of their editorial positions, Prisa, Zeta, and Mediapro can be considered center-left on the ideological spectrum, while Planeta, Vocento, Unedisa and Godó are positioned more to the centre-right. Secondly,

Artero considers that specialized conglomerates are those industry-specialized – the ones that concentrate their media outlets, and therefore their audiences, on a specific industry. Here he includes television groups such as Mediaset, the free newspaper company *20 Minutos*, local dailies enterprises such as Prensa Ibérica, radio outlets like Cope, and magazine publishers such as Hachette, G+J, or Condé Nast. Finally, Artero distinguishes a third type of media conglomerate that he names as 'regionals' for developing their operations and strategies regionally. Artero identifies several groups with a regional approach including Voz, Hermes, Joly, Serra, Heraldo, and Promecal.

Although the democratic Spanish mass media was developed later than in other European countries, Spanish news media outlets initiated their migration to the internet at just the right time. The first online news site, the Catalan VilaWeb, was created in 1994 and the main Spanish newspapers (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*) joined the Net in late 1995, with basically the same content as their print editions (Montagut 409-418). During these years, CNN and BBC also launched their online sites: the former in 1995 and the latter in 1997. During the second half of the 1990s, the majority of the online news media had a print counterpart. It took several more years for the widespread appearance of *pure players*, understood as news outlets born and available only on the internet. During this decade, most media entrepreneurs saw the internet as "suicide" and strategically used it as a platform to promote their printed newspapers (Delgado 12). The Spanish presidential elections of 1996 and 2000 marked a historic moment in online news, since many printed newspapers decided to join the internet to cover the elections. In this sense, *La Vanguardia* was the first newspaper to cover the 1996 elections in real time in its digital version.

During the first years of the 21th century, it became clear that the internet was here to stay. However, most media entrepreneurs still lacked a very definite idea about how to manage their content on the new medium or about the informative relevance of the internet. To this effect, in 2002 elpais.com, the online version of the larger newspaper in Spain *El País*, decided to protect its contents by creating a pay wall. Its main rival, elmundo.es, continued to offer its online content for free but also established a pay wall for the content that belonged to *El Mundo*'s printed newspaper. In the first decade of the new century, Delgado locates four disruptive moments that accelerated the rhythm of news actualization; the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, the March 11th terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004, and the Spanish presidential elections of 2004 and 2008. If the presidential elections of 1996 and 2000 encouraged media entrepreneurs to open the online versions of their newspapers, Delgado notes, the presidential elections of 2004 and 2008 changed the working routines of the election coverage.

At a more regulatory level, Manfredi and Artero differentiate two stages in the development of mass media in Spain. The first, from 1976 to 1989, is what they call the "normative/ legal development" stage, a period defined by several important shifts: from censorship to freedom of expression, from a state run media-system to a system that enabled the participation of private-run media, and from a centralized media and communication policy to a decentralized one. Manfredi and Artero identify a second stage from 1989 to 2000, a period characterized by "the formation of big media and multimedia groups and the creation of an information hyper-sector, in the midst of the spectacular development of information technologies and the liberalisation of telecommunication markets, which became highly

globalised" (160). In all of these regulatory processes Manfredi and Artero criticize the crucial role of the state in the configuration of the audiovisual market:

> In Spain, television was adapted to the structure of the state through the unusual combination of government, information services and bureaucracy. The mixture of these three elements favoured the creation of an intense relationship between political and information powers. Plutocratic relations have been maintained for a long period, and it has been difficult to break certain habits of collusion between television and the state.

Thus, the audiovisual licensing system has strengthened a duopoly by the media conglomerates Mediaset and Planeat, reducing the chances for growth by local and third-sector operators (168).

In the last few years and since the outbreak of the economic crisis, one of the sectors that has suffered the greatest effects of the recession, along with radio, is the press. The combination of the crisis in advertising, together with the transformations in use of news and consumption habits brought about by new media technologies, has been lethal. Following the global trend, from 2008 to 2013, 11,151 journalism-related workers lost their jobs and 284 media outlets closed.[13] However, Manfredi and Artero point out that the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008 also ushered in the transformation of new media companies in Spain. Instead of following the exhausted models of print and audiovisual media, these new business projects were launched "with a more flexible structure that takes into account the basics of the

[13] According to a report from 2010, in Spain the average salary of an editor in chief is 53,200 euros a year, while senior reporters make around 38,500 euros and junior reporters, 26,000.

digital economy" (170). Hence, during the same period when thousands of jobs have been destroyed and hundred of media outlets had to close, 265 new media outlets were launched.[14]

This data draws a very unstable scene but at the same time it shows vestiges of innovation and entrepreneurship –two basic characteristics of the current international moment of rupture and crisis of both business models and working conditions. These new forms of entrepreneurial journalism offer competitive advantages by "the use of open licences, collaboration with other digital media and the intensive use of social networks. In this context, journalists act as key nodes of journalistic information, participating in digital debates, using new narrative formulas and establishing networks with the reading community" (Manfredi and Artero 174).

4. Three newsrooms

That being said, three different Spanish mastheads representing three different ways of doing journalism, three different business models, and three different forms of managing internet users' participation collectively provide the object of study for this dissertation: *El País*, *eldiario.es*, and *El Huffington Post*. *El País* is the largest newspaper in Spain – with an additional, relevant presence in Latin America – and constitutes an example of traditional journalism exploring its options in the digital era. *eldiario.es* is a pure player that follows Manfredi and Artero's definition of the aforementioned new entrepreneurial journalism that is currently developing not only in Spain but also in many places around the globe. Finally, *El Huffington Post*, the Spanish version of Arianna Huffington's news franchise, corresponds

[14] For more information (in Spanish): http://www.apmadrid.es/noticias/generales/informe-de-la-profesion-periodistica-2013-11151-empleos-perdidos-y-284-medios-cerrados-desde-2008?Itemid=209

with a new wave of what could be called global digital news organizations (*BuzzFeed*, *Vice*, etc).

a. El País

The daily newspaper *El País*, the leading news organization in Spain, was founded in 1976, during the historical period known as *La Transición*, which took place between the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 and the establishment of democracy in Spain in 1978. *El País* is the "flagship" of the media conglomerate PRISA (Nieman Journalism Lab), whose media outlets are spread around 22 countries in America and Europe. *El País* is one of the national newspapers of record –that is to say, one of the newspapers of reference in the country– that apart from its central office in Madrid, where this study was conducted, includes satellite offices in various Spanish regions, as well as in Latin America and EEUU. Its political editorial views can be located in the left-center wing, although during the last years it has supported more conservative views in certain areas.

As aforementioned, *El País* went online in 1996, almost at the same time as other large newspapers in Spain, with basically the same contents included in the printed version and with little resources invested. In November 2002, *El País* decided to establish a pay wall for accessing to its digital version, as a way of protecting the content of its print edition. This decision resulted in a decline in their unique visitors and leadership that were lost to its competitor *El Mundo*. It wasn't until June 2005 that *El País* decided to offer its content for free to its audiences. During the almost three years that *El País* had a pay wall, only 46,000 users paid for the subscription (Delgado 13-14).

In 2012, *El País* undertook the most profound redesign of its website since it was launched. First of all, the method of organizing information was restructured in a way that

granted more relevance to tags than sections. Moreover, there were also changes in the structure of the newsroom as well as the work routines: all journalists began to write for both online and print and a central table, the aforementioned 'superdesk,'[15] was installed in the newsroom to coordinate the online with print. The idea behind this latter decision was to convert the print edition into a compilation of the best stories. Lastly, one of the main changes was at a technical level: a new team of developers together with some reporters created a new Content Management System designed to answer to the needs of journalists and the challenges of new technologies. Integrated in this new CMS was one of their new tools, a social network tool called Eskup that was conceived for interacting with the readers (Nieman Journalism Lab).

El País is currently developing a strategy to begin following the 'digital-first' model, giving priority to online news and reserving the print newspaper for more in-depth stories and opinion. Although it hasn't been officially announced, these potential changes were discussed and partially introduced to journalists during the newsroom observations conducted for this dissertation.

b. El Huffington Post

Inaugurated in May 2012, *El Huffington Post*, the Spanish version of Arianna Huffington's *The Huffington Post*, is partially owned by PRISA (50%), the media conglomerate that owns *El País*, and *The Huffington Post* (50%). *El Huffington Post* has a

[15] Defined by Anja Bechmann as "special workplace arrangements where editors from different media are placed next to each other to enhance knowledge sharing and coordination across media" (15).

small newsroom based in Madrid in the same building as *El País*, where 11 journalists[16] – mainly young professionals – work under the supervision of the renowned and award-winning Spanish journalist Montserrat Domínguez. Although totally independent in its daily selection of news stories and their treatment, *El Huffington Post* follows the structure, working routines, and the thinking of the EEUU American Huffington Post. That is, in order to understand how *El Huffington Post* works it is necessary to go back to the founding of *The Huffington Post*.

The EEUU American *Huffington Post*, in its origins a start-up, was founded by Arianna Huffington and Ken Lerer, and presented as a conversational group blog and a news aggregator. *The Huffington Post* was born with the aim of being an alternative to the conservative news aggregator The Drudge Report. Despite the fact that it began as a blog with a focus on political affairs, the site has evolved into a news site (still with some traces of news aggregator and multiple blogs) and incorporated a variety of topics, including technology, sports, business, environmental issues, divorce, and food, among others. In 2011, *The Huffington Post* launched its international venture, establishing news sites in Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Spain, North Africa and UK (Nieman Journalism Lab).

With the intention of 'democratizing' the opinion section, both *The Huffington Post* and *El Huffington Post* host a network of bloggers that includes experts on a variety of topics, from politicians to students. In the case of the Spanish *El Huffington Post*, it also hosts a very active online community, grown from the comment sections of its news stories, that organized its first in-person meeting in July 2013.

[16] At the time when the fieldwork for this dissertation was conducted.

El Huffington Post closely follows the daily trending topics on the internet as well as the directions of web traffic. The tone, treatment of the news, and topics of interests range from the sensationalistic and sometimes superficial to the politically relevant and socially engaged, as happens in the other versions of Arianna Huffington's franchise. In a piece written for its first anniversary, *El Huffington Post* affirmed to have registered more than 500,000 commentaries,[17] featured 400 bloggers, and generated traffic of 2,800,000 unique visitors in May 2013.[18]

c. eldiario.es

The Spanish online news site *eldiario.es* was launched on September 18, 2011. It was created with the aim of covering stories that focused on two topics: the economy and politics. That is, *eldiario.es* focuses on what Anderson et al. describe as "hard news" (Anderson et al. 3), a term that follows Lord Northcliffe's observation that "news is something someone somewhere doesn't want printed. Everything else is advertising" (ibid). However, although they have recently started to include sections such as 'Culture' that do not necessarily fit with the idea of 'hard news,' the publication's main focus remains the coverage of economic and political affairs. *eldiario.es* started with a very small newsroom of 12 workers (including journalists and administrative personnel) located in Madrid and is continuously expanding in size and space.[19]

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[17] Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2013/06/05/aniversario-huffington-post_n_3384080.html
[18] Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2013/06/04/blogueros-huffington-post_n_3384350.html?utm_hp_ref=primer-aniversario-huffington-post
[19] The size of eldiario.es has grown exponentially since this study started. As a result, the newsroom moved into a new space during the summer of 2015, a year and a half after I conducted my fieldwork. However, these are the risks of studying a very innovative and successful start-up, and the fact that

By September of 2015, three years after it was launched, *eldiario.es* had expanded to include 44 workers in their main newsroom in Madrid, as well as 13 additional regional newsrooms countrywide. These regional newsrooms function as franchises: they follow and share the thinking of the organization in their working routines and their technologies but they are economically and executively independent. In relation to the business model, *eldiario.es*' revenues come from advertising, subscriptions and the sale of printed volumes and books that analyse in-depth specific and relevant topics in current affairs. Around 68% of their first-year income came from advertising, while subscriptions added up to 30%. The rest of their revenue came mainly from the sales of the printed special issues. The major shareholder is the editor in chief, Ignacio Escolar, however, other journalists in the newsroom are also part of the site's shareholders. Such a financial decision was motivated by ideas of "buying" their "freedom" and "defend[ing] the profession, being the owners of the newsroom" where they work, which therefore "guaranteed an independent editorial line that do not follow obscure interests."[20]

One of the features of *eldiario.es* that differentiates it from other Spanish online publications is its treatment and consideration of its subscribers as 'associates.' That is, they are not treated simply as 'consumers' of a product but rather something more like partners. For that reason, these 'associates' are consulted about key decisions in the newsrooms that affect the treatment of the news and are also given special access to in-depth reports; every day before midnight, 'associates' receive an email with exclusive access to the articles and reportages that will be open to the rest of the readers the day after and are punctually informed about the financial situation and the accounts of the enterprise. Additionally, in the comment

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these changes occur should not stop researchers from studying these news organizations in an early stage.

[20] Source: http://www.eldiario.es/el_equipo/

section of every news story, the comments by the associates appear inserted in a box that distinguishes them from other readers' comments. *eldiario.es* reached 12,257 'associates' in September of 2015 and generated traffic of 4,800,000 unique users in July 2015. Both their associates and web traffic have increased dramatically in the last years.

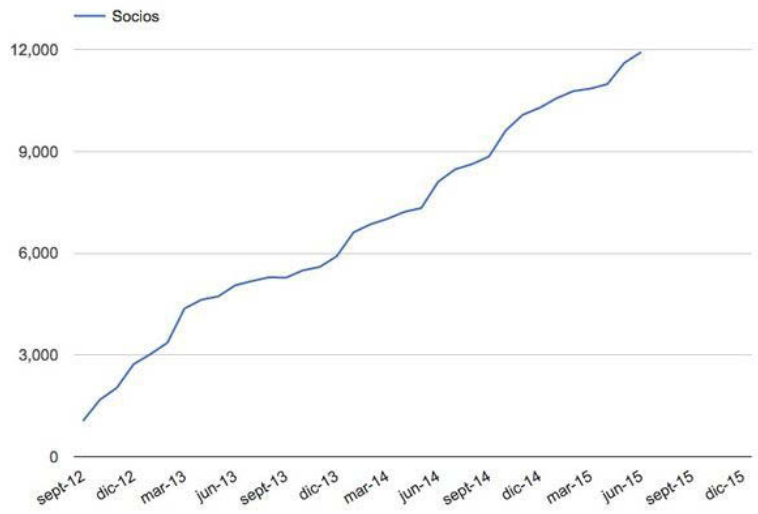

Figure 1: This graphic shows the increase in the number of associates from September 2012 to June 2015. Source: http://www.eldiario.es/redaccion/millones-personas-Espana-leen-eldiarioes_6_405319479.html

5. The methods

Jane B. Singer (2009) explains that although ethnographic studies make use of various methods, the most common ones (and the core of the methodology, it would be possible to say) are observation and interviews, "sometimes adding visual recording, document analysis, diaries, and more" (191). Singer also explains that in the field of mass communication it is

usual to include some sort of "content analysis of the products created by the people being studied" (ibid). Accordingly, a methodological triangulation consisting of participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis has been followed in this dissertation. As Singer points out, "such triangulation increases confidence in the interpretation of findings; it is particularly useful for exploring the "why" as well as the "what" of a subject" (ibid).

a. Newsroom observation

The central method of analysis in ethnographic investigations is participant observation. This method is normally used in order to become familiarized with the practices and activities of a group. As Bonnie S. Brennen puts it: "In participant observation, researchers go into the field to gain knowledge about activities, beliefs, values, relationships and interests so that they may learn more about how others make sense of their everyday lives" (163). Within participant observation, the researcher can be integrated in the community he or she is observing at different levels, positioning him or herself as a complete observer (no interaction with the participants), observer as participant (on-site but distanced from those being observed), participant as observer (fully integrated in the culture being studied), and complete participant (fully bonded with the group under examination) (ibid 164-165).

For this dissertation, participant observation in the three aforementioned newsrooms organizations took place from January 13 - February 19, 2014: January 13-24 at *eldiario.es*, February 4-14 at *El País*, and February 19 at *El Huffington Post*. In both *eldiario.es* and *El País* I had full access including to team meetings. At those two newsrooms, I varied the schedule of my visits, which normally lasted 8-9 hours per day, so I could get an idea on how things work at different times during the day. At *El Huffington Post*, I was only allowed to

spend one full day (around 12 hours) with the journalists at their offices. However, I had informal conversations over lunch with *El Huffington Post* journalists on various occasions and most of the interviews took place in the newsroom on a different day than the one when the observation was conducted. That is, although I couldn't have the same degree of access as at *eldiario.es* and *El País*, I was still able to get an idea of the working routines and common journalistic practices at *El Huffington Post*.

The initial plan was to integrate myself as a complete participant, working as a copy editor in the three newsrooms, receiving the journalists' stories to proofread, fact check, improve the writing style, and prepare the texts for online publication. The logic behind this intention was to perform an assignment that would interfere the least with others' work and in a position where I already had experience.[21] Scholars in favour of the complete participant position of newsroom observation research, such as Paterson and Zoellner, highlight two main benefits of conducting participant observation while doing ethnographic research in newsrooms. First of all, they argue that "full participation can be a commercial argument in access negotiation because the company gains a free-of-charge employee with professional experience in exchange for granting access" (103). Moreover, Paterson and Zoellner maintain that "by participating in the activities in such an office environment, a researcher as participant can be far less obtrusive than a passive observer" (ibid).

Nevertheless, my offer to work as a copy editor was not as convenient in practice as it sounded in theory. First of all, only *eldiario.es* accepted me in their team as a copy editor from the beginning. Despite the fact that they explained to me how to use their web-publishing

[21] I worked as an editor of online news in different newsrooms (soitu.es, elmundo.es, telecinco.es and others) for more than 3 years. I am very familiar with how news is covered, written and presented on the internet, so I was confident I had something valuable to offer to these news organizations.

platform, and even created a profile for me in their system so I could access and edit their stories, they rarely assigned me a news story. It took four days for them to assign me the first one. It was then that I realized that full and complete observation of the journalists' routines cannot be done while performing certain tasks. Editing a news story requires total concentration and dedication to the text, which necessarily means isolation from the rest of the team. While editing this first piece of news, I became aware that in order to be attentive to everything that it is happening in a newsroom, a researcher should be freed from other activities. Hence, after the first week at *eldiario.es*, I decided not to insist on assisting with the journalists' workload and duties in these newsrooms.

At *eldiario.es* I occupied different positions within the space of the newsroom, which gave me the opportunity to meet, talk, and observe the practices of almost every journalist there.

Figure 2: eldiario.es newsroom is formed by 3 different long tables. At table 1, editors in chief and "portadistas" (journalists in charge of the homepage). At table 2, journalists covering economy, politics, and social issues. At table 3, culture, technology, special issues, and a journalist who covers political stories. I conducted the observations from tables 2 and 3. Photo credit: flickr.com/photos/marilink/

At *El País*, a much larger and hierarchically organized news outlet, I stayed in a central desk where the homepage of their website is managed by a team of around 10 people.

Figure 3. Central desk at El País. The oval end of the table is where editors in chief are placed. The long table is where journalists work. I conducted my observations from both places at the central desk. The different sections are distributed throughout the newsroom in small aisles of desks around the central desk. (Photo credit: El País)

At *El Huffington Post*, journalists work all together in the same table, which I joined as part of the newsrooms observations.

Figure 4: Main desk at El Huffington Post from where the newsroom observations were conducted. At the right side, the glass office of the editor in chief. Photo credit: El País.

At *eldiario.es* I was able to attend the daily staff meetings that happened every morning, during which the different section editors in chief discussed the stories they were following for the day. At *El País*, I also had access to a couple of these morning and afternoon meetings. At *El Huffington Post*, journalists rarely organize this kind of team meeting so there was no way for me to attend one.

During the newsroom observations, I took field notes systematically. These notes included verbal and non-verbal comments, interactions, and descriptions of the organization of the newsrooms as well as observations and reflections on the research process. In some cases, while being in the newsrooms, I also followed some of the journalists on Twitter. This double ethnography (physical and virtual) offered me interesting and insightful discoveries, especially in the case of *eldiario.es* where journalists sometimes shared online the conversations they

were having in the office and continued these debates online, incorporating their readers. These notes were daily revised and copied into a Word document afterwards.

b. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Given the fact that the group of individuals interviewed for this dissertation was very heterogeneous (journalists from different sections, positions, ages and backgrounds)[22], the best way to proceed with the interviews was to conduct semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, "questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is more free to probe beyond the answer" (May 111). In this case, "interviewers may vary the order of the questions and may also ask follow-up questions to delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed, or to clarify answers given by the respondent" (Brennen 28). While a list of questions was used to guide the interview (see Appendix A), other questions were incorporated during interviews based on the type of responses provided by journalists and ongoing findings made during the newsroom observations. Moreover, as a form of ice-breaker and in order to better understand the individual who was being interviewed, all the interviews began with a question about the professional background and experience of the journalist interviewed. In every case, the journalists were informed about the aim, scope, and limits of the study as well as about their right to discontinue their participation in the study at any moment.

[22] The interviewees are referred as to journalists or participants throughout this dissertation. Unless it was necessary for reasons related to clarification, I have not differentiated between individuals holding different positions such as editor in chief, reporter, editor, etc., and I have also tried to avoid specifying the section they work for. In most cases, this has been done for the sake of confidentiality.

A total of 33 interviews (11 at *eldiario.es*, 12 in *El País* and 10 at *El Huffington Post*) between 45 minutes and 1.15 hours in duration were conducted for this dissertation. At eldiario.es, I observed and interviewed 5 female participants and 6 male participants; 6 of them were reporters, 3 were section editors in chief, and 2 of them were editorial directors; the majority (6) were under 35 years old and had spent most of their careers working on online journalism projects. At El Huffington Post, I recruited 5 female participants and 5 male participants; 7 were working as reporters/community managers, 1 was employed as editor in chief, and 2 were editorial directors; the great majority were under 35 years old (8) with past experience in online news production. Finally, at El País, I recruited 3 female participants and 9 male participants: 7 reporters, 4 editors in chief, and 1 editorial director. At least 5 of them were under 35 years old, but most of the participants had gained almost all of their work experience at El País, in different sections, both online and print.

The interviewees were normally first contacted by email, especially in the case of *El País*, or while the newsroom observations were taking place. The interviews were held mostly in the newsrooms or in cafeterias close to the places where the journalists were working. The interviews were recorded in mp3 format using a Olympus VN-712PC digital voice recorder and later copied into my personal computer and various external hard drives, for security reasons. The interviews were confidential so the name and position of the respondents will not be revealed. The interviews were transcribed into a Word document immediately following the completion of the fieldwork.

c. Textual analysis

Elfriede Fürsich defines textual analysis as "a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text" (240). Qualitative textual analysis differs from quantitative content analysis in that while content analysis measures value considering repetition (that is, counting the number of times a word, a concept or an idea appears in a given text), textual analysis understands texts as complete entities and bases its analysis in interpretations that take into account not only the surface meanings but also the underlying intentions of a text (Brennen 194). As Fürsich explains, textual analysis has been historically and commonly used as a complement of or complemented by production studies or audience analysis, since textual analysis "is assumed to result in incomplete findings that have to be sustained or even authenticated" (244). However, Fürsich claims that media texts constitute "sites of ideological negotiation" and "mediated reality" rich enough to be studied on their own.

In this dissertation, textual analysis has been used to support or clarify nuances in the data and discoveries gathered during the newsroom observation and interviews. Thus, although, as Fürsuch argues, textual analysis is a valid research method by itself that does not necessarily require complementary data, in this case, it has been used as what we can call a *secondary method*. In this investigation, textual analysis serves to give a glimpse into how user-generated content is actually inserted in the news. Following my observation of the journalists in action and hearing their reasoning and considerations about UGC, my textual analysis of the three mastheads' homepages and news stories that include some form of UGC confirmed the findings of my observations in some cases, but questioned them in others.

The homepages[23] of *El País*, *eldiario.es*, and *El Huffington Post* were methodically examined from July 7 to July 20 of 2014, once a day, between 11 a.m[24] and 2 p.m (Montreal time). The textual analysis included the 10 top news stories on the newspapers homepages. Journalists organize the information on the homepages according to the importance they assign to specific news stories; therefore, these 10 news pieces are supposed to be the most relevant in the opinion of the journalists. The news pieces (a total of 420 news pieces) were scrutinized in search of UGC.[25] When a news story that included UGC was located, five elements were taken into consideration: (1) the place where the news story was situated within

[23] The logic behind analysing the placement of news stories within the homepage relies on something noticed during the newsrooms observations. In the three newsrooms I observed, a significant amount of human resources were employed in constructing and designing the homepage. At *El País*, an entire team that includes journalists and photography experts is dedicated to constantly updating the homepage under the supervision of various editors in chief. At eldiario.es, someone called 'portadista' (front-pager) is fully dedicated to the homepage, also under the supervision of the editors in chief. Same thing at El Huffington Post, where they treat with special care the news story that is at the opening of their homepage.

I am aware of the changes in news consumption; an important segment of the audiences no longer visit the newspapers homepage to get their news but instead gain access to the news through references from their contacts on the social networks. However, while homepages are still a *sacred place* for journalists, there is not much intervention by editors in chief or even group decision-making when it comes to sharing a news story on Facebook or Twitter. Since this dissertation looks at the logic behind the production of news rather than the reception stage, I found essential the analysis of the homepages, as they are still considered in these three newsrooms as *the face* of the journalists' work.

[24] Since newspaper homepages and news stories are constantly updated, I decided to choose a specific time in the day to conduct the textual analysis. Some of the news pieces could have been modified after my analysis and for sure the way the homepages were structured when I analysed them wasn't the same two hours later or two hours before. However, given the fact that news stories and homepages are *living entities* nowadays, the only way to approach them for an investigation such as this one is to decide when to analyse them and how, always keeping in mind their *liveliness*. Moreover, although digital news products seem to be always 'under construction,' journalists publish news stories and organize homepages as if they were static pieces, that is to say, constructing them as if they were finished products (unless they are breaking news stories).

[25] As will be shown in chapter 3, UGC is a term that has been loosely defined and that can include or ignore diverse practices. Although, as specified in chapter 3, this dissertation further analyses and considers UGC as audiences' content, audiences' comments and what has been called network journalism, the textual analysis of the homepages and news stories has been done considering only audiences' content, that is, audiences' footage, audiences' experiences and audiences' stories.

the homepage; (2) the genre and section of the news story; (3) the type of UGC inserted (tweet, YouTube video, Facebook comment, Flickr photograph, etc); (4) how UGC was inserted (as raw material, as a quote, etc.); (5) relationship between UGC and other content (was it the main source? was a quote added at the end of the news story?, etc.). These categories were constructed following the concept of ideological analysis as formulated by Michael Cormack.

In *Ideology* (1992), Cormack outlines a method to conduct an ideological critique, based on a British cultural studies framework, with an emphasis on five different areas: content, structure, absence, style and mode of address (19-20). The textual analysis for this dissertation was conducted taking into account the structure and absences in the texts under scrutiny. As Cormack explains "content does not stand alone and part of the meaning of any element of a cultural product derives from its position within the whole artefact" (29). Thus, looking at the placement of UGC within the news stories and homepages, it is possible to detect how the process of ideology works with respect to internet users' participatory practices in the studied newsrooms. Moreover, as stated by Cormack, although absences are a "difficult category to deal with since its scope is potentially infinite," absences can be a useful element to look at in a textual analysis if we consider the "elements which might have been expected to be in the text but which are missing from it" (31). For instance, in this present case, I paid attention to differential absences – as for example when a piece of UGC was included in the coverage of a news story by one of the media outlets but not by the others[26]. A summary of the results from the textual analysis is provided at the end of this dissertation (Appendix B).

[26] Unfortunately, no examples of such absences were found.

6. Researcher as a former practitioner

I am, like many other researchers conducting ethnographic studies in newsrooms, a journalist. Over the last ten years, I have worked in multiple newsrooms and participated in various online news projects, and I currently contribute occasionally to Spanish media. How can this professional experience affect my research? As Chris Paterson and Anna Zoellner comment in *The efficacy of professional experience in the ethnographic investigation of production*, having professional media production experience in the field of study eases some parts of the ethnographic research. Specifically, Paterson and Zoellner mention four main advantages of professional experience: "a means of understanding more readily the practices being observed; easier access to conduct the research, as an 'insider'; a means of encouraging greater disclosure from the media professionals whose practices are being examined; and an increased amount of trust of the researcher not to disclose confidential (or proprietary) information" (98-99). In addition to personal connections and some knowledge about the jargon of the field as valuable entry points into the domain, Paterson and Zoellner explain that "with specialist knowledge of the language and a basic understanding of production routines, a researcher is able to immerse herself quickly into the research field and does not need to spend an initial time period in order to gain basic understanding" (103).

I agree with Paterson and Zoellner, particularly in their assertion that my professional background provided me with the necessary contacts to gain access to the newsrooms and also in that I did not need extra time to understand and immerse myself in the working routines and journalistic slang. Likewise, I felt comfortable and confident surrounded by journalists and I believe this assured attitude assisted me in my interactions with the journalists. For instance, at

eldiario.es on the last day of the newsroom observations I was told: "I wish you could stay here. We are now used to have you around as if you were one of us."

However, Paterson and Zoellner also observe that "professional experience needs to be balanced with distance to the research subject, and it can prove helpful not to be overly familiar with the processes and people studied" (104). Otherwise, as Sills-Jones points out, research risks 'reproducing industrial myths' (quoted in Paterson and Zoellner, 104). In this dissertation I have tried to overcome these challenges by adding thick descriptions to support my findings and theories. I believe that by forcing myself to meticulously describe every step, discovery, and conclusion I have made has assisted me in reducing the risk of becoming too close or familiar with the object of study.

7. Data Analysis

The data collected during my fieldwork and through my textual analysis was evaluated following two steps. First of all, in order to help me organize the data, a series of categories were established based on or inspired by previous research and particularly by my theoretical frameworks. For instance, in the examination of the first research question, 'how is UGC being integrated in mainstream journalism?', I use Wardle and Williams' categorization of UGC as a guide for the analysis. For the evaluation of the second research question, 'how does the integration of UGC in mainstream journalism affect the role of the audiences?', inspired by Heinonen's research, I decided to separate the data into two main clusters: the audiences' role before a story is written, and the audiences' role after a story is written. Finally, in order to answer the question 'how have the integration of UGC and the introduction of new ways of understanding and dealing with audiences impacted the practice of gatekeeping?', I have

considered two common levels of study in gatekeeping theory: the individual and the organizational.

In a second step, I performed an inductive analysis of the interviews and field notes. David R. Thomas defines inductive analysis as "approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (238). This mode of data analysis permits themes and categories to emerge from the data instead of, as in the case of deductive analysis, using the data to test previous theories, hypothesis or categories. The aim of applying this mode of analysis was to be able to summarize the data gathered through the different methods to then create links between the research questions and this summary in order to reach some conclusions, categories, keywords and theories.

My inductive analysis of the data was carried out using Thomas's strategies as a model. First, interview transcriptions and field notes were subjected to multiple close readings in order to identify key themes related to the categories or clusters associated with the dissertation research questions. Once a first set of key terms, themes, and categories was identified, quotes and notes from the data associated with these keywords were methodically organized. New categories and keywords appeared during this process. Finally, categories, themes, and terms were related to each other and used to answer the research questions.

The next chapter begins unpacking this data, offering a description of how journalists deal with UGC in the three newsrooms, based on the newsroom observations, interviews, and textual analysis. The results are presented separately by news organization, and data from each method is provided under a theme only when relevant. That is to say, not all the themes,

categories, and ideas are supported by evidence gathered from the three methods, but only by relevant and decisive data.

Chapter 3: UGC and journalists

There are multiple entry points for encountering and framing the existing research on participatory practices and their impact on journalism. The present chapter begins by situating my dissertation within these discourses. The two following sections are dedicated to analysing and critiquing Axel Bruns' figure of the *produser*, the theoretical concept that serves as the point of departure for this dissertation, as well as explaining how the term user-generated content (UGC) is being used and understood for this research. Keeping these theoretical frameworks in mind, this chapter continues to address the first research question of this dissertation, by describing how journalists in the three newsrooms studied deal with UGC, based on observations, interviews, and textual analysis.

1. *Produsage* and the figure of the *produser*

As mentioned in chapter 1, with the rise of the so-called Web 2.0, terms and theories in relation to the participatory practices it enhances emerged not only in academic settings but also from techno gurus and media specialists. Initially, books and articles attempting to understand the consequences of the changes produced by media technologies often predicted revolutionary outcomes that nearly a decade later appear naïve at best. Axel Bruns' conceptualization of the *produser,* formulated in those early years of the social web, reflects some of that initial illusion and innocence (based partially in articulations by Shirky and Benkler) but it is equally a term that has retained its usefulness over time and can be applied in current investigations. Bruns begins his theorization by questioning the relevance of terms related to industrial modes of production of information and knowledge, arguing that it is

more useful to explore the alternative forms of collaborative information creation made possible by new technologies. Drawing upon new practices such as online social networking, collaborative knowledge management, or collaborative filtering, Bruns (2007) describes the post-industrial or informational model as *produsage*, whereby "the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge" (101). Bruns argues that, given this new scenario, terms such as product, consumer, and producer are outdated and need to be revised. Hence, he proposes *produsage* to refer to the content creation practices of internet users.

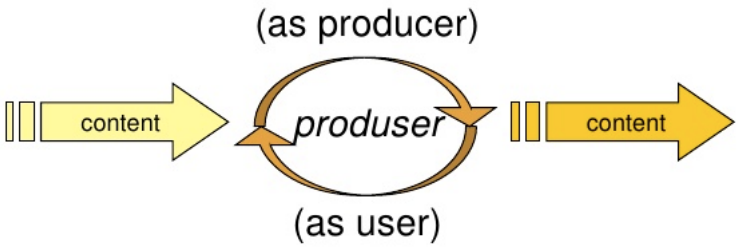

Figure 5: Produsage by Axel Bruns. Source: Produsage: a working definition http://produsage.org/produsage

Produsage is characterized by the generation of content by a broad community of participants vis-à-vis the production by dedicated individuals and teams present in the industrial production of goods; a constant change in the role of the participants, also called *produsers*, and leadership determined by communal evaluation; the creation of evolutionary

and unfinished artefacts[27] instead of finished products; and new interpretations of the copyright systems that allow continual improvement of content (ibid). The *produser* is user and producer of media contents, understanding producer in a not conventional or industrial sense of the word, since, as mentioned, in most cases *produsers* do not generate finished and ready-to-consume products. Bruns also considers *produsers* "those members of the networked population who choose for the moment to remain users, simply utilising the 'products' of the *produsage* process as substitutes for industrial products" (Bruns, 2006, 22), since these users are potential *produsers* and sometimes unintentional producers of content. Bruns explains that *produsage* coexists with the industrial production model and has challenged diverse industries such as "software, journalism, music and broadcast, each of which have struggled to hold on to existing markets while finding it difficult to attract new consumers especially in younger age groups" (Bruns, 2007, 104). Most of these industries are trying to figure out how to overcome and/or how to work with and within *produsage*.

Although perhaps too positive and somewhat utopic in its early outlines, the concept of *produsage* and the figure of the *produser*, revised and expanded to different contexts by the author, serve as an ideal framework for this dissertation. First of all, Bruns' description of the changes and challenges of digital media technologies is especially compelling because he stresses crisis, a moment when old and new models coexist and when different actors, not only the new *produsers*, are at play. Secondly, this dissertation looks at those artefacts created by *produsers* in the same way as Bruns; as unfinished content or materials that journalists utilize for journalistic purposes. Thirdly, contrary to concepts such as citizen journalist, *produser*

[27] Bruns uses the word 'artefacts' as an alternative to 'products.'

does not imply any journalistic intentionality – and not even a content-creation intention – by the content creator, which allows me to open the focus of the study to a wider diversity of media artefacts or, as I will be denominating these contents within this dissertation, user-generated contents. Finally, the term *produsers* allows me to consider not only the UGC created by the audiences of the media organizations under study but also by other internet users, in this way avoiding an exclusive focus on audiences' participation as well as the restrictive, poorly-applied concept of citizens' participation.

2. User-Generated Content

The term user-generated content (UGC) is particularly useful for theorizing about the practices of *produsers* in a journalistic context because it permits us to concentrate on the outcomes or elements that constitute these activities. Whereas concepts such as citizen journalism, participatory journalism, or network journalism assume some kind of intention of *doing journalism* in those who produce newsworthy content, the term UGC leaves more room for discussing the practices of the *produsers* without presuming specific goals or objectives (i.e., the creation and dissemination of news content). However, the term UGC has been widely critiqued for being poorly defined as well as inappropriate for referring to journalistic-related practices.

The earliest studies on the impact of UGC in journalism allude to UGC as the consequence of initiatives started by online news sites to integrate and implement certain types of content produced by their audiences. In *A Clash of Cultures*, for instance, Hermida and Thurman (2008) approach UGC as spaces within online news sites created by journalists for

audiences in order to facilitate participation in journalists' projects. In Hermida and Thurman's examination of the tools for readers' contributions that different British newspapers offer, they limit their definition of UGC to content created within the boundaries of news organizations. A similar approached is suggested by Henri Örnebring (2008), who studies UGC *channelled* through news organizations. However, in each of the studies, the authors fail to provide an explicit definition of UGC.

Wardle and Williams (2008), while also focused on materials submitted by audiences to a specific media outlet, attempt to clarify and delimit their understanding of the concept in a way that can be readily extrapolated to other investigations that consider UGC in journalism using a more general approach. Based on interviews with journalists at the BBC, Wardle and Williams differentiate between audience content, audience comments, collaborative content, network journalism and no-news content.

Audience content includes audience footage, audience experiences ("case studies contributed in response to a BBC news story") and audience stories ("story tip-offs from the audience which are not on the BBC news agenda"). Audience comments are defined as "opinions shared in response to a call to action, a radio phone-in, a presenter request on a television news programme, or a Have Your Say debate" (10-11). Collaborative content "refers to material which is produced by the audience, but with training and support from BBC journalists and producers" (ibid). The term 'networked journalism' comes from journalist and commentator Jeff Jarvis and

> takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognises the

> complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product (ibid).

Finally, by no-news content Wardle and Williams mean "photographs of wildlife, scenic weather or community events" submitted to the BBC (10-11).

However, in an article published in 2010, Wardle and Williams explicitly distance themselves from the term UGC, which they consider inappropriate for the purposes of their research:

> The term UGC developed as a way of describing content created and shared by users on the internet, and in this context the term 'user' is appropriate, but in the context of the BBC, which produces television and radio content alongside online content, it is not. Similarly, while a YouTube clip is 'generated', a comment about the presidential campaign on the current economic situation is not. And, finally, the idea of 'content' also fails to capture some of the material which is described with the term UGC, such as participatory journalism drawing on nodes of expertise within the blogosphere, or a collaborative journalism project training community reporters to produce their own stories.

Instead of using the term UGC, Wardle and Williams move to the concept of 'audience materials,' which they argue is more suitable to their investigation. Although this and other critiques are valid and reasonable, the term UGC is employed in this dissertation for several reasons. Contrary to much of the early research conducted on the topic, this dissertation takes into consideration not only the journalistic materials submitted to newspapers by their audiences, but all of the newsworthy content generated by audiences of the news media outlets

under scrutiny as well as by other internet users (the *produsers*). That is to say, this dissertation does not only examine the materials addressed specifically to the journalists of a media outlet, but it also takes into account the content created with no particular goal by *produsers*, who share these materials with no clear recipient or intention. Based on Wardle and Williams' categories, UGC is understood in this dissertation as the compendium of the following elements:

- ***Produsers'***[28] **content**: As in Wardle and Williams' categorization, this type of UGC is comprised by *produsers*' footage, *produsers*' experiences, and *produsers*' stories. *Produsers*' footage normally implies a witness of a breaking news event who documents totally or partially the story in some kind of audio-visual format – either video, photography or audio. It must be noted here that, following Wardle, Dubberley, and Brown's study (2014), the scope of this dissertation only includes the footage "capture[d] by people who are not professional journalists and who are unrelated to news organizations" (15). Conversely, the materials created by traditional newsmakers and shared on the internet with the intention of bypassing traditional public relations are not included in this classification.

  Produsers' experiences are understood in this dissertation as materials other than footage (tweets, blog posts, etc.) where users share their involvement in a newsworthy

[28] I deal with 'produsers' instead of 'audiences' here because contrary to Wardle and Williams' study that focuses on BBC audiences' submissions of content to the BBC newsroom, at this point my dissertation looks at the contents created by internet users and disseminated on the internet without the intervention of news organizations. These *produsers* can be audiences of these and other online publications or not. Further on, the concept and roles of audiences will be also discussed.

event already part of the current news agenda. Finally, *produsers*' stories refer to newsworthy stories that are distinct from breaking news stories or stories that are already part of the news agenda, shared by internet users.

- **Audiences' comments**: By audiences' comments I mean comments posted by audiences through different platforms about a specific news piece published by a news organization. Included in this category are not only the comments posted at the bottom of a news story (in the news comments sections), but also the comments addressed to journalists in relation to a news story they have published via different social platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter. Although there is plenty of research about news comments sections, it is not so common to include in this category audiences' comments in the Facebook pages of the news organizations or the tweets addressed to journalists and news sites in response to a story. Yet, some journalists check their Twitter feeds or the FB pages of the news organizations they work for more often than the news comments sections.

- **Collaborative Content**: The newsrooms under study in this dissertation do not train their audiences to produce journalistic content, however, the opinion section at *El Huffington Post* is open to audiences' contributions, which they evaluate and edit if necessary. Sometimes, journalists at *El Huffington Post* also suggest topics or stories to their usual collaborators, for them to develop if they wish. These contributions are unpaid and although this particularity has generated significant debate around unpaid labour in current

journalism,[29] these pieces should be considered when discussing UGC in newsrooms. This category will be only included in my discussion of *El Huffington Post*, since it was found to be either irrelevant or absent in the other case studies.

- **Networked journalism**: Networked journalism is probably the most difficult category of UGC to define, due to its subjectivity and abstraction. In this dissertation, network journalism comprises the exchange of information and debate about an ongoing story between journalists and their audiences, generated by journalist demand. It is different from *produsers*' content in that in this case the materials shared by the audiences have been solicited by the journalists. It is also different from audiences' comments since the journalists initiate the dialogue or at least intervene, and focuses on the conversational aspect of certain UGC, whereas the term audiences' comments refers specifically to the audiences' reactions to a news story.

- **No-news contents**: Although not so relevant in terms of empowerment and representation, no-news content is a significant category of UGC for many newsrooms, as for example *El*

[29] It is not part of the scope of this dissertation to discuss the possible political-economic ramifications of the creation and uses of UGC but rather to describe and analyze how news are produced in the times of *produsage*, and its implications. Authors such as Banks and Deuze (2009), Scholz (2008) or Terranova (2000) have discussed this matter extensively. However, my position is closer to Wardle, Dubberley, and Brown's claims in their recent report for the Tow Center (2014):
"Before we launch into our main research discoveries, we wanted to highlight what we found in relation to some of the assumptions commonly shared about the integration of UGC: that it is only used because it is a cheap way to source pictures and that news is being dumbed down by viral video of talented pets and amusing babies. Neither of these assumptions is true. Managers shared with us the cost of resourcing the integration of UGC into their output, in terms of discovery, verification, and clearing rights. Not one newsroom considered UGC a cheap alternative (10)."

Huffington Post. No-news content includes those audio-visual materials unrelated with topical issues: from pet pictures and videos, to 'how to wear these clothes' tutorials. Content that appears in the 'soft news' sections but that is also relevant when analysing the uses of UGC by journalists. This category will only be included in the description of the uses of UGC by *El Huffington Post*, since it wasn't so relevant in the two other cases.

In relation to the *brief* history of the usage of UGC by journalists, Wardle, Dubberley, and Brown mention the Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004 and the London bombings of July 2005 as the two early events in which coverage obtained through UGC was incorporated by some newsrooms around the world. These authors also mention the Iranian protests of June 2009 as a "watershed moment" (12-13), when journalists' attitudes towards UGC shifted and they began to consider it as a relevant source in the coverage of current affairs. It could be said that this shift did not occur in Spain until the spring and summer of 2011, during the Arab Uprising and the movement of Los Indignados. Especially in the case of the latter, it took time for the journalists disconnected from the conversations and debates occurring on the online social networks to understand what was happening on the streets, as discussed in chapter two.

3. Web Metrics / Audiences data

Another way in which audiences unconsciously express themselves, their desires, and their preferences is via web metrics. Audiences involuntarily leave traces when they visit news sites, traces through which they unconsciously express their identities, desires, and preferences. These traces, known as web metrics, can then be consulted and analysed by journalists to reveal information such as the most visited news stories, the average time

readers spend in a single text, or which parts of the website are clicked most often by audiences, to name a few. Although these types of web metrics cannot be considered UGC (since there is no content created), audiences' behaviour data constitutes a rich resource for journalists' work.

Recent studies have started questioning how web metrics affect editorial decisions. As Lee, Lewis, and Powers point out (506), after years of ignoring audiences' preferences, current investigations demonstrate how editors are increasingly paying attention to their readers' tastes (as examples, they mention the studies of Anderson 2011, Dick 2011, and Loosen and Schmidt 2012). Anderson goes so far as to affirm the existence of an "agenda of the audience" (529), "a manifestation of audience-driven interest that would appear to complicate established notions of mass communication such as gate-keeping, agenda setting, and audience influences on media content" (in Lewis et al. 506).

In light of this research on web metrics, and taking into consideration my own observations while visiting the newsrooms under study, this dissertation examines how journalists manage audiences' behaviour data, in order to answer the research question, 'how is UGC being integrated in mainstream journalism?'

4. eldiario.es

The newsroom of *eldiario.es* is located in an old building in downtown Madrid[30]. It is a small newsroom where journalists share a collective space, divided into three distinct lines of

[30] Due to growth in the number of employees, the newsroom of eldiario.es had to move to a new space during the summer of 2015, when I was about to finish writing this dissertation.

tables. I conducted the observations from two spots within two of these lines of tables. The atmosphere was friendly and the relationships and working dynamics of the journalists were relatively easy to follow. Although the journalists spent most of their working hours in the newsroom, there were almost always a couple of team members engaged in activities outside the office, conducting interviews or covering press releases. In most sections, journalists are divided into two shifts, either morning or afternoon, which results in a busy newsroom for most of the day. Editors in chief generally follow split shifts and do not work night shifts.

Every morning, the editors in chief of the different sections held a meeting where they discussed the main stories they were going to be covering and realising during the day. I was authorized to attend these meetings, where I could also take notes on if and how UGC was mentioned, commented, and treated. Apart from these more formal and regular meetings, journalists also decided on the fly what to follow, cover, and feature, which resulted in spontaneous debates and conversations in the newsroom. What follows is a description of the journalists' practices and perceptions of UGC, based on my experiences, the journalists' testimonies, and the brief textual analysis conducted during the summer of 2014.

a. *Produsers*' content

The first questions that arise when considering *produsers*' content – that is, *produsers*' footage, *produsers*' experiences and *produsers*' stories – are how do journalists access this content, who do they listen to, who do they follow in the social networks, and to whom do they tune their radars? First of all, for journalists at *eldiario.es*, the entry point to these *produsers*' content is the social network platform Twitter, which they check continuously, both at work (even during staff meetings) and out of the office, in a way that they refer to as

"an addiction." Secondly, although the answers vary, especially depending on the news section a journalist writes for, in general terms, journalists at *eldiario.es* follow other journalists, experts on the topics they normally cover, politicians, activists, influencers, and friends. In this sense, when journalists come across a newsworthy piece of user content, they admit to being more inclined to trust and pay attention to materials shared by well-identified users with profile pictures, some biographical information, a considerable number of followers, and/or some type of connection with the journalist's existing contacts.

Regarding *produsers*' footage, the utilization of these materials is less common in news sections such as Economy, Culture, or Technology. In relation to this type of UGC, the evidence found during the textual analysis and newsroom observations matches with the journalists' answers: journalists generally employ pictures and videos shared by internet users to improve their coverage of national demonstrations and stories related to the aftermath of these demonstrations (e.g., police brutality or riots investigations), for national stories of social dissent, and as a source for from-the-office coverage of international crisis and war.[31]

In the case of social dissent and demonstrations, journalists are particularly open to using videos and pictures shared by the various groups related to the 15M or Los Indignados movement. Although they could be considered activists, these groups do not act and are not organized in the same way as more traditional activist groups: they do not have a clear political agenda, they do not have clear leaders, their members come and go, and most of the time they act as a liaison between an individual who has experienced or has witnessed an act

[31] Eldiario.es did not have an International section at the time when the fieldwork was conducted. They limited their coverage (mostly through agencies reports and opinion pieces by experts on the field) of international news to topics of special interest for their targeted audiences such as the crisis in the Gaza Strip, Venezuela's elections, and crisis or the citizens' revolts in the Middle East, among others.

of violence or injustice committed by the state apparatus, and different audiences, including journalists. Among the material analysed during the textual analysis, at least two news stories related to social dissent and demonstrations incorporated users' footage. In both cases, the videos were recorded with a cellphone and uploaded to YouTube from anonymous accounts, one of them related with the 15M movement, and both were used as proof of police brutality.[32] For those stories related to international crisis and war, they mostly use footage that, while it may have been recorded by non-traditional newsmakers, has been distributed by social and humanitarian organizations, as the textual analysis confirmed.

Journalists at *eldiario.es* prefer to use materials already authenticated by non-profit organizations to ease the verification process, which is the main issue that journalists encounter when working with UGC. Verification issues are also the reason they prefer to use footage of a newsworthy event taken by off-duty journalists or by those with a communications-related background. When these types of materials are not available, they follow an investigative procedure to evaluate if a picture or a video is valid. To do so, journalists make use of online tools such as Topsy that allow them to identify the user who tweeted an item first, in order to, if possible, contact her to verify its origin. As one of the journalists summarized:

> The verification processes with these images are tricky. The images are sometimes retweeted by someone you know and that you trust, but you don't really know the original author and the verification steps that this person you know has followed before retweeting them. We normally follow the same verification processes as before [the

[32] Sources: http://www.eldiario.es/politica/Legal-Sol-Constitucional-Rodea-Congreso_0_279622338.html; http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/Mossos-David-Fernandez-Placa-Catalunya_0_282422390.html

> existence of the online social networks], but before you just received photographs by the newsroom photographer or a freelancer you had worked with in the past. Also, you had more time and human resources to verify if that image was trustworthy. Nowadays, it is not always possible to talk with the person who has taken a photograph. (…) For these reasons, a photograph taken and shared by someone communications-related, who specifies her communications-related occupation in her profile, is more trustworthy than a photograph taken by a regular citizen or an internet user that you cannot even identify.

When using *produsers*' footage, journalists at *eldiario.es* are not only worried about the validity of the content, but also about its copyright. During an informal conversation, one of the journalists explained that on one occasion they published some photographs of a brutal police detention of protesters who were trying to stop an eviction, which had been taken by one of the detained protesters and shared on Twitter. Although the news piece was critical of the police intervention and the photographs were used for the benefit of the protesters, the author of the photographs asked eldairio.es to pay for them, questioning their use for commercial purposes. Since then, *eldiario.es* publishes images shared on Twitter using the embed function offered by Twitter, which does not incur any copyright infraction.

Journalists respond in a very similar manner to *produsers*' experiences, which they normally access via Twitter. For instance, during my newsroom observations, *eldiario.es* published a news story about a woman whose car had been burned during a series of demonstrations that were happening at the time in Spain. The woman found out about the incident because she discovered a video on Twitter showing her car on fire. Immediately afterwards, she sent a couple of tweets sharing her demonstration-related story, which were

retweeted by other users and finally read by one of the journalists at *eldiario.es*. According to this journalist, they contacted the victim via Twitter and double-checked her story before publishing it.[33]

While little evidence of other uses of *produsers*' experiences was found during the newsroom observation or the textual analysis, one of the journalists mentioned during interviews that in some cases, *eldiario.es* builds news stories based on users' reactions to a newsworthy event. Following up on this topic through various emails with the site's journalists, one of them explained that when the news organization first launched, they used to recap Twitter users reactions to an event using an online tool called Storify.[34] The same journalist explained:

> We don't do it anymore, since there are more users now on Twitter and they don't need us to summarize what is being said on Twitter. However, if we see a tweet by a witness of a story we are following, we embed it in the text. If we see [on Twitter] that while a press conference is happening, there are people affected denying what is being presented, we include their testimonies from the beginning into the news story.

eldiario.es states in its founding document: "Fortunately, the public debate is formed [now] by more voices and the social networks have strengthen the collective intelligence. We want to coexist in this ecosystem to do a job that will have an impact on the society."[35] Related to this motto of *working with the collective intelligence*, it is also relevant to consider the

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[33] Source: http://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/gamonal-disturbios-manifestacion-zaragoza_0_220478630.html

[34] eldiario.es profile on Storify: https://storify.com/eldiarioes

[35] My translation from: *¿Qué es eldiario.es? (What is eldiario.es?)* http://www.eldiario.es/que_es/

altruistic help that journalists receive from experts on specific topics when covering certain breaking news stories, and to which journalists at *eldiario.es* are very open. For example, during the interviews one of the journalists mentioned the coverage of a train accident that happened in Spain in 2013 and how relevant expert explanations were to understanding key information about the incident:

> [on the social networks] you could find people who know a lot about the topic, and who clarified things about the trains' security systems, either because they are railway workers or simply because they were always interested on the subject, and you can't just ignore what they are saying, because they are actually contributing to your understanding of relevant information about the story.

Finally, in regard to *produsers*' stories, it seems to be more common for the journalists at *eldiario.es* to receive them via direct message or a call (@ followed by their user names) on Twitter, or, also on Twitter, via other specialized journalists or international correspondents. However, as noted during some of the staff meetings attended while conducting the newsroom observation, journalists are given leads to new stories by their audiences, such as documents that can help to build a story or links to local news that could have national relevance if connected with other reports, more often than they receive publication-ready stories.

b. Audiences' comments

Contrary to recent studies (see for instance, Nielsen 2014) that affirm that journalists are not taking into consideration what readers have to say in the news comments sections, the majority of journalists at *eldiario.es* do read some of the comments and integrate readers' input in their work. However, do they read the comments of all news pieces? How do they

proceed with the information that the comments may contain? Do they pay more attention to some types of comments than others? And more importantly, do they openly talk about the audiences' comments as a group or do they work with these materials individually?

First of all, it is important to note that most of the journalists only read comments related to news stories they have worked on. In some cases, this means news pieces signed by a journalist/s, and in others, pieces where information has been provided by news agencies and then updated and re-written by a journalist in the newsroom. In both scenarios, the main value that audiences' comments provide to journalists is editing and proofreading feedback: names incorrectly spelled, grammar or orthographic mistakes, wrong data, etc. detected by audiences members that are rapidly corrected by journalists. Although less frequent, audiences' comments that question editorial decisions regarding the treatment or focus of an event sometimes lead to debates and discussions, both online, with the authors of the comments, and offline, in the newsroom. On even rarer occasions, audiences' comments result in new stories or information being added into the story.

At *eldiario.es*, journalists pay special attention to news comment sections and comments directed to them on Twitter, leaving aside comments posted on Facebook or directed to *eldiario.es* on Twitter. Within news comment sections, journalists admitted to considering more carefully comments made by what they call *associates*. As aforementioned, *eldiario.es* considers their subscribers to be associates rather than media consumers, treating them as something closer to partners. In the specific case of the comment sections, comments by the associates are highlighted in a box that differentiates them from other readers' comments.

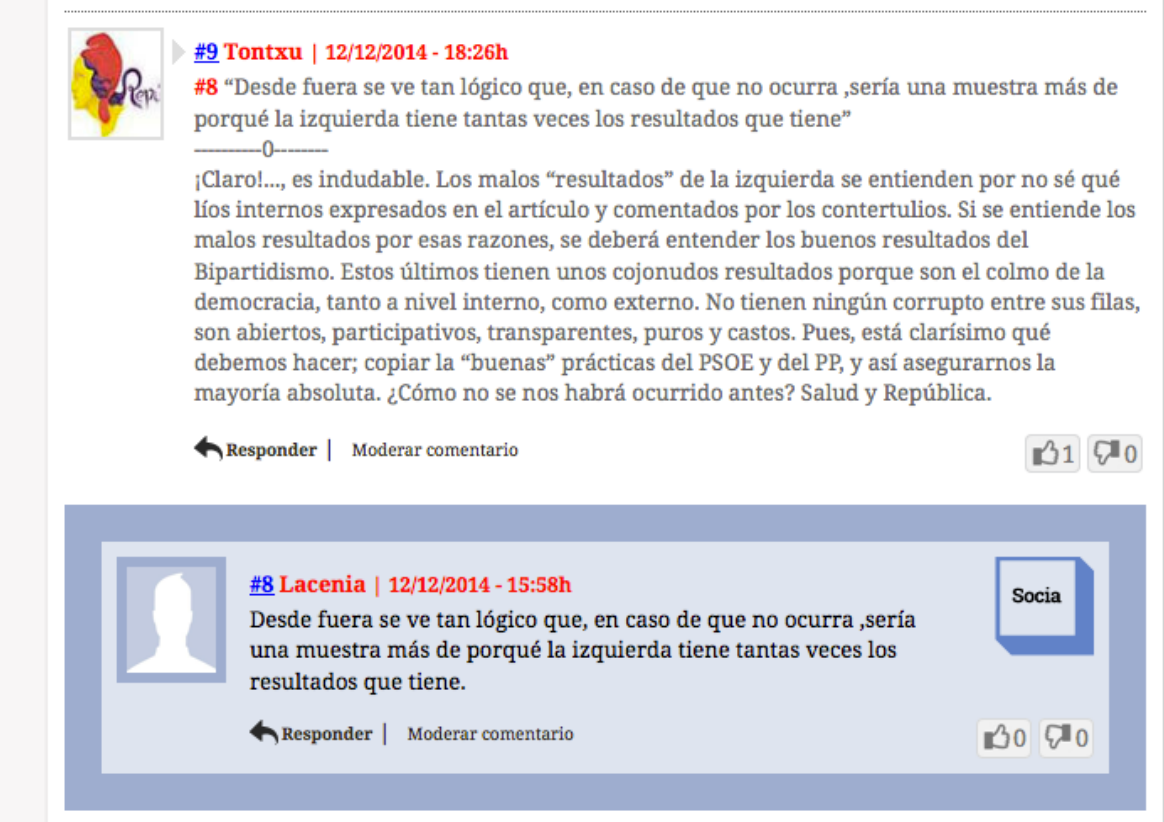

Figure 6: At the top, a comment by a normal user. Below, a comment by an associate.

According to the journalists, comments by associates are scrutinized with care because associates "are the ones who pay" the journalists' salaries and because "they belong to the project" in some way. Some journalists even go as far as to say that they "work for" the associates. Similarly, journalists think that the associates share with them this feeling of belonging to the project. As one of the interviewees put it: "They also take it very seriously, because their comments are accompanied by their names, they are identified as associates, their comments have more visibility… and I think they also want to protect their own image."

Nevertheless, not all sections and topics receive the same valuable feedback. In the journalists' opinions, stories based on politicians' statements or pure economic data do not generally receive insightful and useful comments, but rather, especially in the first case, more

irrational, impulsive, and opinion-based comments. These irrational, impulsive, and sometimes insulting comments are not welcome, and in some instances represent the main reason that journalists question the value of audiences' comments. Those with more experience working on the internet seem to ignore them, describing them as "trolls'[36] comments" and making arguments such as: "There are manners that I can't stand and when a comment is insulting it doesn't deserve my attention. Those are my rules." Conversely, as noted in the interviews, those journalists with backgrounds in print journalism, television, or radio are more critical of audiences' comments and tend to take them more personally. Journalists with long-term experience of online journalism mentioned these differences and also alluded to a change in journalists' mindsets toward news comments:

> I remember when in 2006, I was working for the website of a television channel and TV reporters started to write for the web… they were horrified about making mistakes and receiving feedback from their audiences telling them that they had noticed them. They could put their feet in their mouths on television and nothing happened, no one was going to warn them about their mistakes, no one was going to call to the office or at least no one who was situated at the same level in the message… A news comment is printed in the same space as the news story, where everybody can read it.

In most cases, journalists consider audiences' comments to be beneficial feedback for their work that allows them to improve their stories, not only for the input they provide but

[36] According to Shin (2008), "a troll is a person who interrupts communications on the Internet, and often seen as problematic or even criminals".

also through the increased pressure created by the possibility of immediate response and criticism to their work.

Comments are not only integrated into the journalists' work individually but also become part of conversations in the newsroom. During the newsroom observations, journalists repeatedly mentioned audiences' feedback on their stories, reading out loud news comments and tweets and discussing them with each other. On a couple of occasions, one of the editors in chief asked the writers to look at a specific comment that criticised a story in a very convincing way, to check if they were somehow wrong in the story. Audiences' comments also help journalists to detect hot and trending topics from their own menu of stories, which they may need to pay more attention to. In relation to this, during the newsroom observations, a journalist referred to certain comments as "fires" and discussed different strategies for approaching them. In most cases, journalists were open to starting a conversation with the authors of these comments. In this way, audiences' comments often lead to network journalism.

c. Network Journalism

There are two ways of understanding network journalism: as the materials submitted by audiences in response to journalist demands, or as conversational journalism, that is, as the exchange of opinions and information in relation to a news piece published by the news outlet. It is more common at *eldiario.es* for journalists to ask for opinions about their coverage than for materials about a specific hot topic. One example brought up by some of the journalists during the interviews, was when, some days before the Spanish general strike of November

14, 2012, *eldiario.es* sent a survey to their readers asking "What should *eldiario.es* do during the general strike?," followed by a text that read:

> At the *eldiario.es* newsroom, we support by majority the general strike but we have an internal debate that we haven't been able to solve: what to do during the 14N. We have to options in mind: a total shut down or a partial shut down, with minimal services destined to inform that day exclusively about the strike. On the one hand, we believe that the way to support a strike is by not working, and that journalists aren't different from any other worker. On the other, we suspect that the majority of the media is going to be out as any other day and if we shut down, it will be only their voice that will be listened to. As an associate of *eldiario.es*, we ask about your opinion. What do you think we should do?[37]

The 81% of the readers that voted (1,313) decided that they should "shut down partially and only cover the strike," and that is what they did. It is interesting to note here that this survey collected 337 comments, with readers and associates giving their opinions about the survey itself as well as about the two options.

The aforementioned *fires* also normally result in this type of conversational journalism in which journalists exchange ideas with their audiences about a hot topic. In this regard, most of the interviewees mentioned an incident that occurred during the spring of 2013. During May of that year, *eldiario.es* published an article about the collapse of a factory building in Dacca, Bangladesh, that analyzed the tragedy from a neoliberal perspective, a position very far

[37] Source: http://www.eldiario.es/politica/deberia-hacer-eldiarioes-huelga-general_3_68273173.html

from their usual left wing frame of reference.[38] Despite being published in a section dedicated to opinion and political analysis, the readers considered the article "unacceptable." Readers and associates complained in the article comments, in emails to the press ombudsman, and through online social networks. Many associates even threatened to end their subscriptions. Such was the noise that journalists at *eldiario.es*, including the founder and editor in chief, had to intervene in the conversation. They replied to and discussed with readers their reasons for publishing the article. At the end of that day, the editor in chief wrote a long explanation that partially read:

> As I have argued on many occasions, I believe that *eldiario.es* has to be a plural medium, with a broad editorial line where there is space for a diversity of opinions. As the editor in chief, I don't share all the ideas reflected in all the opinion articles that we publish on our website, but I prefer this newspaper to be a place open to debate – between contributors themselves but also readers and associates – more than a truth possessor, where the same voice is heard a thousand times. I still believe in that idea, despite the fact that not all the readers and associates see it that way.[39]

In general terms, journalists feel obligated to respond to their readers' claims and explain their editorial decisions to them, and, as seen, even ask them about certain issues. It is also common to carry these conversations into the newsroom, where journalists habitually discuss their readers' remarks. During the newsroom observations for this study, some journalists started a conversation about the treatment of a news story that had received certain

[38] Source: http://www.eldiario.es/zonacritica/Bangladesh-fabricas-pobreza_6_128147190.html

[39] Source: http://www.eldiario.es/defensor/mejor-pasado-pobres-Bangladesh_6_129197081.html

criticisms overnight. At some point during the conversation, one of the journalists tweeted "We are having a sane debate [about x][40] in the newsroom," moving the "sane debate" to online social networks and opening the discussion to Twitter users, with whom this journalist exchanged various messages. These conversations and exchanges of ideas between journalists and their audiences also impact how some of them cover their stories, expanding the conversation into the political arena. As one of the journalists explained: "Sometimes I use the comments about social issues I read on Twitter to raise these topics with the Government during their press conferences."

d. Web Metrics / Audiences data

The direct information about their audiences' usage habits that *eldiario.es* obtains thanks to online tools such as Google Analytics or Crazy Egg give journalists a general notion of which stories their audiences are paying attention to and where on the website are they clicking. This information helps them to redesign their homepages and structure the website in line with the preferences of their audiences, as well as to situate the information they consider to be more relevant in strategic places where they know audiences tend to click more often. Web metrics also help them to learn the source of their traffic and distribute their stories accordingly.

While not all of the journalists have access to web metrics, the like, share, and tweet buttons on news stories provide them with some information about the audiences' habits and preferences. In this respect, journalists at *eldiario.es* are very conscious of the fact that most of

[40] Information about the topic has been removed for the sake of anonymity.

their readers access to their stories via Twitter. Consequently, when breaking a news story, they write a short paragraph and an informative title and tweet the story while it is still under construction. Although they are aware of the risks of using Twitter as their main source of traffic, this particularity makes them very attentive to the news circulating through this online social network. During the newsroom observations, it was very common to hear the journalists expressing impressions such as "everybody is talking about that on Twitter" or "this and that story worked really well yesterday on Twitter," even during the staff meetings. Moreover, when their traffic is good enough and they have fulfilled with their daily estimates, journalists tend to save the stories they know that are going to work well on social networks for the next day.

While in their newsroom, I had the chance to be present at a rather interesting conversation after a staff meeting about web metrics and how journalists face them. Some team members whose stories were generally not so frequently *liked* on Facebook or shared on Twitter explained how discouraging that was for them. Other members of the team with backgrounds as television reporters responded that they should not to worry about the traffic, arguing that that reasoning had led to the end of quality journalism on television. Thus, journalists expressed the need to find a balance between the market exigency of being shared and liked to increase their web traffic and survive in the online ecosystem, and their professional mandate of serving the community with content that was not necessarily popular but rather "content that matters."

5. El Huffington Post

The newsroom of *El Huffington Post* is located in the same building as *El País*, in the outskirts of Madrid. Almost all members of the team are seated along the same long table, while the editor in chief has her own separate office. In relation to their working routines and organization, while some journalists affirmed that they hold weekly meetings where they discuss the main issues they will be covering in the following days, others admitted that these meetings do not always happen. Since I didn't have access to these meetings or to a long-term observation of their practices, I was unable to confirm this information. However, it seemed to me during the time I spent in the newsroom that there is not much conversation or debate about how they should proceed with the coverage of events, and instead decisions are made mostly individually or in pairs on the fly, with the exception of politically sensitive issues. As in the case of *eldiario.es*, journalists are organized to cover two time frames, morning or afternoon, in a way that allows them to always have someone in the newsroom. They do not work night shifts.

Journalists at *El Huffington Post* continuously differentiated between two types of content that determine their working routines, their understandings of their roles as journalists, and their relationships with UGC: hard news and soft news. While five journalists are dedicated to the coverage of hard news, only two of them work for the soft news sections. Although they share some practices, in terms of uses of UGC, soft news journalists are more focused on what it is defined in this dissertation as no-news content, which will be developed in greater detail below. Soft news journalists also pay more attention to the circulation of memes and viral content on the internet and are in charge of improving, controlling, and understanding the web traffic.

a. *Produsers*' content

Hard news journalists access *produsers*' contents mainly via Twitter, where they follow journalists, politicians, other media outlets and, generally speaking, traditional newsmakers. It is in the DNA of the journalists and part of their routines to search for footage on the different social networks (especially YouTube) to illustrate the stories they are building. Thus, many examples of YouTube videos inserted in news stories were found when conducting the textual analysis; however, most of these videos were recorded by professional journalists or even shared on the YouTube channels of diverse news organizations. In a couple of cases examined in the textual analysis, the YouTube videos showed exclusive news content broadcasted by a news organization, recorded by an internet user with a cellphone and then uploaded on the social network.[41]

In the hard news sections, it is more rare to find stories based on *produsers*' footage shared online (instead of adding *produsers*' footage to stories that have broken via traditional newsmakers), yet it constitutes a relevant practice that, according to the journalists, mostly happens with stories related with the Spanish government's financial cuts to education and health services. During the interviews, most journalists mentioned a recent incident in order to explain how they react in these situations and what verification steps they follow:

> Some days ago, a Twitter user uploaded a photograph of a tuna sandwich to denounce the food that is being served to the oncology patients in a hospital in Murcia. I saw that picture when it already had 700 retweets and it captured my attention. The next step

[41] The cases found in the textual analysis were stories related with the tour of France. See, for instance: http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2014/07/09/froome-abandona-tour_n_5570645.html?utm_hp_ref=spain

was trying to verify the story, contacting the person who shared the picture. Since this person follows *El Huffington Post* on Twitter, I could send him a Direct Message asking him his telephone number. He answered that the picture was taken by a friend of his who went to visit her mother at the hospital where they were serving those sandwiches, and he gave me her telephone. I contacted her and she explained to me her version of the story and how things happened. Then I called the hospital, I talked with the catering service, and with the ministry of Heath Services. (…) And this is how we normally operate.[42]

As in *eldiario.es*, photos shared on Twitter are normally embedded in the text to avoid copyright infractions. Journalists operate the same way with the *produsers*' experiences collected on Twitter. As noted in the textual analysis, it is more typical to find tweets by traditional newsmakers in reaction to a news story or an event, but it is also possible to find tweets embedded in a story with *produsers*' experiences. In this sense, *El Huffington Post* counts with a tool in its editing system to create galleries of tweets that are used to summarize the reactions of Twitter users to an event. These galleries of tweets are placed at the bottom of the story. A journalist explained:

> In order to decide the tweets that we are going to include in a gallery, we use a tool called Topsy and a tool developed by *The Huffington Post*. Topsy is much better because it allows you to measure the impact of a tweet. For example, I have used Topsy to see who started a viral story: this tool allowed me to check who was the first one to use a hashtag. These tools are very useful when doing galleries with tweets

[42] Source: http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2014/02/04/sandwich-atun-hospital_n_4724442.html

because otherwise the tweets selected are limited to your contacts. When we started doing these galleries, we mainly used tweets by journalists. The profile of certain people appeared recurrently in these galleries. It is also important to take into account who the influencers are on Twitter. A tweet by an influencer has a higher chance of being retweeted than an anonymous comment. However, there is much more value in a tweet by an anonymous person that has been retweeted by 500 users.

In regard to when to embed these *produsers*' experiences in a news story, one of the journalists explained:

> The criteria we follow to decide when to include a gallery of tweets in a news story is basically common sense. If a topic is being controversial, it is easy to say… If, for instance, you see that a statement has been perceived as very polemic or there are jokes around something, it is automatic, there goes a gallery of tweets.

Produsers' contents and experiences also help journalists with the coverage of breaking news stories, which they follow in a specific format called liveblog. This kind of coverage allows journalists to update information of breaking news events using all kinds of sources and non-verified content shared online. When journalists use a non-verified source or material, they simply add a note saying "this video / picture has been uploaded in x social network by x unidentified user. Its content has yet to be verified / confirmed."

b. Audiences' comments

At *El Huffington Post*, an external company moderates the news comments sections. Comments that violate human rights (e.g., homophobic or racist comments) or comments that include insults are immediately deleted from *El Huffington Post*. On Facebook, comments are

also moderated, in this case by a journalist in the newsroom. Instead of being deleted, offensive Facebook comments are hidden in a way that can't be noticed by the person who wrote it. These filtering practices are particularly relevant in the case of the comments sections, since it seems to the journalists that someone else is already managing the comments, at least partially.

Journalists at *El Huffington Post* treat news comments in diverse ways: some journalists admit to reading them from time to time, others confess to not paying attention to them at all. None of them seemed to consider news comments as a very substantial source of daily information or as newsworthy content, although some admitted to have occasionally found some leads to new information in them. It is important to note here that feedback about mistakes and erratum are normally sent to journalists via a form available to readers at the end of every text. These notifications go directly to the journalists' email inbox folder. When read, protocol obliges them to reply by thanking the sender for the notice.

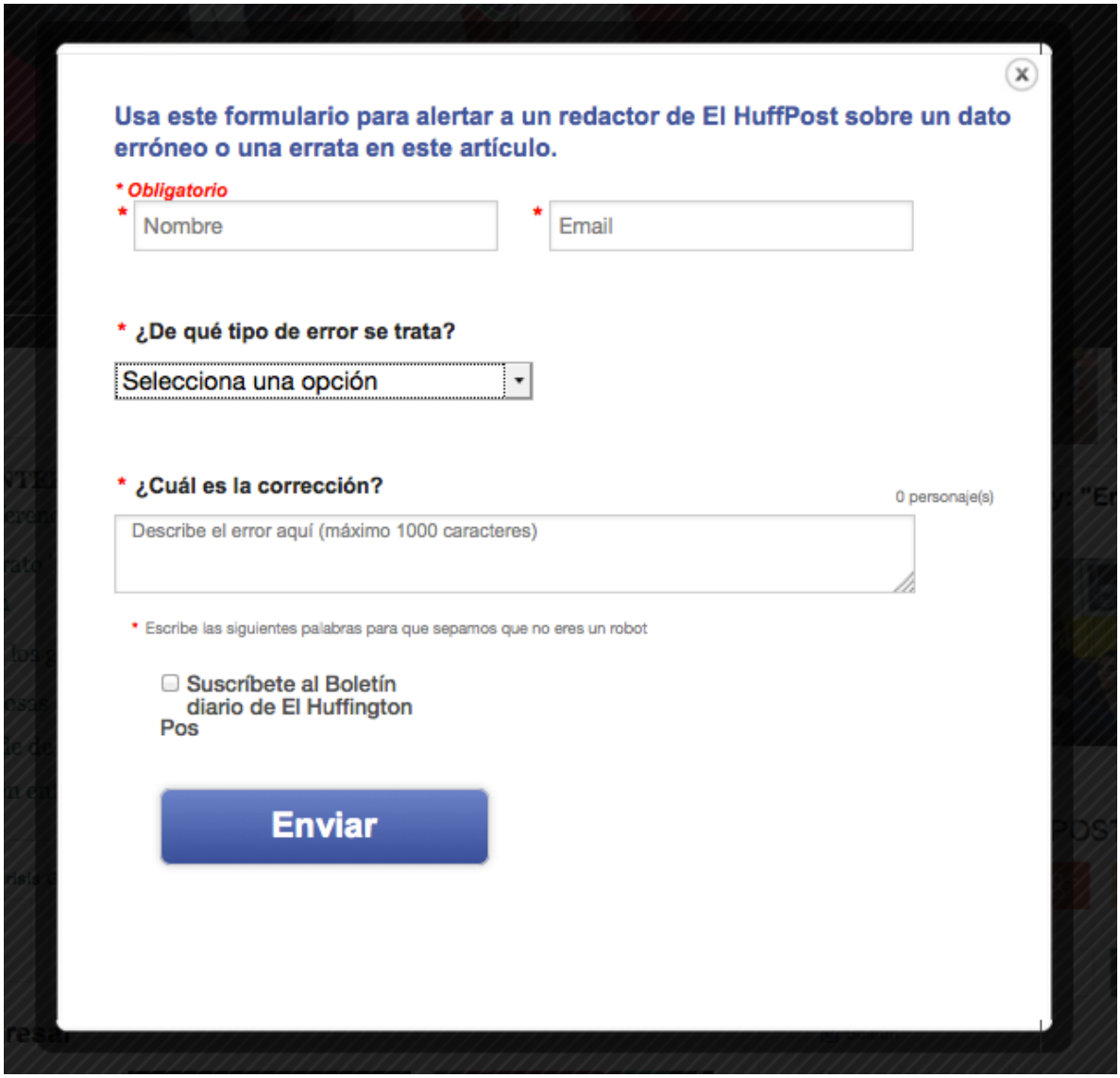

Figure 7: This is the form that can be sent to the newsroom specifying mistakes found in an article. It reads "Use this form to alert a journalist at El Huffington Post about mistaken data or erratum in this article." It requires the users' name and email address to be submitted.

According to the journalists, *El Huffington Post* news comments sections serve as spaces for readers to create a community where they can discuss and chat about personal matters not necessarily related to the news stories under which they are posted. Journalists

refer to this community as a space external to their work in which they do not participate. When asked about debates with the readers or replies to their comments on different platforms, one of the journalists explained: "I don't think it is our role to intervene in these debates that people need to have. (…) It is a debate that we want to happen, but for it to happen it needs to be free. (…) We are an authority figure." In general terms, journalists believe that it is neither part of their responsibilities to cope with the audiences' comments, nor a beneficial approach to engage in dialogue with them.

Only one of the journalists, the community manager, the one in charge of building community, interacts on a daily basis with this community, which resembles the online communities created around online leisure activities such as videogames. When the community manager finds a comment that may be of the interest to the other journalists, she transmits it to the journalist/s who may be able to work with it in some way. For instance, during the newsroom observations, the community manager contacted the two journalists in charge of the soft news sections to tell them about complaints they were receiving on Facebook in relation to one of their stories. These two journalists agreed with the readers and changed the story, while the community manager explained to the readers *El Huffington Post*'s reaction to their complaints on Facebook.

As in other online communities formed around leisure activities, *El Huffington Post* community organized a convention ('Primer encuentro de los amigos de *El Huffington Post*'[43]) where readers could meet in person. Even though they invited the journalists to participate as

[43] This is the blog they used to organize themselves and post information about the meeting (in Spanish): http://amigosdehuffingtonpost.blogspot.ca/

well, they weren't at the center of the discussion; meeting with them was not the objective. As one of the journalists recounted: "(Three of us) went to the convention. At first, the community asked us for more involvement in the event, but the truth is that they were the organizers and we were the guests." This strong community was weakened and lost many of its members when, at the beginning of 2014, the US-based flagship of the news organization, *The Huffington Post*, decided that all users needed to be registered in order to be able to comment on the news. Some users found this decision problematic and chose to leave the community. Although journalists were not actively involved in the community, they noticed the absences and mentioned during the interviews how negative the consequences of this situation were for them.

As part of the community management strategies of *El Huffington Post*, during the earliest months after the newsroom's launch, weekly pieces featuring the best readers' comments were published. "It was an arduous work. We captured the best comments from the most commented news stories and built image galleries. It didn't increase our web traffic that much and the responses from the readers were diverse: some loved it and congratulated those whose comments got picked; others hated it and threatened to leave the community if we continued publishing them. It is very difficult to please everybody," said one of the journalists.

c. Collaborative contents

Although the newsrooms under study in this dissertation do not train their audiences to produce journalistic content, the opinion section at *El Huffington Post* accepts audiences' contributions, which the journalists evaluate and edit if necessary. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, these articles are unpaid and while the practice has generated

significant debate around unpaid labour in current journalism, these items should nevertheless be considered when discussing UGC in newsrooms.

Anyone can ask *El Huffington Post* to open a blog for her in the opinion section. The contact page includes a call for bloggers that includes an email address where proposals can be submitted. The editor in chief has the last word on who can contribute. It is normally required that those interested in contributing send a sample of their writing and a brief explanation about what they want to cover in their blogs. As one of the journalists explained:

> *El Huffington Post* is not a blog platform. That is to say, it is not a platform in which anyone can write. We decide who can write attending to certain journalistic criteria – interest, value, relevance, etc…. However, we are open to some things that other news organizations don't accept. Some news organizations welcome different members of the European Parliament in their pages but they assume that those [members of the audience] who want to respond to them need to do so in the comments sections. Here it is not the case: unemployed young expats, for instance, can find a space here to respond, to talk about their experiences, and we will place their texts right next to one by the member of the European Parliament.

Nevertheless, the majority of the blog posts that appear in the homepage of the news site are written by university professors, journalists, politicians, and other traditional newsmakers, as noted during the textual analysis. Not all opinion blog posts received are published and not all of the published blog posts make it onto the homepage. The homepage has a specific column on the left side reserved for chosen blogs, which give them more visibility.

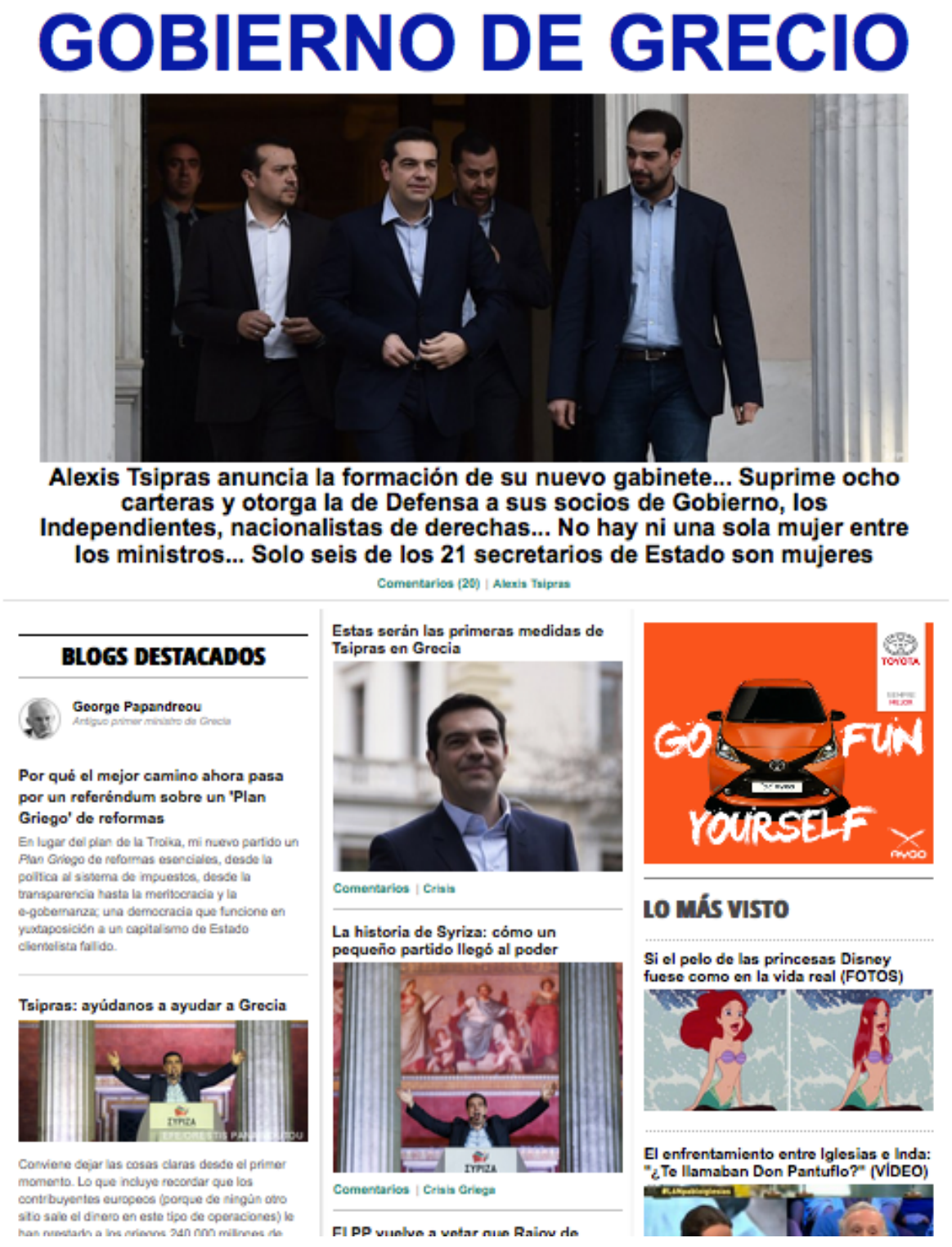

Figure 8: The column under 'Blogs Destacados' (Highlighted Blogs) is entirely dedicated to the promotion of blog posts by contributors from the site's readership.

In the words of one of the journalists, these contributions are not considered *citizen journalism* since the blogs are supposed to be more opinion-based: "We ask contributors not to *do journalism*, given that we have journalists for that. We have had cases in which a blog post has made it into the news sections, but that is not the idea. With exceptions, the blogs aren't for journalism." This journalist added that on "rare occasions, we have used blog posts as news stories. When this happens, we present them as news stories and not as blog posts." When conducting the textual analysis, two blog posts presented as news stories were found, one of them headlining the homepage.

d. No-news contents

As one of *El Huffington Post* journalists explained to me during the interviews, no-news content submitted by readers has always existed in the Spanish press: in the pre-internet era, it was relatively common to find pictures of religious and town-related celebrations in the local press; since the arrival of the internet, it is not unusual to come across requests for readers' pictures of holidays, nature, storms, etc. on online news sites. These kinds of content are especially relevant at *El Huffington Post*, where the soft news section is fed with no-news content created by internet users and shared online. As various journalists declared during the interviews, these materials have no informative function and are mainly used to increase the web traffic and provide entertainment.

As noted during the textual analysis, YouTube videos are a very common no-news content employed by *El Huffington Post*, particularly videos containing potential viral stories.

It is also very common to find pieces with a selection of the best internet memes[44] about all types of stories, newsworthy or not. Sometimes this content is placed in relevant areas within the homepage, despite its informative irrelevance. No-news content is closely related to the way in which *El Huffington Post* understands the journalistic functionality of web metrics.

e. Audiences' data

In the selection of no-news content, journalists at *El Huffington Post* continuously check tools such as Google Trends to get a sense of what is proving successful on the internet. These indicators, as well as regular reports from other Huffington Post sites on what is working for their own publications, determine the no-news and soft news content. In addition to information on internet trending topics, journalists – particularly those in charge of the soft news – also receive regular information about their own web metrics. This information assists journalists in the arrangement of content on the homepage: "The content that works really well goes automatically to the homepage," one participant said.

El Huffington Post also plays with headlines and decides which ones to keep by considering the information obtained by a tool developed by them and known to the journalists

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[44] Limor Shifman (188-189) defines a meme as follows:

> The term 'meme' was coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in his book The Selfish Gene (1976) to refer to small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread by copying or imitation. Like genes, memes undergo variation, selection and retention. At any given moment, many memes are competing for the attention of hosts. However, only memes suited to their socio-cultural environment will spread successfully; the others will become extinct. Memes can be ideas, symbols or practices formed in diverse incarnations, such as melodies, catch-phrases, clothing fashion or architectural styles. While some memes are global, others are more culture specific, shaping collective actions and mindsets (Knobel and Lankshear 2007).

as 'Headline A or B.' This tool allows journalists to create two different headlines for the same story that will randomly appear on users' screens. After a limited period of time, the most clicked headline will be kept and used in the homepage.

Web metrics also affect journalistic genres:

> we know that organized stories – lists or bullet point style texts – work very well. Not only in soft news, but also in hard news. All kinds of lists. Summarizing debates concerning the state of the nation as a list of 15 sentences, for instance. Readers love this kind of synthesis exercise and it is normally the most read. And this is something extra that we can offer.

Thus, on the one hand the information about trends on the internet affects the content selection in some way (especially in the soft news stories) and on the other, the internal web metrics impact the form (how stories are told and presented).

8. El País

The newsroom, division of labour, and working routines of *El País* are much more complex than what I observed at *El Huffington Post* or *eldiario.es*. First of all, like many other large media organizations, *El País* not only publishes a newspaper and manages its own news site, but it also produces diverse supplements in both print and online, weekly or even daily. This study focuses primarily on the online news site,[45] for obvious reasons. However, some of the journalists interviewed, especially reporters, work for both the print and the online

[45] In this dissertation, I do not consider the online version of the magazines and supplements including in *El País*. Neither do I consider 'Verne,' a new online publication included in elpais.com launched in September 2014, that focuses on viral news and memes and that was strategically introduced in order to increase web traffic.

publications. Although we spoke very generally about their working routines and relationships with UGC, often without specifying if they were alluding to the online or print publications, the journalists tended to refer to the online version of their work when commenting on their uses of UGC.

Due to its size, *El País* functions with a higher level of division of labour that results in different routines and grades of involvement with the online realm among journalists. While those in charge of the homepage, the different sections of the website, and internet users' participation work shifts covering a 14-16 hour timeframe (24 hours in the case of the homepage), reporters who are employed in the coverage of diverse areas of current affairs arrive in the newsroom past noon or even during the late afternoon. The newsroom is an amalgamate of digital natives, digital converts, and "journalists with a hat and a cigar," which was how one of the participants in this study referred to those journalists with a non-digital and more classic or traditional approach to journalism. In this sense, the most interesting experiment in relation to the uses of UGC takes place in the National Politics section, managed by a team permanently connected to online social networks and who refer to themselves as a group of *digital converts*.

An external company is responsible for not only filtering the comments submitted to the news comments sections but also for sending daily reports with the most relevant ones, emphasizing those that highlight errors. These reports are received by the editors in chief of the different sections and by the two journalists in charge of managing internet users' participation. Reading and evaluating these reports is part of the duties of these two journalists, who are also in charge of managing *El País* profiles in different social networks and disseminating their contents. They also check and respond to *produsers'* and audiences'

contents, comments, and demands if necessary. However, they are not responsible for verifying the origin and validity of UGC, since this is normally done by more senior members of the team.

The size and complexity of this newsroom also complicated my observations, since it was almost impossible to understand what was happening in each section simultaneously. This limitation was partially overcome through interviews, which allowed me to get a sense of the working dynamics at play. In addition, I held a meeting with one of the editor in chiefs before starting my observations in order to better understand the structure and recent changes in *El País*.

Finally, it is important to note here that in November 2012, PRISA, the media conglomerate that owns *El País*, sent a document to its employees entitled 'Code of Conduct in the Web 2.0,' as a "clear reference for how to behave in this environment and to know how to face possible crisis situations."[46] This corporate document establishes some guidelines for using Twitter that may affect how journalists deal with UGC. Part of these guidelines read:

1. Commitment to the values of the company: Working at PRISA involves subscribing to values based on the defense and diffusion of the democratic freedom of all citizens, so it is important to ensure consistency in the opinions and avoid membership in groups or pages that contradict the foundational principles of [our] organization.

[46] Internal document provided by one of the employees during the time the fieldwork was taking place. It is also available (in Spanish) here: http://212.166.70.27/uploads/ficheros/paginas/descargas/201211/descargas-codigo-de-conducta-en-la-web-2-0_1-es.pdf

2. Confidentiality: Due to the constant creation of high quality new projects (informative, educative and cultural), the enterprises that belong to the PRISA group are analyzed and followed with special attention by rival companies. For this reason, it is important to follow precautions in order to avoid revealing internal information about products, corporate operations, or economic results that could affect to their development or to the company's profits.
3. Veracity: Credibility is one of PRISA's pillars, as an enterprise that creates and distributes contents. As its employees and distributers of its values, we should always contribute with truthful information, fact checked and completed that helps readers to understand the reality that we want to reveal.
4. Legality: All PRISA employees should abide by the current legislation. The protection of intellectual property rights is especially relevant, so we should avoid the use of any text, image, or video without the stated permission of the owner, even in cases when these texts, images, or videos have been posted by other media organizations.
5. Respect: We should always use a proper language and tone, following the basic, socially agreed-upon norms of education.
6. Grammar and spelling: It is important to write with the accuracy and appropriate style, following the rules of the Royal Spanish Academy. We suggest, as a reference, following the *El País* stylebook.
7. Responsibility in the relation with sources: The attribution of a news piece or information to a source or sources does not exempt the writer from the responsibility of writing it.

8. Treatment of information: Avoid working based on rumours and always fact-check the information. Moreover, we will try not to publish breaking news or exclusive information without a link to our sites, because they are the ones that should offer it. Alternatively, it is possible to do so linking to the homepage of our mastheads.
9. Diligence in crisis resolution: In case of mistakes, we should be the first ones in assuming them and correct them quickly. Given the relevance of this point, we have prepared a series of recommendations and protocols for crisis situations that all employees who are using web 2.0 should know and put into practice.
10. Common sense: All the aforementioned norms should be put into practice following common sense, that is, judging things reasonably, applying the same principles that have been followed in analogic media and paying attention to our own well being and the well being of the company.[47]

During the interviews, none of the journalists mentioned this code of conduct in relation to their practices, which makes it difficult to determine the real impact this report had on *El País* employees. However, there was a continual mentioning of the brand and its relevance in all journalists discourse ("I represent *El País*," "I should be cautious with the UGC that I retweet since I am part of a larger news organization," "I shouldn't share my opinion in the social networks because I am an employee of *El País*," etc).

a. *Produsers*' contents

As in the cases of *El Huffington Post* and *eldiario.es*, journalists at *El País* access *produsers*' content primarily via Twitter. And as in the other cases, Twitter is a fundamental

[47] Translated from Spanish by the author.

and indispensable tool for their work. Yet, journalists at *El País* mostly follow politicians, economists, media organizations, and what I have been calling *traditional newsmakers* (institutions, organizations, political parties, unions, etc.). Most of the journalists interviewed admitted to using Twitter as a daily newsfeed, a site where they follow influencers who filter the information they receive.

Of all the types of *produsers*' contents, journalists seemed to be more interested and find more value in *produsers*' footage. Instead of using it as a source, most of the journalists described its relevance as an *alert*, a clue that lets them know where they need to be (i.e., where they need to send their reporters and photographers). Since *El País* hosts a larger newsroom and network of journalists and reporters, its journalists stated that they preferred to send their own team to where the news was taking place rather than using the *produsers*' footage circulating on the internet. One of the journalists recounted:

> For example, in the case of legalizing immigrants: We start seeing photographs [in Twitter] of large lines of immigrants trying to legalize their situation in the country. Photographs by people who are in line or by passersby. And from them you build a story. You go and ask in the pertinent section "Have you seen this? Have we sent a photographer? No? So go and do it because there is an interesting photograph there."

This lack of interest in publishing *produsers*' footage was also apparent in the textual analysis: no evidence of *produsers*' footage was found on the *El País* website during the two weeks that the monitoring lasted. Most of the journalists mentioned the relevance of *produsers*' footage in crisis and breaking news events – incidents, traffic accidents, fires, etc., demonstrations and international conflicts where there is a temporary block out to journalists,

as it was the case in Syria. In these cases journalists also noticed how difficult is to verify if the images show the complete story:

> We have recently seen amateur videos of the police abuse of immigrants illegally crossing the border in Ceuta. In the last one, since it is not a professional video, it is only possible to see 8 immigrants getting onto the beach and the police sending them back, but it is not clear if they are in Spain. If a professional had done it, she would have opened the angle to show the exact location. And this is the general problem with citizen journalism; you never know if this content is produced by someone who is lying about something. However, we take into account this content and carefully analyze it.

Nevertheless, *produsers*' footage remains a more important resource for journalists at *El País* than *produsers*' stories or experiences. In most cases, journalists referred to these stories and experiences as "more opinionated," and therefore more difficult to trust, yet they also serve as a barometer of audiences' general frame of mind that assists in determining what issues should be prioritized.

The two journalists in charge of managing internet users' participation follow more closely the *produsers*' content that gets to be popular on the internet, and bring them to the attention of different editor in chiefs as well as to other staff during the morning team meetings. They are also in charge of compiling *produsers*' content on *El País*'s Storify profile, a social network for creating stories by aggregating content shared on other social networks. This means that while little of this content gets published directly on *El País*' site, there is still a general recognition of its potential value.

b. Audiences' comments

The first thing that must be considered here is the fact that *El País* is a large publication with a significant international audience that receives a high volume of comments throughout diverse platforms that are extremely difficult to manage. The sheer complexity of this situation discourages *El País*' journalists from engaging with this type of UGC. Whereas smaller publications such as *eldiario.es* are directed to niche audiences, *El País* attracts very fragmented, diverse, and international audiences who don't function as organically as audiences that typically frequent smaller media outlets. This lack of organic fluidity in the audiences' comments is particularly visible in the news comments sections, and creates a considerable challenge for the journalists. All the interviewees agreed that news comments "don't work" for *El País*: they receive "too many" comments on every news piece, and commenters tend to "insult each other" instead of discussing the news. One of the journalists went so far as to state that "the general rule of *El País* is not paying much attention" to the news comments.

There was also an overarching discourse about the "quality" of the comments that led to conversations about who should be qualified to comment on the news:

> I regularly follow Paul Krugman's blog for the NYT. The comments on his blog are a dream. First of all, all of the commenters discuss the content of his blog posts, and secondly, all of the commenters are respectful. The guys who comment there are economists from Harvard, guys who disagree with Krugman, neoliberals. But they discuss with arguments and even include graphs in their comments. It is another world. It doesn't mean that we don't have knowledgeable people in Spain. In certain high spheres you can find incredible people. But those people don't comment on *El País*,

> they comment on the NYT. I have found the most interesting forums about separatism in Cataluña in The Guardian. [High level] people don't comment in *El País* because at some point someone from Extremadura is going to comment something nasty, call them all faggots and say that the government should send tanks to Cataluña. Trolls in Spain are a real problem that doesn't exist in other places.

Since news comments at *El País* are controlled and managed by an external company, journalists don't bother to search them for messages about mistakes: instead, notifications are forwarded to them directly if corrections are needed. This work dynamic, combined with the overwhelming amount and diversity of comments, results in a lack of interest and motivation. The only time a journalist referred to a news comment during the newsroom observation was to criticize it: "Readers complain about everything."

Comments directed to journalists via Twitter about news published by *El País* have a different impact. One of the journalists explained that "news comments in the time before Twitter were better; Twitter is now the best platform to comment on." Comments on Twitter serve as immediate feedback about mistakes or inaccuracies as well as contribute to a general feeling in journalists of *being controlled*. A couple of interviewees mentioned that after receiving critiques via Twitter about their use of imprecise and ambiguous words, they reconsidered how they were using them and replaced them with others.

> I always used the word drift when referring to the separatism in Cataluña; the separatist drift. But people convinced me [via Twitter] that the term drift has a negative connotation. Since it wasn't my intention to add a negative value to it and they proved their point using as an argument the definition of drift by the RAE [Royal Spanish Academy], I decided not to use it anymore.

c. Network Journalism

When asked if they engage in debates with their readers, most of the participants replied that they represent a brand and that they should be careful about sharing their personal opinions. It seems that working for a media corporation and for a well-known international publication somehow restricted the journalists' possibilities for engaging in a conversation with their readers. "As a general rule, we don't converse or debate with our audiences," explained one of the journalists. Other journalist added: "We interact but we don't debate," establishing a distinction between responding to a request for information and discussing the news. During the newsroom observations, when I also followed the Twitter activity of some of the journalists working at *El País*, no debates or comments about online debates occurred.

The closest activity to network journalism that journalists reported becoming involved in consisted of calls for participation that some of them included in their blog posts, asking for answers and contributions related to the topic of the text. In these cases, the blog posts they referred to weren't related to current affairs or relevant political, social, cultural, or economic issues but rather to entertainment, and did not result in an exchange of opinions or ideas.

d. Web metrics / Audiences data

Not all of journalists have access to the same detailed information about web metrics, and not all journalists are asked to respond to this data. At the central desk, where the newsroom observations were conducted, journalists have access to a screen where up-to-date information about web metrics is displayed. At the same desk, an expert on web metrics assists the team. The journalists at the central desk are in charge of managing the homepage,

which they arrange taking into consideration the web traffic: the most viewed stories are normally kept on the homepage. This is radically different from how the first page of the print edition is built: whereas on the website decisions are made by intermediate managers based on editorial approaches, relevance, and web metrics, the content of the first page is agreed upon between senior staff (mainly the director and assistant directors) in a daily evening meeting, considering editorial positioning and political impact.

While most of the interviewees insisted that they have "the last word" in deciding what is relevant and what should be published or highlighted in the different sections, some of them also admitted to pursue coverage of "information of interest" that they didn't plan to report on intensively but that had generated relevant web traffic: "We *feed* the information that we see is creating some interest and that we didn't think initially to cover extensively," stated one of the interviewees.

Thus, web traffic works as an indication of how well a news story is received and understood by the audience. During the newsroom observations, one of the editor in chiefs in charge of the central desk was worried about the formulation of a headline, and asked to another member of the team, "is it understandable?" The other journalist responded: "Of course, see how people are clicking on it."

9. Discussion

In their recent report on amateur footage, Wardle, Dubberley, and Brown conclude with the following statement, which can be also used to introduce the discussion of the results presented in this third chapter: "UGC is used by news organizations daily and can produce

stories that otherwise would not, or could not, be told. However, it is often used only when other imagery is not available." (n. pag.) As this chapter demonstrates, UGC comprises many different types of materials created and distributed by *produsers* that constitute part of the daily to-check items in journalists' lists of duties. It is possible to say that UGC is a relevant tool for journalists that, given the evolution of and current usages, is here to stay. Not all journalists make use of UGC in the same way, however, and not all newsrooms integrate it at the same level. These different manners of dealing of UGC definitely go hand in hand with the approaches to the practice and ideologies of journalism these newsrooms support.

In relation to *produsers*' content, the entry-point for journalists to these materials is by and large Twitter, where journalists normally follow traditional newsmakers and media organizations. This means that not all content created by *produsers* has an equal chance of being considered by a media organization: those shared or retweeted by influencers will have more possibilities to reach the news.

Within *produsers*' content, it seems that *produsers*' footage is the most commonly used material, with some differences between newsrooms. Whereas small digital-only newsrooms such as *eldiario.es* and *El Huffington Post* tend to integrate and embed raw footage when relevant, *El País* normally uses it as an alert that notifies the organization about where news events are happening and where they need to send members of their team. This reaction is not only due to the opinions that journalists have about *produsers*' content, but also due to a question of resources: *El País* has extensive enough resources to send a photographer and a reporter to locations where events are happening without needing to consider the origin of the source and its validity.

Contrary to what was concluded by previous studies, *produsers*' content is not only used for the coverage of soft news or lifestyle sections,[48] as for instance Jönsson and Örnebring (2010) indicate, but also for the development of stories related to demonstrations, social dissidence, or governmental cuts to health and education. This specific use of this type of UGC may be due to the current context in Spain, as explained in more detail in the previous chapters. Besides, the fact that *eldiario.es* and *El Huffington Post* are more willing to include *produser*s' content in their coverage of these kind of events than *El País* can be understood as an editorial position and a statement in relation to who has the right to say what.

In the three case studies, the use of *produsers*' content raises several questions about copyright and authenticity that complicate its integration as a regular source or news material. These findings match with previous research that suggested newsrooms exert significant control over what *produsers*' content is published and how (Hermida and Thurman 2008; Pantti and Bakker 2009; Williams, Wardle, and Wahl-Jorgensen 2011). This control should not always be interpreted as a way of showing or performing power differences between journalists and the other actors, but rather as acting in accordance with journalists' values and ideas about what journalism entails.

Finally, of the three studied newrooms, *El Huffington Post* is probably the one that takes *produsers*' experiences into consideration the most, generally integrating them into a news story when the topic it revolves around has proven to be particularly controversial online. This is not always done in order to increase the number of voices included in news coverage; sometimes it is done to improve web traffic. These *produsers*' experiences are inserted as

[48] Although in the case of El Huffington Post it is considered a relevant resource for the soft news sections.

image galleries and every time a user clicks one to pass to the next one, this action counts as a new page viewed.

The other relevant finding of this part of the study is related to the uses and understandings of audiences' comments and the associated practice of network journalism. While attitudes towards audiences' comments vary between journalists within the same newsroom, in general terms it would be accurate to say that these three mastheads approach audiences' comments in three distinct ways, marked by their divergences in *doing journalism*, their size and the size of their audiences, their understanding of the digital realm, and their moderation systems in the comment sections. In general terms and as a common point of understanding, journalists in all three newsrooms consider audiences' comments (in news comments sections, Twitter, or Facebook) as good resources for tips or notifications about mistakes.

Journalists at *El País* respond to the general pattern shared by most journalists who work for traditional or legacy news media by dismissing the relevance of news comments sections, not paying much attention to them, and considering them an issue to be resolved by an external company in charge of their moderation or specific members of the team (community managers) who notify them when a correction is needed. Conversely, these journalists do read the comments submitted by audiences to them via Twitter, although they admit not engaging in debates or exchange of opinions with the commenters.

Comments sections in *El Huffington Post* are unusual; they have become spaces for community creation rather than spaces for public debate. Journalists seem more attentive towards them than at *El País*, and admit reading these sections from time to time. Surprisingly, comments on Facebook, mostly ignored in the other two cases, were mentioned by at least two interviewees at *El Huffington Post* as a source of relevant feedback.

The most interesting case that goes against the general opinion that news comments sections are useless (Nielsen 2014) or even a problem for journalists (Locke 2013) is *eldiario.es*. Whereas journalists at *El País* and *El Huffington Post* follow what Heinonen (2011) calls the "conventional" attitude towards audiences' comments (a defensive detachment from audiences' discussion in the name of independence), the attitude of most journalists at *eldiario.es* falls into what Heinonen refers to as "dialogical," that is, an understanding of the relevance of fostering and engaging in conversations about current affairs with their audiences. This approach to audiences' comments leads into the active use of the type of UGC that has been categorized here as network journalism.

Lastly, information about audiences' online behaviour (where they click, with what frequency, what are the most read stories, etc.) affects how the information is arranged on the homepages of all three news organizations. Although there is still a political and editorial interest behind the decisions made in relation to what should be included on the homepage, the information that journalists manage with respect to their audiences' tastes and interests is also reflected on the homepage. This information also affects how the news is told: new formats such as lists or bullet point summaries are the result of audiences' demands. These new forms of storytelling are especially relevant in *El Huffington Post* and relatively common in *El País* (particularly in soft news stories), but not so frequently used by *eldiario.es*.

These three different ways of dealing with UGC can be associated with different approaches to news production and worldviews. While for many years news organizations were classified according to their political views and positioning, nowadays it is also possible to do so considering their relations with the internet users or *produsers*. As it is happening in

other social spheres, the left-wing/right-wing division seems inadequate for describing the nuances of the new practices and power relations in journalism.

Going back to Axel Bruns' conceptualization of the practice of *produsage* and the figure of the *produser*, it is possible to say that although journalists still exert control over the contents they produce, UGC has some effects across different stages of the newsmaking process. Based on Domingo et al. (2008) and Hermida's (2011) division of the production process, we could say that *produsers*' contents have an impact on the following stages:

1. Access / observation: As seen above, *produsers*' contents have increased in some way the number of *eyes* that journalists have around the world. In the three news organizations studied, journalists admitted to constantly checking social platforms where items of UGC are distributed, particularly Twitter. *Produsers*' content allows journalists to access a series of stories about social issues and crisis events that would not be possible otherwise.
2. Selection / Filtering: I will expand on this stage of the production process in chapter five. At this point and given the results analysed, it is important to highlight the fact that the interest in certain topics expressed by *produsers* tends to push journalists to continue covering these topics.
3. Process / Editing: New forms of storytelling have emerged in response to *produsers* /audiences interests, as indicated through web traffic. Among the case studies for this dissertation, El Huffington Post is the one in which *produsers* feedback seems to have the greatest impact on the process / editing stage of news production, influencing even how headlines are presented. In none of the cases under study *produsers* have direct access to edit the journalists' pieces (at least, not yet).

4. Distribution: Information about *produsers'* consumer habits as well as their feedback affects how information is distributed on the homepage or disseminated through social networks.
5. Interpretation: This is probably the stage where the *produsers*' content has had the least impact. Only journalists in *eldiario.es* seemed to really care about audiences' interpretations and comments on their news stories.

Considering the various uses that journalists make of the items of UGC, it is fair to say that *produsers* constitute a relevant actor in the current process of *making news*, distinct from other, similar civil society actors previously involved with journalism –particularly in the stage of access /observation – such as consumers' organizations or advocacy groups, and distinct, too, from traditional audiences. Contrary to consumers' organizations and advocacy groups, which serve normally as sources for the sake of balance, *produsers* can be single individuals with no affiliations and no clear agendas who may act only intermittently as *produsers*. *Produsers* also differ from traditional conceptions of audiences, since not all *produsers* are audiences of all given media organizations; a media organization can make use of an item of UGC created and disseminated by a *produser* who has never read / watched that particular news organization's stories.

However, most members of online media audiences are *produsers*. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, *produsers* are also those internet users who do not produce UGC themselves but who participate in *produsage* by consuming others' UGC. This means that all members of audiences who receive their news from the internet can be considered *produsers*. The following chapter will focus on investigating how journalists' perception of their

audiences and their roles have changed given this new configuration of the audiences as potential or de facto *produsers*.

Chapter 4: Journalists' perceptions of their audiences

Following a description and discussion of how journalists work with UGC in the three newsrooms under study in chapter three, this fourth chapter revolves around one of the main implications of these practices: the change in the relationship between journalists and their audiences and the shift in how journalists understand and consider their audiences. Whereas the third chapter focused on user-generated content, the materials created and disseminated by *produsers*, this chapter pursues a narrower focus, looking at the subset of *produsers* comprised by the audiences, guided by the research question 'how does the integration of UGC in mainstream journalism affect the role of the audiences?'

The first part of the present chapter delves further into the theoretical framework that informs my analysis of this second research question: the industrial construction of audiences. Thus, building upon studies conducted in the second half of the 1990s, this chapter tries to understand how the new practices related to UGC held by journalists have affected how they see, imagine, and work with their audiences.

Before embarking on this enterprise, however, it is important to note that, as we have previously seen, there is a fine line that divides and differentiate *produsers* from audiences and vice versa. Online audiences can be considered *produsers*, since this category includes potential *produser*s as well as consumers of *produser*s' contents. Yet, not all *produser*s are audiences of a given media organization. Nevertheless, while journalists do not differentiate between these two roles – audiences and *produser*s –, they tend to refer to *produser*s as 'citizens.' In many cases, when theorizing about the journalists perception of their audiences' roles, it is not readily apparent if the actors performing these roles are audiences members or

*produser*s, something that is particularly challenging to ascertain during the pre-writing stage of article preparation. Most of the time it is very difficult to know at what point a *produser* becomes an audience member.

1. The Industrial Construction of Audiences

Audiences are an integral part of mass communication; it seems almost too obvious to say that there is no possible communication without a receptor of a transmitted message. However, despite the relevance of audiences as an essential element of all communication processes, the relationship between journalism and audiences is, as Loosen and Schmidt remark, at least paradoxical: "On the one hand, journalism provides a public service for which it needs an audience – media coverage of current events largely depends on audiences. On the other, this audience only plays (or used to play?) a subordinate role in everyday newsroom routines" (868).

In Mass Communications research, there are numerous ways of approaching and understanding these media audiences and their role in the media ecosystem. One of the most popular among communication researchers is the study of audiences' responses to media: how audiences react to different messages, what the effects of particular media content is upon diverse audiences, and how audiences decide their media preferences according to the gratifications they seek. A less commonplace approach tries to understand audiences' roles by examining how media professionals view the receptors of their media contents, following the assumption that these ideas or images about audiences have an impact on media content. This

approach, also known as the *industrial construction of audiences*, serves as the theoretical framework for the second research question of this dissertation.

Turow and Draper note that before the 1980s, studies that investigated media professionals' understandings of their audiences "did not directly confront the notion that the audience is a constructed phenomenon" (644). Among these early studies on the industrial construction of audiences, Turow and Draper distinguish between those that emphasize and those that diminish the importance of the media practitioners' images of their audiences for the creative process. For instance, in the first group they include Zimmerman and Bauer's (1956) study that analyzes how individuals' perceptions of their audiences affect how they communicate a given message. Zimmerman and Bauer explain that:

> It is likely that a good deal of a person's mental activity consists, in whole or part, of imagined communication to audiences imagined or real, and that this may have a considerable effect on what he remembers and believes at any one point in time, and in turn on what he is likely to say or do in a given situation. Among the kinds of audience with which he may hold imaginary conversations are reference groups and significant internalized figures, as well as his prospective real audiences (quoted in Turow and Draper 644-645).

Other researchers whose studies were conducted before 1980 disagree with this premise, maintaining instead that the images newsmakers have about their audiences minimally impact the content they produce. For example, Herbert Gans explains in *Deciding What's News* (1979):

> I began this study with the assumption that journalists, as commercial employees, take the audience directly into account when selecting and producing stories; I therefore

> paid close attention to how the journalists conceived on and related to their audience. I was surprised to find, however, that they had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback from it. Although they had a vague image of the audience, they paid little attention to it; instead, they filmed and wrote for their superiors and for themselves, assuming, as I suggested earlier, that what interested them would interest the audience (229-230).

In a chapter dedicated to the profits and audiences of the same book, Gans describes how little impact information about audiences' sizes and habits had on journalists' work, as well as journalists' resistance to the idea of using tactics such as sensationalism, yellow journalism, or sex stories to increase their audience numbers. In this sense, he also notes that:

> neither journalists nor the business departments know how to enlarge the audience (no one can prove that more sensationalism or show business would be effective); and while there is no dearth of theories about how to accomplish this, existing audience research has not proven them" (217)

Thus, Gans presents a scenario where, on the one hand, relatively inaccurate and unreliable information about audiences was given to the journalists, while on the other, journalists felt no obligation to take this information or audiences' feedback (submitted mostly in the form of letters) into serious consideration, often because they believed it encroached upon their professional independence.

Muriel Cantor conducted a similar study on Hollywood television producers (1988), which drew many of the same conclusions: television producers primarily think about pleasing network executives when creating television contents, since they are the ones who are going to

approve the contents and fund future ideas, with the result that network executives, rather than television viewers, are the main audience of the producers.

Turow and Draper explain that from the 1980s onwards, studies focusing on the impact of journalists' images of their audiences on the content they produce rose in prominence, likely influenced by the growing popularity of social constructionism. Turow and Draper highlight Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) as a foundational text of this analytical approach. In their book, Berger and Luckman maintain that individuals within a given society collectively construct their understanding, knowledge, and meanings of their society. This knowledge is then spread and institutionalized in such a way that it becomes taken for granted within societies and installed as *real*. Social constructionism has been applied and articulated in the study of different social institutions and phenomena, and it has been particularly relevant for researchers analysing the production of media culture.

According to Turow and Draper, during the 1980s, studies that could be included in the industrial construction of audiences theories suggested that media creators' understandings and images about their audiences were based on these creators' institutional realities. For instance, Ien Ang suggested in *Desperately Seeking the Audience* that television institutions had a very limited understanding of their audiences' identity and preferences, largely due to institutional constraints and their own preconceptions of what audiences (as a total and quantifiable actor) are and what they, as organizations, need from those audiences. She writes:

> Institutional knowledge is not interested in the social world of actual audiences; it is in 'television audience', which it constructs as an objectified category of others to be controlled. This construction has both political and epistemological underpinnings.

> Politically, it enables television institutions to develop strategies to conquer the audience so as to reproduce their own mechanism of survival; epistemologically, it manages to perform this function through its conceptualization of 'television audience' as a distinct taxonomic collective, consisting of audience members with neatly describable and categorizable attributes (154).

Similarly, Ettema and Whitney write in the introduction of their compilation of articles entitled *Audiencemaking: How the Media Create the Audience:*

> By the idea of audiencemaking, we do not mean the assemblage of individual readers, viewers, or listeners who receive messages. Such actual receivers may exist in mass communication theory as Schramm understood it, but they do not exist in an institutional conception of mass communication –at least, they do not exist as individuals. In an institutional conception, actual receivers are constituted –or, perhaps, reconstituted– not merely as audiences but as institutionally effective audiences that have social meaning and/or economic value within the system (5).

Thus, these studies analyzing journalists' perceptions of their audiences conducted in the second half of 1990s pictured a scenario where little attention was directed to audiences. Instead of creating messages with the primary aim of reaching and informing their audiences, most journalists directed their efforts to please their superiors. In cases where audiences were considered, it was mostly in the form of *commodified audiences*,[49] quantifiable and sellable.

[49] Although outside of the scope of this project, it could be useful at this point to bring Smythe's construction of the commodity audience. In his political economy analysis *On The Audience Commodity and Its Work*, Smythe explains that when producers determine a price for audiences that advertisers pay to reach them, audiences, "as collectivities, (…) are commodities" (17). Additionally, he maintains that audiences do an unpaid work when "they create demand for advertised goods" that ultimately generates profits and "is the purpose of the monopoly-capitalists advertisers" (40). Thus,

However, since the beginning of the 2000s, the web seems to have permitted journalists a closer relationship with their audiences that has the potential to modify these behaviours.

2. Audiences in the Age of the Web 2.0

The recent emergence of audiences as creators of media content introduces new functions for audiences at different stages of the news production processes. These new functions have been described by Heinonen (2011) as a power shift: a shift that begins with a change in the way audiences "receive journalism" (to "click to play an online news video" or rank a news story is not the same as watching the news on a TV or reading a printed newspaper), and a transformation that also brings new opportunities for audiences to "talk back to journalists" (36). In the last decade, a great effort has been made within the academy to identifying the implications of this power shift, which typically involves a consideration of how journalists work with UGC or the participation tools available in online news sites, while ignoring, in most cases, the industrial construction of audiences.

The term gatewatching, coined by Axel Bruns (2008), further extends the conceptualization of this power shift in the journalists-audiences relationship. According to Bruns, the newsworthy information generated by audiences / *produser*s constitutes a "second tier" in mainstream media information, that is complementary – and sometimes oppositional – to it. Bruns explains that in the online realm audiences / *produser*s are invested in the "observation of the output gates for first-tier news organizations as well as of primary

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according to Smythe, audiences have a double role in monopoly capitalism: as commodities and as workers.

resources" (250). That is to say, audiences are dedicated to fact-checking the information provided by news organizations, an activity that Bruns calls *gatewatching*. Gatewatching differs from the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists in the kinds of competencies it requires: instead of drawing upon skills for gathering and composing news, gatewatching is more about "information search and retrieval skills especially in online environments" and is practiced by a "much wider range of participants" (Bruns, 2009, 5). This image of current audiences as the watchdogs of news organizations has been recurrently used in recent research about audiences in the age of the web 2.0.

Another popular theory about the new roles of the audiences is Singers' secondary gatekeeping (2014). In this case, Singer's emphasis rests on the distribution of information; she is interested in the redistribution practices embraced by audiences. Singer explains that although news organizations still have the last word in what is going to make it to the news, audiences have the power to disseminate news stories within additional audiences that these news organizations cannot reach, becoming this way secondary gatekeepers. She writes:

> The re-dissemination of information may reach an audience larger than its original one, as in the case of items from a small news outlet shared through a widely used social bookmarking site such as Newsvine. In this case, users are essentially serving as gatekeepers for a mass audience different from, yet not ultimately unlike, the one the original outlet serves –a large and unknown group of people who might be interested (58).

However, as aforementioned, not much effort has been directed to analyze the industrial construction of audiences. How do journalists perceive the changes in audiences' roles? Do they believe their relationship with audiences is different now? How do they work with the

information they have about their audiences? Canter's (2013) study about the role of citizen journalism in the local British newspaper *The Leicester Mercury* offers some answers to these questions, although her research makes an additional distinction between regular audiences and citizen journalists. According to Canter, citizen journalists, that is, those audience members who volunteer to assist journalists with some informative materials, take on the role of source, resource, and collaborator at different stages of news production (1097 – 1098).

In the same line of investigation, Heinonen's chapter in *Participatory Journalism* about the changing relationship between journalists and their audiences concludes that in the news organizations he and others studied "journalists assign users important roles, particularly in the initial phases of the journalistic process, as idea generators and observers of newsworthy events" (52). These roles range from eyewitnesses to experts, reflectors, commentators, pulse-takers, guardians of quality, or ancillary reporters, to name but a few. Heinonen also notes the changes produced in the nature of audiences, focusing his study on the *active* members of these audiences, whom he referrers to as *users*.

Inspired by Heinonen's analysis and using the industrial construction of audiences as a theoretical framework, this chapter describes the images that journalists in the three news organizations studied have of their audiences, assuming that, as discussed above, these images affect the content they produce. More importantly, this chapter describes how journalists understand the role of their audiences in two different moments of online news production: before the story is written and after it is written. Contrary to Heinonen and Canter's studies, this dissertation does not discriminate between active and non-active audiences, since, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, all internet users participate in some way in produsage practices, and all audiences of online news are internet users.

3. Audiences at *eldiario.es*

Contrary to what early studies about the industrial construction of audiences showed, journalists at *eldiario.es* seem to have a real interest in the identity and concerns of their audiences, and maintain an image of them in mind that influences how they write their stories. When asked about their audiences, most journalists responded with positive descriptions. For instance, one of the interviewees described *eldiario.es* readers as "a community of very interesting people, committed and moved by the necessity of being informed, very knowledgeable people." Other participants' offered similar responses, typically highlighting the fact that their readers are well informed and educated. Yet, most of the journalists were also conscious of the fact that this image corresponded to those who participate and comment, and that those who are more willing to participate represent only a small percentage of their readership. According to the journalists, this portion of their audiences is also more critical and ideologically left-wing.

The journalists all agreed that this image likely does not represent the totality of their audiences, but since the majority does not participate, "they are more difficult to identify." One of the journalists, who was more openly critical than the rest of the team, explained that generally journalists tend to "idealize their readers," and that sometimes it is frustrating to see that no matter how hard one tries to break down a story to simplify it, some readers will leave feedback in the comments that demonstrates that they have not understood the story. "Sometimes you realize that the literacy skills of most Spaniards are really low," she added. Thus, while journalists keep an idealized image of their readers in mind when writing their stories, they are also aware that this idealization does not correspond with the majority of their readership.

There is, however, a special interest in learning who these readers really are. One of the journalists explained to me that they were working with a team of sociologists[50] to develop a survey that would identify more precisely their readership:

> We are preparing this survey to know what is the social reality of our readers, and although this information shouldn't determine our contents, it is something we need to take into account; at the end of the day, we live by them. It is not our intention to attach ourselves to a specific ideology. We just want to know the opinion of a 50 year old associate who is paying for our information and who never comments on the news. This reader might be thinking 'these guys do very weird stuff.' We want to know what these readers think.

The information provided by web analytics allows journalists to view details of their audiences' news consumption habits and a few demographic details, but it does not provide a clear overall image of who they are. *Eldiario.es* has retrieved some more reliable demographic information about their associates (I was told by a person in the marketing department that their associates are mostly men over 50), but, surprisingly, journalists did not mention this demographic information or the data retrieved through web analytics when speaking about their audiences. It seems that this demographic information was more relevant to editors in chief and those working in marketing campaigns than for writers and reporters (most of whom do not even have access to this data).

While journalists do not have a crystal-clear image of their readership – and of course, one could wonder if it is even possible to grasp a coherent image of audiences, given their

[50] At the moment when the interviews were conducted.

current fragmented and heterogeneous form –, they are aware of the differences between their current knowledge of and their relationship with audiences and how journalism was practiced before the age of the Web 2.0. As one journalist pointed out: "Before [the internet] how the hell were you going to know what mattered to people? I didn't know it! You wrote a text, it was printed. If my bosses congratulated me, I understood my text was really good. Or if we received letters to the editor. But since we started to write in the web… It is the only way to obtain a direct response." Another journalist explained how information about audiences simply wasn't something that journalists were involved with in the past:

> In printed journalism you simple didn't know who your audiences were. In printed journalism, audiences depended on the marketing department instead of the newsroom. The success in audience numbers depended more on the gift that was offered with the newspaper during the weekend than on how well journalists were doing their jobs.

In sum, while most journalists at *eldiario.es* write their stories with a specific picture of their audiences in mind, some of them also know that this picture does not correspond with all members of their audiences but with an ideal based on the feedback they receive. Moreover, most of them, particularly those with experience in print and broadcast journalism, are conscious of the fact that there has been a shift in the way journalists perceive and work with their audiences.

a. Audiences' role before the story is written

When discussing the process of writing a story, journalists at *eldiario.es* frequently mentioned the pressure that immediate audience feedback places upon them, particularly if the feedback comes from the associates. "Many times, when I am writing, I feel the gaze of the associates, who, at the end of the day, are paying our salaries, and I tell to myself, 'I am not

going to disappoint them. I am going to write a good story, so that they can't complain about anything and feel proud of the work we are doing here,'" one journalist described. Other journalists also explained that the constant feeling of having *the eyes of the audiences on their necks* obliges them to justify every argument and back up their explanations with hyperlinks to official information and past-related stories. Thus, audiences become unintentional supervisors of the journalists' work and a constant virtual presence in the newsroom, exerting a certain authority over the journalists. It is interesting to note here the absence of any intention by audiences to perform this role; audiences lack official mechanisms for supervising journalists' work before stories are written, but the pressure of their potential feedback means that journalists situate them at a similar level of authority as editors.

While journalists recognize the benefits of audiences' unofficial role as supervisors, they are also aware of its downsides. On many occasions during the interviews and other encounters, journalists mentioned something that they call "the Magic Mirror effect." Referring to the fairy tale *Snow White*, journalists explained that they are afraid of becoming a sycophantic mirror to their audiences that would always agree with them and "massage their ideologies." Hence, journalists seek out a balance between pleasing their imagined audiences, meeting what they consider their quality demands to be, and self-censorship.

Surprisingly, the word "witness" and similar terminology rarely appeared in discussions about audiences. Instead, journalists compared the content disseminated on the internet or submitted to them by their audiences with newswires services and press release documents. One of the journalists described them as "another actor that is working as a filter for us." However, they also see differences between all these actors and services. For instance, a participant remarked: "The social networks are telling us the demonstrations that the

newswire services aren't." Therefore, in lieu of understanding their audiences as witnesses or direct sources, these journalists picture their audiences as something closer to a resource; producers of materials they can work with and integrate into their stories, rather than simple observers.

Finally, some of the interviewees view their audiences as experts that assist them in understanding and analysing complex issues. This idea recalls the description of imagined audiences as informed and knowledgeable individuals, as well as the journalists' feeling of being supervised by them.

b. Audiences' role after the story is written

With the exception of their role as *resources*, as complements to newswire stories and press releases, the roles of audiences before a story is written have more to do with imagined audiences and the pressure that anticipation of audiences' feedback imposes upon journalists, than with real actions undertaken by audiences. It is when a story is written and shared in cyberspace that audiences' feedback and responses really happen. It is also at this time that the roles of the audiences as proof-readers and fact checkers begin; roles that are first mentioned when journalists are asked about the relevance of online audiences for their work. In regard to these roles, it is important to note that online news organizations have mostly eliminated the figure of the copy editor. That is, Spanish online news organizations normally don't assign a

journalist to the task of proofreading and fact checking news stories before they are published[51].

Journalists also frequently mentioned that although they take several factors into account when deciding if covering a story, they view audiences' feedback as one of the most important: "The fourth time I publish about something and I see no one is paying attention to that story, I tell to myself 'ok, enough,'" one of the interviewees told me. Heinonen describes this new role of the audiences as *pulse-takers*: "a cue to the professionals –if they care to take heed of it– to continue discussing that topic on a variety of levels" (41).

Finally, one of the journalists mentioned something during the interviews that, while it may sound overly optimistic or idealistic, effectively summarizes the attitude that most journalist at *eldiario.es* have in relation to their audiences. This journalist described certain online audiences as a "counterpower": "Before [the online social networks], the public opinion depended on what was said in certain offices. (…) I would say that the information circuit is healthier nowadays. I prefer the tyranny of the networks than the tyranny of advertisers. I prefer the pressure of the associates… I prefer this new scenario than the 'here I am and I decide what is true and what is not. Me and my friends and my clients who participate in the party of the democracy. And you shut up and listen what I am saying. (…) Journalists are not the doormen of the disco where the party of the democracy is happening anymore." This new way of understanding the role of the audiences is closely tied to the new forms of understanding gatekeeping and agenda setting that will be commented upon and analysed in depth in chapter five.

[51] It would be highly inaccurate to assume in this sense that news organizations prefer saving expenses by cutting a job that they replace with the free labour of their audiences.

4. Audiences at *El Huffington Post*

At *El Huffington Post*, journalists affirm that they know who their audiences are, using data about their followers provided by Facebook. They believe in the reliability of this data and its usefulness for defining and imagining their audiences, and admit that they are sometimes surprised about their audiences' profiles, given the mission of *El Huffington Post*. During our interviews, journalists mentioned a meeting that their readers organized in 2013 as an occasion that also aided them in picturing their audiences.[52] Thus, the image of their audiences that these journalists have in mind is drawn from a small percentage of more active members: the ones who participate on Facebook, the commentators, and the ones who support *El Huffington Post*. For most journalists, knowing these audiences is important because, as one of them explained, "at the end of the day, the web traffic is what increases the advertisement investment, so more advertisement means more investment in *El Huffington Post*, that means more jobs, more money for the project."

Journalists at *El Huffington Post* describe their audiences as "people of advanced age," as "older than [they] thought in principle," and also not particularly intellectual: "I know our reader," explained one of the participants. "Our reader doesn't read *The New Yorker*, or at least she is not a regular reader. And if they have to choose between clicking on a news story about Nadal's biceps and the abuse of children in Uganda, they are going to click on Nadal's biceps. It's sad, but it is what it is." In this regard, another journalist mentioned: "Some of our readers register a low level of cultural awareness. This is something important, since some of them have problems with spelling." Surprisingly, and despite the newer type of media

[52] For more information about this event, please, check chapter three.

organization that *El Huffington Post* represents, one of the interviewees asserted that their audiences are "people not very used to the social networks." These images and definitions are employed when writing their stories, since "it is important to read (understand) the reader, because the reader is going to read you with her own considerations in mind," as one participant explained. In spite of these intentions, however, another journalist remarked that "it is really difficult to please people of so many different profiles."

Most of the journalists in the team are in the early stages of their careers and have mostly worked for online publications, so they are used to the constant presence of the audiences in their work. Yet, some of them mentioned the changes they have noticed since the popularization of the social networks in the Spanish newsrooms in 2011, which allowed them to have instant feedback. One of the senior journalists with experience in print publications explained that before working for online news, he "didn't know who the reader was" and that he "didn't care," since his "pride was in publishing and seeing [his] name printed on the page."

In sum, when asked about their audiences, journalists at *El Huffington Post* appear to have a clear representation of their general receptors that they take into consideration and try to please when writing a story. However, it seemed to me that at the same time, these journalists also want to reach broader audiences and have a say in more serious conversations. Thus, there are some differences between *imagined* and *known* audiences and *desired* audiences.

a. Audiences' role before the story is written

Unlike the journalists working at *eldiario.es*, journalists at *El Huffington Post* described during the interviews how relevant their audiences are as *sources*, particularly as

producers and disseminators of footage. Although the word witness was never brought in the conversation, the journalists repeatedly stated that images and videos created by *produsers* (or audiences) need to be contextualized and explained. That is to say, they acknowledge their audiences' contributions but consider them more as sources than as resources. This way of understanding their audiences is remarkable considering *El Huffington Post*s' extensive use of UGC and the general discourse of *citizen journalism* emphasized by *El Huffington Post*'s founder, Arianna Huffington. However, the responses of these journalists could also be a reaction to the extended criticism of the type of journalism that they practice as well as a way to protect themselves against possible judgements by me, the researcher.

Once again, attitudes toward readers and their content differed slightly among journalists working in soft news. For them, audiences are also pulse-takers during the initial stage before the story is written. In this case, it is not only their audiences but also their potential audiences, the internet users or *produsers*, who leave clues about their interests that can be traced with tools such as Google Trends. One of the journalists mentioned that what is well received by or even goes viral with audiences reading the American version of *The Huffington Post* tends to work well with Spanish audiences: "*The Huffington Post* is a good test. If an article worked well with their audiences, it normally works in Spain, even if it is in English (…). There is someone in charge of sending what worked well in the different Huffington Posts. She sends the best pieces, explaining how and why they worked in the social networks." In this way, not only do their own audiences and potential audiences become pulse-takers, but international audiences, too, help determine which stories will increase web traffic.

Journalists in charge of hard news also mentioned that "people tell you how and where to direct your news story" and that "it is really important to listen to the social networks: what are people commenting on?" Thus, although the practices of measuring what internet users are commenting on and reading is more formalised in the soft news sections, it is also part of the working routines of the journalists in other divisions.

b. Audiences' role after the story is written

As in the case of *eldiario.es*, the first things mentioned by journalists when asked about the new tasks that online audiences undertake are proof-reading and fact-checking. As described in the previous chapter, *El Huffington Post*'s platform features a built-in tool for reporting mistakes directly to its journalists, who receive these notifications by email. In addition to these roles, typical of most news organizations, audiences have a certain editorial power at *El Huffington Post*: "When we don't know how to title a piece, audiences help us deciding which headline is better." As explained in chapter three, *El Huffington Post* has a tool called 'Headline A or B' that allows journalists to create two different headlines for the same story that will randomly appear on users' screens. After a limited period of time, the most clicked headline will be kept and used in the homepage. "This is something as old as wanting to reach more of the public with your headline," one of the journalists explained. "We write stories to be read. The worst article is the one that no one reads. And now, thanks to the readers, we know what works and what doesn't," this person added. Other interviewee explained that "if a news story is working well, we include it in the homepage." Hence, part of the role that editors had in the past, which included deciding which news headlines were the

most effective and which news stories should be featured on the front page, is now being partially delegated to or shared with the audiences at *El Huffington Post*.

The pulse-taker yet again plays an important role here, but this time after a news story is published. As in the case of *eldiario.es*, journalists highlighted the relevance of the feedback received: "If people don't care about a topic, we understand that there is no interest in that kind of topic among our audiences. An example in soft news is Justin Bieber. Everything related with Bieber worked really well in the previous news organization I worked for. Conversely, stories about Bieber don't work for us. People don't come to us to read about that." Thus, if a news story is being widely read, it gains a spot in the homepage. If the web traffic shows no interest by their audiences on a topic, journalists don't put that much effort in covering it further, especially in the case of soft news.

Finally, according to most journalists at *El Huffington Post*, and particularly for those in editorial positions whose discourse tends to align with the organization's official mandate, audiences now have a space in journalism as commentators. In the case of *El Huffington Post*, both in the news comments sections and in the blogs: "*The Huffington Post* was one of the first news organizations to understand that an article or a news story is only the initiation of a conversation that lasts longer than what journalists though about the duration of a news story." *El Huffington Post* claims to foster, feed, and promote this public conversation that happens around the news and that transforms audiences into opinion makers with roles previously reserved for experts, politicians, policy makers, and other public figures.

5. Audiences at *El País*

A good way to begin a description of how journalists at *El País* think about their audiences is undoubtedly the following quote, provided by one of the editors in chief interviewed for this dissertation:

> The internet has taught us many things about our audiences. We had a platonic ideal about them. An idea about the ideal reader. In the editorial room there is a painting of a man wearing a big pair of glasses, reading the newspaper, a bearded man. That was during many years the idealized vision of the reader at *El País*. Our reader was something platonic, overrated. A reader very similar to us, demanding. With the arrival of the web and the social networks, we have learnt a lot about our readership. We have discovered that it is very diverse.

The diversity that this journalist mentions is key to understanding the relationship that these journalists have with their audiences. As aforementioned, *El País* appeals to very fragmented, international, and diversified audiences, resulting in a demographic profile that complicates the relationship and the image that the journalists have about their readership. Journalists tend to differentiate between their loyal audiences, the traditional readers of *El País*, and more casual audiences, whom they associate with the readers who confront them, often through unflattering comments, through social networks and comments sections. Their traditional audiences are clearly described in relation to the imagined ideal reader that the editor in chief describes above: intellectualized audiences that evoke the journalists' image and likeness, created and targeted by the brand they work for. When asked, the journalists of *El País* never admit to writing to please their audiences, instead insisting that they are following the editorial directions imposed by their masthead.

Most journalists commented that their relationship with audiences has changed over the last several years. Like the editor in chief, they have discovered that their audiences are not as loyal as they believed and that they do not necessarily correspond to their mental image of them: "I fear them more than before. And it makes sense: they talk more, I listen more, and they dislike what I do more than I thought." Those members of the audiences who complain are sometimes depicted as "rude," "less intellectualized," and "people who want to agitate."

However, some of them admit that knowing more about their audiences makes a difference: "My relationship with the reader used to happen in the metro, in Madrid. I took the metro and suddenly saw a gentleman reading *El País*. And he started reading the newspaper. And maybe I had written a page. Suddenly, this gentleman took my page, had a general look, and passed it. And I got angry. Come on, guy, I've been investigating four days about this. Or he folded the page and read the information. Then, I felt happy because he found my story interesting. That is to say, I had no idea [about the readers], I knew nothing."

a. Audiences' role before the story is written

As noted in the previous chapter, journalists at *El País* are reluctant to use what *produser*s and audiences share on the internet. Most of the time, they see these contents merely as a notification of something that is happening and could be of interest. Thus, instead of audiences being a source or a resource, they are mostly treated and understood as *signals*, as indicators of potential news stories. Most of the journalists admitted that they needed to check what their audiences were commenting and sharing but they always insisted in the prevalence of their criteria, the editorial mandate, and their own principles. Hence, the role of audiences before a story is written is less relevant and determinant for most journalists at *El País* than it would be,

for instance, at *eldiario.es*. What seemed to be a valued input for journalists in other newsrooms (with some exceptions, since it is possible to find journalists at *eldiario.es* and *El Huffington Post* who think otherwise), was seen as a headache by most journalists at *El País*.

Again, this is likely due to the heterogeneity of their audiences, but it is also attributable to the nature of the news organization itself: whereas the other two case studies were born and created considering the new roles of the audiences in the Information Era, *El País* is still transitioning to the new information model. Moreover, *El País* is a bigger news organization, with a more corporate view on the news and more intricate and entrenched power structures, which leaves little room for audiences to participate or have a say in its operations.

b. Audiences' role after the story is written

As in the case of the other two news organizations, journalists at *El País* highlighted the new role of audiences as fact-checkers. In the case of *El País*, the continuous connexions with this new role and the idea of "quality control" are remarkable. "I feel the audiences are closer, controlling that that you are working on, that the scrutiny is immediate," said one journalist I interviewed. The journalists shared a more antagonist and somewhat negative view of the feedback provided by audiences, although in most cases, they also admitted the benefits of this "control." For some of the participants, this control is accompanied by public judgments about their roles and work:

> When I was covering stories about evictions, everybody loved me on Twitter. I did have that experience. A lot of people followed me, my tweets were super retweeted. At that time when I was dedicated to that coverage, I lived the public approval. This

approval was clearly related to the topic I was covering, because everybody loves that area. However, I have felt the public rejection recently.

Generally speaking, journalists at *El País* are less inclined to bow to audiences' pressures and claims to cover certain topics than in the other two case studies, and they relegate their audiences' roles to the background. These journalists retain the power to decide if audiences should develop and engage in their new possible roles or if journalists should continue to exercise these roles themselves.

6. Discussion

Journalists in the three newsrooms studied refer in some way to a mental image of their audiences when writing a story. Due to the information about audiences that the internet provides to news organizations, as well as the immediate feedback supplied by audience members, journalists are increasingly aware of not just who is accessing their news stories, but also when and how. However, in examining how journalists imagine their audiences, it is possible to differentiate between what can be described as images of their commercial audiences and images of their public. Ien Ang defines commercial audiences[53] as "markets to be won," as "potential consumers" of both of the contents created by a media organization and of the products being advertised in these media organizations (28-29). In contrast, "audiences-as-public consists not of consumers, but of citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained –in short, 'served'– presumably to enable them to better perform their

[53] Ang's definition of commercial audiences is clearly related to Smythe's construction of the commodity audience.

democratic rights and duties" (29). In all the cases analyzed, images of these two types of audiences were invoked at different moments.

These audiences-as-publics can be related to what has been called in this chapter imagined or idealized audiences. On the one hand, journalists write for these idealized audiences, according to their ideals about journalism, democracy, and public debate. These audiences also correspond with the main target market of the organizations where journalists work: the intellectualized, active, expert audiences sometimes referred to by the interviewees. These images relate back to Zimmerman and Bauer's 1956 study of news organizations, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: "Among the kinds of audience with which he [the journalist] may hold imaginary conversations are reference groups and significant internalized figures, as well as his prospective real audiences."

On the other hand, journalists also refer to commercial audiences when discussing their readership. These are the audiences they have discovered with web metrics; these are also the audiences for which the news organizations create their viral contents or what it is called in *El País* 'los pincha-pincha,' 'the click-click news stories.' These are the supposedly old, rude, poorly educated audiences with low literacy skills that the journalists encounter in the feedback they receive. These are the audiences they keep in mind when changing the tone or language of certain stories to make them more accessible.

Contrary to what studies about television audiences found in the second half of the 1990s, nowadays journalists have a clearer idea of the kind of contents that are going to have a greater impact with their audiences – or at least they seem to think that they can accurately predict the kind of stories that will increase their web traffic. This is not, of course, an exact science, and there is still some mystery about why certain news stories attract such significant

amounts of attention by audiences. But whereas most journalists still work with their imagined audiences in mind – the image of their public–, they also deal with identifiable and measurable commercial audiences.

However, there are institutional differences between news organizations to approaching and dealing with commercial audiences. For instance, whereas measuring and understanding the flow of commercial audiences is essential for soft news journalists at *El Huffington Post*, reporters are kept out of the web metrics at *eldiario.es*. At *El País*, only editors in chief have the pressure of dealing with web metrics, while most reporters don't have access to these numbers or are not required to consider them as part of their duties. Institutional realities such as business models or editorial mandates do affect how journalists deal with their commercial audiences.

These institutional realities also affect how journalists perceive the role of their audiences in the two different stages identified in this chapter. Thus, at *eldiario.es*, which mentions the relevance of "collective intelligence" and the contributions of their readers in its founding statement, journalists see their audiences before they publish a news piece as something other than witnesses and informants. Most of the journalists see them –especially when it comes to their audiences-as-publics– as experts and as resources, understanding a resource as Canter defines them, as acting sourcing stories "independently" and creating "own content" (1898). These roles position audiences as some kind of respectable authority, whose opinion matters. Differently, journalists at *El Huffington Post* see their audiences as a point of departure, as pulse-takers of what matters and sources, "contacted by journalist for information, content or comment on a story" (Canter, 1898). Finally, at *El País*, a news organization with a more traditional approach to news production and newsroom dynamics, journalists see their

audiences as signs of something that is happening, but which must be assessed by media professionals.

Journalists' interpretations of their audiences' roles seem to converge when a story has already been published: in all three news organizations, journalists highlight the importance of their audiences as proof-readers, fact-checkers and, ultimately, quality controllers. This latter role is very close to Bruns' description of gatewatchers, but Bruns attributes a certain degree of power to audiences within the media sphere that is only partially recognized by journalists at *eldiario.es*. At this stage of news production, journalists' understandings of their audiences as pulse-takers are also relevant. Pulse-takers notify them of whether they should continue following a story, depending on the public interest expressed for it. However, as in the previous case, it is up to journalists whether or not audiences can exercise the power of these new roles: they decide if and when to listen to the audiences' demands, and although they admit to *feeling the pressure* of audiences, audiences still depend on journalists to make it into the news. There is not yet a process or a dynamic in news production that surpasses the journalists.

These new roles of audiences – especially their role as pulse-takers – and the possible new power dynamics that they entail lead into the research question that guides chapter five: 'how have the integration of UGC and the introduction of new ways of understanding and dealing with the audiences impacted the practice of gatekeeping?' In other words, how does the integration of UGC in process of making news that have been reviewed in chapter three, as well as journalists' understandings of the new roles of audiences analysed in the present chapter, affect one of the most important roles traditionally performed by journalists?

Chapter 5: UGC and gatekeeping

1. Introduction

Up to this point, this dissertation has described, analyzed, and discussed how journalists at three different news organizations deal with UGC and how these new practices affect, as a result, journalists' images and understandings of their audiences. We have seen how the different types of audience feedback that journalists receive (web metrics, news comments, tweets, etc.), as well as leads for stories and other news content have impacted their relationship with audiences, repositioning audiences within the process of making news, an activity traditionally contained within the exclusive domain of media professionals. It seems that for some journalists, audiences are no longer merely observers or receptors.

These considerations lead to the question of how these changes have affected journalists' ideologies about their profession. The concept of gatekeeping is especially relevant for exploring this question. The hypothesis of many researchers is that the new capacities for audiences to participate in news production have intervened in the means of selection and filtering of news items, usurping the gatekeeping role formerly exclusive to journalists.

Following this line of reasoning, the present chapter tries to answer the research question 'how have the integration of UGC and the new ways of understanding and dealing with the audiences impacted the practice of gatekeeping?' The two first sections of the chapter outline the theoretical framework used in the investigation of this research question; the following sections describe, analyze, and discuss the findings of the three case studies.

2. What is gatekeeping?

A far cry from its current use in journalism studies, the term gatekeeper was first coined by Kurt Lewin (1947), a German-American psychologist, as part of a model he created to explain food consumption habits. This model describes how food makes it onto the table through different channels, such as the grocery store or family garden. These channels are divided into sections, guarded by gates that regulate the items permitted to pass through each channel. Lewin's model also considers how different forces at both sides of the gates restrict or help items travel through each channel.

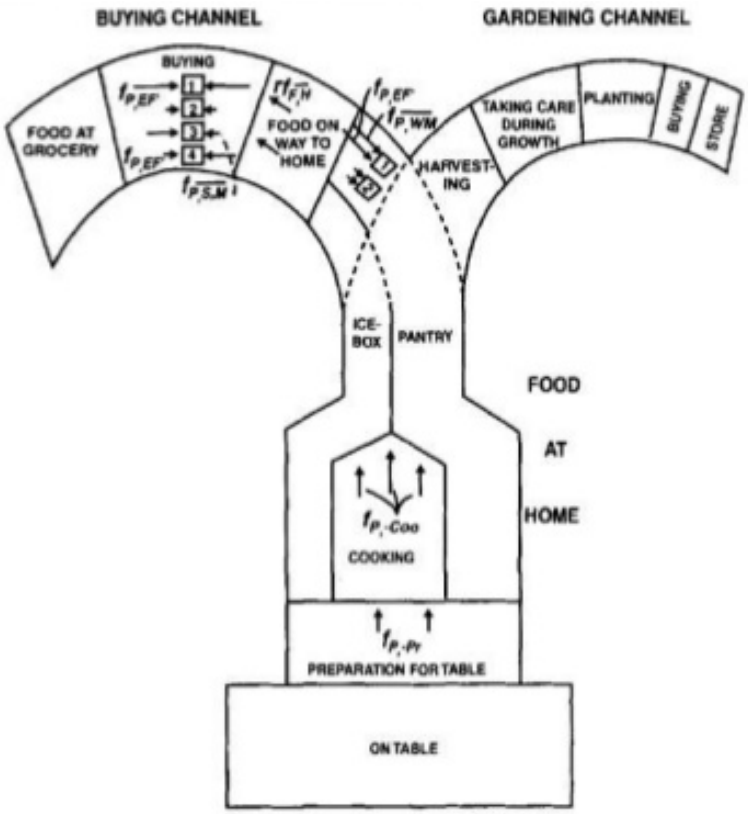

Figure 9: Lewin's gatekeeping model. Source: Lewin, 1947, p.144.

Although Lewin expressed an intention to apply his model to communications, he never got to do so; instead, it was his research assistant at the University of Iowa, David Manning White, who applied the concepts of channels, gates, and forces to the study of news production. In 1950, White investigated how and why the wire editor of a local US newspaper, "Mr Gates," decided to include or reject news items for the newspaper. His main conclusion was that the selection decisions were "highly subjective" (386): "About a third of time, Mr. Gates rejected stories based on his personal evaluation of the merits of the item's content, especially whether or not he believed it to be true. The other two thirds of items were rejected because there wasn't enough space for them or because other similar ones were already running" (Shoemaker and Vos 15). Thus, Mr. Gates was conceptualized as the gatekeeper of information at his local newspaper.

White's conceptualization of the gatekeeper has continued to serve as the main metaphor used by scholars who study news selection, although since his study was published, his observations have been refuted, questioned, and modified, and new theories on gatekeeping have been introduced. One of the primary and earliest criticisms of White's understanding of the gatekeeper is related to the attribution of gatekeeping capacities to the judgment of a single individual. For instance, Gieber (1956), who studied the selection criteria of wire editors at 16 newspapers, concluded that the selection process is mechanical, and that routines and structural limitations such as time and available space are more determinant than individual editors' criteria or preferences. Westley and MacLean's (1957) gatekeeping model follows the same argument, suggesting that individual workers within news organizations follow a set of rules that guide their selection efforts towards the same direction, minimizing the role played by their personal tastes and choices.

McNelly's model (1959), which falls somewhere between White's position and Westley and MacLean's, recognises a chain of gatekeepers with different criteria working within the same news organization. Others such as Bass (1969), Halloran, Elliott and Murdock (1970), and Chibnall (1975) have also studied individuals within news organizations, viewing their decisions as part of a chain of command, rather than the choices of autonomous persons. Thus, gatekeeping is not only about journalists' subjectivities in selecting news items, but a process where the working routines and modus operandi of news organizations are also at play.

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) explain that "the basic premise of gatekeeping scholarship is that messages are created from information about events that has passed through a series of gates and has been changed in the process" (22). Gatekeeping is not only about filtering, but also about the disposition of news within newspapers and newscasts, use of sources, newsworthiness, and other factors that affect the final publication, approach, and presentation of a news story.

In this process that gatekeeping entails, Shoemaker and Vos highlight three crucial features: the entrance of items into the channel, the characteristics of those items, and the nature of forces in front of and behind the gates. The entrance of items into the channel is the first step in the gatekeeping process and makes reference to the different ways in which information gets into the news organizations. Shoemaker and Vos distinguish between three channels through which potential news items need to pass in order become published news: routine channels (non-spontaneous events, organized to get media attention); informal channels (off the record statements, other news organizations, etc.); and enterprise channels (events created by journalists) (22-23).

The characteristics of news items make reference to the common features of newsworthy events or information; that is, what makes certain events more attractive to media organization than others. Thus, for instance, information that is "emotionally interesting, concrete and imaginary-provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way" tends to be more attractive to all individuals, including gatekeepers (Nisbett and Ross 45).

Lastly, the nature of forces in front of and behind gates refers to the events and elements that hinder or ease the passage of a news item through the different channels. For instance, for some news organizations, the materials created by public relations firms can be a positive force, since materials come ready to use and require little work before being published. These same materials can be a negative force for other news organizations, where journalists doubt about the credibility of all messages disseminated by PR firms (Gandy 1982).

Shoemaker and Vos, internationally recognized for their insights on gatekeeping theory, also differentiate between five levels of analysis when theorizing about gatekeeping: the individual, the communication routines, the organizational, the social institution and the social system. While the individual alludes to the characteristics of people working in the media organizations (e.g., Gans' study of "Mr Gates"), the routines refer to the "practices by people who cross communication organizations, practices that are emblematic of the field, rather than of a person or an organization" (31). Additionally, the organizational level of analysis looks at the characteristics of the organizations under study in relation to "the forces outside" these media organizations (e.g. advertisers) and their interrelationships in the media space. This level of analysis also considers the social system "at the extent to which a country's political or economic system controls the gatekeeping process" (32). I will return to

these five levels of analysis at the end of this introductory section in order to frame my own analysis.

3. Gatekeeping theory in the Social Media Age

As in the case of other elements and theories related to journalism, gatekeeping theory has been reviewed, modified, and rejected since the popularization of Web 2.0. The accessibility of media tools for creation and dissemination of media content and the elimination of the limitations of space and reach have resulted in the multiplication of channels: even if an event doesn't make it into a news organization, it can still reach the public through several other mediums (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000). This state of affairs has led scholars to question the usefulness of gatekeeping theory for understanding the current process of news production. More recently, terms such as secondary gatekeeping, gatewatching, and networked gatekeeping have been proposed to explain the new rules of the game.

Secondary gatekeeping, as explained in chapter four, was coined by Jane Singer (2014) and makes reference to the re-dissemination practices used by audience members that allow them to reach additional audiences inaccessible to the news organizations that produced the content in the first place. Gatewatching, another term discussed in chapter four, similarly refers to new practices employed by new actors, but focuses attention instead on audiences' capacities for questioning the information published by news organizations, rather than methods of distribution (Bruns, 2009). The umbrella term 'networked gatekeeping' has also been used to frame different gatekeeping practices performed by diverse actors in the current networked information context (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008).

However, as Vos (2015) argues, the emergence of these new practices fails to entirely discredit the usefulness of traditional gatekeeping theory when exploring the current changes in media organizations:

> The assumption has been that diverse media and diverse alternative channels produce diverse news. While that is no doubt the case in many instances, it is not the case in all instances. Until it is, we would do well to build on the gatekeeping tradition to understand phenomena such as the lack of diversity in early coverage of the financial crisis. Again, the dynamics of gatekeeping are in transition, but the model remains a useful analytical tool (9).

As in other examples reviewed in this dissertation, changes in how information is transmitted and the expanding range of options for amateur content creation and distribution do not necessarily entail radical changes in information power dynamics (who has the right to say what). As explained by Vos, the fact that some events have found alternative channels to make it into the general public does not mean that other events are not being relayed by professional media practitioners. Vos highlights the case of the global financial crisis that took place in 2008: despite all signs pointing toward the crisis, both the mainstream press and alternative media channels and actors failed to identify and report these signs.[54] As Vos remarks, "the truth did not go viral. The truth remained locked behind the gates" (8).

Furthermore, as I have argued in the introduction to this dissertation, while more channels may now exist to circulate information, audiences still trust and consume stories from legacy news media. As Vos writes:

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[54] One could wonder, do the audiences have the requisite skill to identify, interpret, and analyse problems such as financial crises or longstanding political conflicts?

> While audiences may have autonomy in news selection (Napoli, 2003), it turns out that audiences fall into a fairly limited range of repertoires for news and other media consumption (Taneja, Webster, Malthose, & Ksiazek, 2012). So, many, many media gates exist, but audiences attend to a relatively small percentage of those gates. And while some may consume niche media (Anderson, 2008), the relatively few who consume niche media also consume large amounts of media in general (Elberse, 2008) (10).

According to Vos, it is still relevant to study how and why some events make it into the news within the new media ecology. However, as Heinderyckx puts it, "the purpose of gatekeeping is undoubtedly changing; more precisely, it is mutating and diversifying" (256). Vos and Heinderyckx agree that the news industry is in transition and in that journalistic practices are changing, but they also insist on the continued relevance of gatekeeping as a concept. As Vos put it "transition is not termination" (11). Within these transformations, Heinderyckx highlights the appearance of "new forms of selection, curation, and distribution that entail new forms of gatekeeping with specific means and objectives" (256). He also emphasizes the importance of the gatekeeping theory for new elements arising from the intersections between technology and audiences, such as search engines, social networks, and web traffic.

Thus, this chapter examines how the integration of UGC and the new ways of understanding and dealing with audiences have impacted the practice of gatekeeping. Continuing the line of argument pursued through this dissertation so far and considering the specific data collected through the case studies, this chapter focuses on the individual and communications routines levels of analysis. At the individual level, it examines the

journalists[55] considerations about their role as gatekeepers in the new media configuration (Do they think the gatekeeping role is shared with the audiences? Do they consider themselves to be the only gatekeepers? What does it mean for them to be gatekeepers? etc.), based on the journalists' testimonies during the interviews conducted. At the communications routines level, this chapter is concerned about the daily practices for setting the news agenda[56] and selecting stories, looking specifically at if and how the audiences' participation in content creation and dissemination is influencing routines and group practices. In this case, the analysis is based on my interviews with journalists, newsrooms observations, and textual analysis, where necessary.

4. eldiario.es

As it has been seen in previous chapters, journalists at *eldiario.es* seem to be particularly open to *produser*s' contributions, especially when compared with the other two case studies. *Produser*s contents are particularly relevant in the coverage of demonstrations, in the form of comments that assist with editing and proofreading feedback and sometimes lead to conversations and debates with journalists, or through information about web traffic that

[55] All interviewees for this dissertation are referred as to journalists or participants. Unless it was necessary for reasons related to clarification, I have not differentiated between individuals holding different positions such as editor in chief, reporter, editor, etc., and I have also tried to avoid specifying the section they work for. In most cases, this has been done for the sake of confidentiality.

[56] Maxwell McCombs explains that "agenda-setting directs our attention to the early formative stages of public opinion when issues emerge and first engage public attention, a situation that confronts journalists with a strong ethical responsibility to select carefully the issues on their agenda" (20). McCombs also highlights that there are numerous influences at play in shaping the media agenda, arranged like the layers of an onion. At the core of this onion are the norms and traditions of journalism that "define the ground rules for the ultimate shaping of the media agenda" (99). In the other layers and among the influencing actors are political leaders, governments, public relation practitioners, communication professionals and elite news media.

assists in improving the design of the homepage. Most journalists appreciate their audiences and consider them to be, in general terms, informed and educated, and in some cases, experts in fields unknown to journalists. Audiences represent a kind of authority and serve as resources for news stories. Given these considerations, a very reasonable question to ask is how the practices in relation to UGC and perceptions about their audiences have affected the journalists' understandings of their own roles, especially that of a gatekeeper of information.

a. The individual level

At an individual level, when asked if they think they are somehow sharing the gatekeeping role with their audiences, journalists at *eldiario.es* are divided as to whether this is the case. However, the journalists who believe the role is shared still insist that they have "the final say." For instance, one of the journalists who agreed that journalists share the gatekeeping role to some extent with their audiences added: "I agree, but then you still have to decide if what they have chosen interests you or not." Journalists feel that filtering and selecting information is one of their main duties and it is one of the things that makes their jobs meaningful. As one of the journalists expressed it:

> Our responsibility as journalists involves filtering and comparing information, and we don't have to trust and use everything that we receive. (…) I think professionals have the last say. It's our job. I think our job is decodifying things, discern between what is truth and what is not, and from there decide if we want to publish it or not.

This same journalist added that filtering and selecting is not only part of their job but also the reason that audiences still consume news stories published by news organizations: "At the end of the day, if a prestigious journalists tells a news story, it is set in stone. Would people

believe the same story if it was told by an anonymous person....?" Thus, there is a general feeling among journalists that their role as gatekeepers is not just part of their professional guidelines, but also what makes them valuable to their audiences. Even the most "technologic utopian" journalist in the newsroom (as he described himself), who speculated about a future where audiences would be empowered to publish their own content, believes that a group of professionals selecting or curating news stories will be always necessary:

> Maybe in the future, someday, the journalist-as-a-brand will have more relevance than the big media organizations. Or maybe we'll have small news organizations for which independent journalists will work. But there will always be some kind of masthead that gathers these journalists together and gives some editorial value to the news.

Hence, this general defence of the journalistic practice and the role of the journalists as gatekeepers, filters or curators also leads to the defence of media organizations as the main providers of information:

> It is still the big media organizations that publish the important stories. It is true that news organizations are in decline like other traditional institutions; that they are losing the people's credibility; that people are more and more interested in what is told in the social networks and that somehow manifest what news organizations aren't listening to. However, those publishing BIG stories, GOOD interviews are media organizations.

On the one hand, at *eldiario.es* journalists understand and even agree with critiques that in some cases call for a change in the current role and power positioning of news organizations; on the other hand, however, they defend and value their profession and believe that their contributions to society aren't always recognized. Speculating on the future in a similar vein to the previous comment, another journalist told me:

> Some may say "with time, journalists will be replaced by materials shared on the social networks, because what is the point of getting your news from news organizations…" Well, I think that in our country, for good or bad, some stories would have been told if it wasn't for the journalists. Sometimes we see people criticising the journalists' job on Twitter, which has become pretty common, and then we see the same people sharing and commenting on exclusive content published by a news organization.

Thus, while most journalists at *eldiario.es* are open to *produser*s' contributions and incorporating the complaints and useful expertise of their audiences, they also feel that their responsibilities and duties, given their knowledge about current affairs, include filtering and separating the grain from the chaff. But while this role situates them in a clear power position in the public sphere with respect to the audiences, journalists consider their gatekeeping role more in terms of duties and professional training than in correspondence to power relations.

b. The communications routines level

At the communications routines level, one of the most important things that takes place daily at *eldiario.es* in relation to the selection of news stories and agenda setting is the editorial meeting. As described in chapter three, every morning, around 10 a.m., the editors in chief of the different sections hold a meeting where they discuss the main stories they will be covering and realising during the day. Apart from these more formal and regular meetings, journalists also decide on the fly what to follow, cover, and feature, which results in spontaneous debates and conversations in the newsroom. One of the journalists explained their agenda setting routines this way:

> Every day we have the morning editorial meeting to see how the day is looking, but during the day we also hold meetings in the newsroom, small meetings with only some of the journalists. The editor doesn't have an office, so it's like being always in a meeting. From time to time, we stop to decide about the angle of a story or what are we going to leave for the weekend. But these meetings are extremely short. We normally have around three main stories for the day. Stories marked by current affairs, other news organizations or a relevant event that has occurred during the day. Apart from the stories that all news organizations follow, we also have our own agenda with exclusive information that only us are publishing. These stories aren't strictly determined by current affairs but they are mostly about human rights, women rights, sexism, historic memory, technology, etc.…

Thus, part of their agenda is determined by what can be called the *official agenda*, comprised by the activities of political parties, government announcements and press convocations, government meetings, institutional convocations, etc. This official agenda is particularly relevant for some of the journalists in the National Politics section. As one of the journalists in this section told me when asked about the influence of audiences in the agenda: "In my case and in what I cover, that is not happening. The agenda is determined by political parties and institutions." I could also notice this during the newsrooms observations: almost every morning at least one of the team members attended a political party or government press conference. When no one could attend these meetings, journalists followed them on television. Sometimes, even if a team member was in a government session, the rest of them (especially editors in chief) followed the session on television.

This official agenda also consists of what other big media organizations are covering. During the newsroom observations, I noted that journalists almost compulsively checked other news sites to review their news features. Journalists commented on these news stories and discussed if they should consider covering them as well. In the course of the staff meetings, one of the main editors usually read or glanced through the main Spanish newspapers (normally, *El País* or *El Mundo*), occasionally reflecting on certain pieces. This means that even for this small and relatively independent news organization, the material presented by more established and mainstream news organizations is used as a guide for setting their agenda. And despite featuring a significant number of stories that differ from those featured by other news organizations (the stories that belong to their "own agenda with exclusive information that only [they] are publishing"), during the textual analysis I was able to verify that most of their news stories were still part of the *official agenda* shared by most media organizations.

However, as seen in the previous chapters, journalists are at the same time generally predisposed to including UGC and audiences' feedback in their agenda. Yet, despite this inclination, journalists still believe they are the primary gatekeepers of information and maintain that gatekeeping is one of the main and most relevant responsibilities of journalists. Thus, instead of UGC determining the journalists' agenda or audiences as the new gatekeepers of information, in the case of *eldiario.es*, it would be more accurate to describe UGC as positive forces that help news items to pass through the gate. That is, the fact that a news story has been widely shared and liked by internet users and, more specifically, by the news site's audiences increases its likelihood of being featured on the site.

During the interviews, some journalists also conceptualized UGC as a channel itself: as in Lewis' example, where food items travel through two channels (buying and gardening) to reach the dining table, according to journalists at *eldiario.es*, UGC also acts as channel that carries potential news items which then need to pass through different gates in order to make it into the news. Interestingly enough, what differentiates this UGC channel from other channels, such as the news agency, is that what circulates through this channel is visible not only to the journalists but also to the internet users: the UGC channel is transparent and accessible.

5. El Huffington Post

As described in previous chapters, journalists at *El Huffington Post* approach UGC and audiences differently depending on the section they work for. Thus, journalists in the hard news sections use *produser*s' contents mostly for the coverage of news stories related with the government's financial cuts to education and health services. Additionally, journalists in the soft news sections work more closely with the information they have about web traffic and trending topics, and use no-news content (especially YouTube videos) to build their stories. As for the audiences, journalists in the hard news sections perceive them more as sources in need of contextualization, whereas in the soft news section audiences are considered more relevant in their role as pulse-takers who guide the selection of contents. As such, the journalists' notions of their own roles differ from each other.

a. The individual level

As in the case of *eldiario.es*, journalists at *El Huffington Post* disagree when asked if the gatekeeping role is currently shared with the audiences. Although more journalists

responded with a clear 'no' than at *eldiario.es*, others also answered that "of course" they do. They all admit to taking into consideration their audiences' feedback, suggestions, and tastes, but, as in the case of *eldiario.es*, they all agree that journalists have the final say in the selection of news. According to a journalist, news is a mix of "people's interests" and what journalists want. Another journalist added that "everybody trusts the 10 most viewed news stories and they influence not only what we select but what readers read."

Again, journalists refuse to leave what historically has been their main role in the hands of the audiences, arguing that they "are journalists, and journalists have to filter what is important and what is not," as one of the journalists put it. One of the participants asserted that filtering and selection are not only part of a journalist's duties, but also that "the news is what journalists consider it to be," relegating news to something constructed by journalists. This same journalist went so far as to state that "who has the power is the journalist." Another journalist described this filtering role as follows: "it is necessary that some journalism work involves elevating [what users are sharing on the internet] to the category of news."

Hence, journalists draw a clear line between what internet users share online and what they consider to be the purely journalistic work:

> At the end of the day, what makes us different and useful is the filter. Of course, this filter is now more porous, more liquid, and things are very different from when everything was X or Y because a politician said it. In that sense, the filter changes, but the filter is still necessary. In fact, it is more relevant than ever, because everybody can publish, but not everybody has the same principles, not everybody is honest. That's the role of journalists. And a Twitter user doesn't share the same principles per se. But what is a journalist? A journalist is a person who gathers information according to

critical sense, with social utility, with very basic quality controls. And that can't be done by any Twitter user.

Journalists see a social value in their profession that can't be replace by amateur and untrained workers. In relation to content shared on Twitter and its validity as news items, one journalist remarked: "How many times have we seen calls for demonstrations that many people were following and were supposed to attend and in the end they ended up being a joke? That's why we can't trust everything that is shared on the internet. That's why we need journalists." Following this line of reasoning, another participant said: "News organizations should make it clear that they have journalists to filter information. If you want other people to do it, then it doesn't make sense that you create a news organization. We already have experiments such as Menéame[57] for that purpose."

In sum, as in the case of *eldiario.es*, journalists tend to be very defensive when their profession is call into question. Despite their openness to internet users' contents and the ongoing call for people's participation in their news opinion section, journalists at *El Huffington Post* believe that news is constructed by media professionals, and that this role is necessary and valuable for the well being of democratic societies. Journalists are the ones with the power to decide what is relevant, what is not, and what should be made known. The platforms that allow internet users to aggregate contents and decide their order are considered as mere experiments and something different than journalism. Journalists are the ultimate gatekeepers of the main gates.

[57] According to Wikipedia, "Menéame is a Spanish social news website based on community participation, made for users to discover and share content on the Internet, by submitting links, which are voted and commented upon. Its model is based on Digg and it combines social bookmarking, blogging and Web syndication with a publication system without editors". https://www.meneame.net/

b. The communications routines level

The fact that *El Huffington Post* did not allow me to spend more than one day in their newsroom forced me, on the one hand, to add more questions about routines and procedures to my interviews and, on the other, to rely more heavily on the journalists' responses to these questions. As explained in chapter three, there are no daily editorial meetings at *El Huffington Post*. One of the editors in chief explained to me that the journalists who work for the hard news sections normally hold a meeting every Monday morning, where they review the different official agendas (government, opposition, foreign governments, meetings of international relevance, etc.), divide the work, and share ideas for possible in depth reportages. On a daily basis, they discuss on the spot what stories to follow or cover and how. Thus, their agenda is initially structured around the official agenda offered as a service by most news agencies and monitored by most media organizations. This provides the basic skeleton for *El Huffington Post*'s agenda, which is then fleshed out with in depth stories proposed by the journalists and to which they dedicate more resources and time, along with additional last-minute and breaking news stories.

Things appeared to be somewhat different in the soft news sections. The *official agenda* is less packed with events (movie or music festivals, competitions, etc.) and, as noted during the textual analysis and also according the journalists' descriptions, more open to trending stories shared by internet users. At the time when the newsrooms observations and interviews took place, *El Huffington Post* had two journalists dedicated to soft news in the newsroom, as well as some additional freelance journalists who collaborated from elsewhere. These two journalists held informal meetings more often, sometimes over breakfast or lunch.

While I observed that journalists in the hard news sections continuously monitored news agency updates, and always had Radio 5, the Spanish all news public radio station, playing in the newsroom, journalists in charge of soft news were more preoccupied with viral videos shared on YouTube and Facebook, news stories that were proving successful in the other editions of *The Huffington Post* worldwide, and their own web traffic. Hence, in the case of *El Huffington Post*, the influence of UGC in the journalists' agenda depends on the type of information they deal with.

Interestingly enough, it is important to note here that the distribution of news in the homepage of the website is quite particular at *El Huffington Post*. As noted above, they seem to follow the same official agenda as other news organizations, but the way they hierarchize the stories is remarkable: during my textual analysis, for instance, I observed that opinion blog posts, stories about the new iPhone, opinion polls, or a piece on how to ride a bike wearing a skirt, were among the first 10 and most visible news on the homepage (and sometimes, in the case of the story about the new iPhone, headlining the site), mixed in with other hard news stories based on those highlighted in news agencies reports and by other news organizations. Although in all cases studied web traffic and trending topics affected the way news is displayed on the homepage, it seemed to me that these figures were more influential at *El Huffington Post*.

Journalists commented that "sometimes we go a bit apart from the current agenda," and that they "include a lot of news stories that emerge from places that are not the regular ones, such as the social networks." One participant mentioned something particularly relevant:

> We journalists were used to easily locating those who generated the news: organizations, parties, unions, press offices. Everything came from an identifiable

> structure. And that makes you overconfident about the traditional ways of receiving information. Things like the 15M movement, with no press offices, with no convocations, with no press releases or known faces, forced us to rethink the way we approach current affairs.

Even so, another journalist also added that they have "different sensibilities" in relation to the inclusion of UGC and news related to trending topics on the internet.

In sum, at *El Huffington Post* it is also possible to find a mix of news stories, where those that belong to the official agenda are mingled with news pieces researched by members of the newsroom, sometimes based on pieces of UGC, especially in the soft news sections. But while this inclusion remains relevant, the structural skeleton of this agenda is based on events produced, announced, and highlighted by traditional newsmakers. Finally, despite giving more relevance to these official news stories in the construction of their agenda, the site's homepage usually reflects more variety, sometimes featuring headlines for unusual news pieces.

6. El País

As seen in previous chapters, *El País* is, at many levels, a much more complex news organization than the other two. First of all, *El País* is determined by different corporate structures that inevitably affect journalists' understandings of their own roles. Secondly, *El País* is part of what has been called 'legacy media,' a feature that also has an impact on how journalists perceive the meanings and duties of their profession. As aforementioned, these characteristics also affect journalists' relationship with social networks and UGC. For instance, Twitter is mostly used to follow traditional newsmakers that help journalists to filter

information. And while there is some recognition of the potential value of certain types of UGC, such as *produser*s' footage or *produser*s' stories, it is rare to find these materials inserted in a news story. Thus, the journalists' understandings of audiences' contributions and roles in the age of social media is less encouraging and less disruptive than in the other two cases. As such, their opinions about their own gatekeeping practices are, as will be shown, more conservative and less open to change and innovation.

a. The individual level

Journalists at *El País* tend to talk about "how things are done" in their news organization instead of referring to their own personal experiences or ideas about journalism when asked about practices. It seems that editorial priorities and decisions dictate news directions more than individual judgments and preferences. When asked about how UGC and audience pressures to include a story in their agenda affect their gatekeeping role, most of them responded that now, more than ever in history, journalists "need to be careful" with these contents and, in spite of these pressures, make decisions following the editorial mandate. One of the participants went so far as to assert that part of the journalist's job is to "fight against" the idea that selection practices are shared with the audiences. "Journalists are more necessary than ever to eliminate the noise," said another journalist in relation to the gatekeeping role. Similarly, one participant expressed that "this is enlightened despotism. We journalists have the duty of deciding what should become a news story and bet on it."

Hence, at *El País* there is a greater reluctance to share the gatekeeping role with audiences than in the other two cases. Instead of agreeing that at some stages of the process, gatekeeping is shared with the audiences but journalists have the final say, in this case, some journalists even suggested that they should resist this new state of affairs. However, other

journalists showed more openness in this regard during the interviews. One of them, who had spent most of his career working for digital news sections, explained that journalists nowadays are "more permeable" to audiences' suggestions and claims than before, but he also pointed out that "it's not an imposition, [since] you're the one who decides." Another participant indicated that "for something to be included in the agenda, it needs a widely supported motion."

This means that at *El País* journalists are less inclined to share the roles that have been traditionally assigned to their profession with internet users or even with their audiences than in the other two cases. Again, this defence of the status quo fits with the type of news organization they represent as well as with what has been observed in relation to their usages of UGC and their relationship with their audiences.

b. The communication routines level

It is almost impossible to fully understand how decisions are made at *El País*. There are so many actors and interests involved, and it is such a huge organization, that one gets the impression that attempting to explain how the agenda is set and how news stories are selected is an impossible mission. However, despite the impossibility of fully grasping and describing how these selections are made at *El País*, there are still several interesting things that a researcher can comment on and theorize about through the observation of journalists' practices and an analysis of their discourses. As previously discussed, there are two major editorial meetings in the newsroom during the day: one early in the morning, where editors in chief of the different sections present the stories they are expecting for the day, and one in the late

afternoon, where the director and the assistant directors decide what to include in the front page of the printed edition.

These two meetings seem to make more sense for the printed edition; when it comes to the digital version, everything needs to happen more quickly and decisions are frequently made on the spot by middle-ranking managers, without necessarily considering political strategies or objectives. Moreover, whereas the content included on the front page is discussed and decided on by the big bosses in the news organization, decisions about the homepage are made through consideration of other factors such as web traffic. A journalist working for the digital edition told me:

> The sentence 'this works well for the digital edition' is internalized. This didn't happen four years ago. At that time, when someone suggested to include in the agenda something different than the habitual, the answer was 'we have always had this type of content and we have always done things this way.

It seems that the criteria applied in the selection of news stories for the digital edition is laxer than the process followed for news print. "In our section, we sometimes headline the homepage for hours with a news story that afterwards appears only as a brief review in the newspaper," added this same journalist.

Most journalists at *El País* expressed the feeling that they are the ones leading the way for other media organizations. A feeling that one journalist put into words as follows: "We big news organizations are the ones setting the agenda." Journalists know that not only do national news organizations continuously monitor their coverage but also that correspondents and international news organizations set their international agendas considering the news selection of *El País*. During the newsrooms observations, I noticed that journalists at *El País* also check

what other big media organizations are doing, especially the ones that are globally recognized such as *The New York Times*. It was more common to see journalists commenting on news by other news outlets than on pieces of UGC shared on Twitter. It seems then that the bigger and more globally recognized a news organization is, the larger impact it has in setting the agenda internationally.

In relation to news selection and agenda setting, it is also relevant to mention a distinction that a couple of journalists made in regard to which UGC-based news stories are published in *El País*. One participant explained to me that "some stories make it into the agenda because of the pressure generated by social networks" but she clarified that "these stories aren't about the Gürtel case,[58]" meaning that these stories aren't as important as the ones investigated by the journalists. Another participant made the same kind of distinction, pointing out that "we have created a new section called 'Vida y Artes' (Life and Arts) where we dedicate a lot of space to movements and debates produced in social networks and that we didn't have before." That is, content based on UGC does not belong in the hard news sections such as National Politics or Economy, but rather to a new section created ad hoc for these kinds of stories.

In sum, although things appear to be more flexible in the digital version in comparison to the print edition, journalists at *El País* still maintain a very conservative outlook of who has the right to say what, which is also reflected in their routines and organization of work.

[58] The Gürtel case is an ongoing political corruption scandal in Spain that affects one of the main political parties, the People's Party (PP), currently in power. *El País* has reported extensively about the case and has been especially relevant for its investigative journalism reports.

7. Discussion

In the study of gatekeeping at the individual level, researchers have generally considered both journalists' logic in decision-making as well as the core characteristics of gatekeepers. This chapter has been dedicated to analyzing the latter. Within the features of journalists who act as gatekeepers, authors have directed their efforts to studying journalists' personalities, backgrounds, and values, as well as their tendency to favour certain worldviews and values such as ethnocentrism, responsible capitalism, or individualism. Researchers have also looked at the conception of professional roles, since, as Shoemaker and Vos put it, "the gatekeeper's ideas about what his or her job entails can also affect gatekeeping choices" (47). Thus, Cohen (1963) and Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1976) distinguished between neutral reporters and participants, categories that were expanded by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986), and Culberston (1983) into four other roles: disseminator, interpreter, adversarial, and populist mobilizer.

In a similar vein, scholars have also considered how disruptive practices such as public journalism[59] or online journalism impact the way journalists think about their roles. The results presented in this chapter aim to contribute to this corpus of literature. Previous studies have demonstrated that most journalists considered public journalism a threat to the traditional values of journalism, independence and objectivity (Arant and Meyer, 1998), but they also indicate that journalists in smaller news organizations, who are generally more involved with the communities they work for (Voakes, 1999), were more positive to this approach. Studies of online journalism have found that there has been a shift in the journalists' conceptions of

[59] For more information about public journalism, please see chapter 1, where this movement is introduced.

their duties and roles due to the implementation of online journalism: according to Singer (1997, 1998), online journalists believe that their main duty is finding meaning and coherence in the huge amounts of information that are currently produced and circulated.

This dissertation has specifically investigated whether, given the current possibilities for content creation and dissemination, journalists feel that they are sharing their gatekeeping role with internet users or certain members of their audiences. Although there are variations between journalists and newsrooms, it is possible to affirm that despite the new options for sharing and consuming news, journalists maintain that selecting news stories is one of their primary duties, without which the profession would no longer have value. What is more, some of them even suggested that the news exists only so long as journalists do. Gatekeeping is so engrained in journalists' ideologies about their professionalism that the idea of sharing this role with amateur media producers is perceived as an attack on their core values. They admit, however, to having modified their gatekeeping practices in order to obtain news items from sources they simply would not have considered. But while journalists have become more accessible and flexible, and the channels, forces, and gates for news have changed, they are the ones who ultimately press the 'publish' button to send a news story into the world.

This rejection has also something to do with journalists' ongoing defence of the value of independence. As indicated in Arant and Meyer's study of journalists' professional role conceptions in the context of the public journalism movement, journalists are generally worried about letting audiences or internet users determine the selection of content. There is of course more willingness to take into consideration *produsers*' contents and audiences' feedback at *eldiario.es* and *El Huffington Post*, but in both cases, journalists claimed to be independent of any pressure and free to make their own, independent decisions.

In light of these findings, has the usage of UGC affected in some way how gatekeeping is practiced? While it currently lacks a clear implication for how journalists view their role as gatekeepers, UGC has definitely had an impact on their agendas and how journalists in the newsrooms habitually build them. As Shoemaker and Vos explain, "routines seem to dictate the overall pattern of events, and individual gatekeepers decide which particular news items are used within that standard framework" (52). We can certainly say that UGC has become a new element to consider – in some cases more, in some cases less – within the journalists' routines.

As seen throughout this chapter, there is a predetermined set of news stories or topics that are covered systematically by most media organizations. This is what has been called in this chapter the *official agenda*, and is determined by traditional newsmakers such as political parties, organizations, unions, etc., and fixed by large news outlets such as *El País*. The three organizations studied structure their agenda according to the official agenda, and then fill the gaps with contents of their own production. It is in this filling of the gaps that the UGC comes most often into play.

In this schema, UGC can be conceptualized as a channel that supplies newsrooms with news items. However, this channel has certain particularities. It is first of all a transparent channel accessible not only to news organizations but that is also visible to internet users. In this channel, audiences and internet users push news items through the gates, becoming themselves positive forces. This alternative and new channel is used differently in the three newsrooms under investigation. As seen in chapter three, *eldiario.es* makes use of it for the coverage of news stories related to demonstrations and social dissidence; *El Huffington Post* is more inclined to use these news items for the coverage of stories about the government cuts in

health services and education, but they are also particularly relevant for their soft news sections; at *El País*, journalists want to think that these news items are used for sections with a lower profile and relevance.

Heinderyckx (2015) argues that while gatekeeping is still a relevant theoretical framework to explore the selection practices performed by journalists, we should rethink the metaphor of channels and gates and find new images more appropriate for the current network communications schemas. While I agree with Heinderyckx that some elements of the traditional practice of gatekeeping have been altered (e.g. the 24 hours news cycle forces a non-stop gatekeeping practice and more decisions are made on the fly), news items still travel through different channels to the journalists' desks and need to push through different gates on their journey in order to be considered newsworthy.

However, the life of a news story does not end when it is published by a news organization (as it used to be); now, news stories continue to be transformed and constructed once they are out of the hands of journalists. As we have seen, *produsers* and audiences occupy roles of greater relevance only after a story has been written and published. This relates back to Brun's conceptualization of the gatewatcher and Singer's notions of the secondary gatekeeping: both of these practices take place after a news outlet has circulated a news piece. I will come back to this idea in the concluding chapter.

Thus, since selection and filtering appear to be inherent to journalists' understandings of their profession, I believe that we must continue to explore how journalists' gatekeeping practices have been modified and how new channels and forces are currently at play. Gatekeeping appears to be the one of the pillars of journalists' ideologies of their profession,

the activity for which they have been trained, and without which their profession would become irrelevant.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

1. Introduction

This dissertation began with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the implications that the new opportunities for media content creation by non-professionals have had in journalism. As described in the introduction to this dissertation, over the last decade, various studies have investigated how new participatory practices in the media sphere have impacted different industries and even the nature of these very practices. In the field of journalism, the literature is divided between excitement about a future where anyone can publish without intermediaries, and the total negativism of those affirming that at the end of the day, nothing has really changed in the news media industry. This dissertation was built on the intuition that although we still rely on news organizations to get our news, the way news is constructed has been altered in some way. I also began this investigation with the feeling that these changes have not happened at the same level and in the same way in all news outlets. With these motivations in mind, I decided to study three news organizations with different profiles and, ontologically, slightly different understandings of the journalism profession.

In these news organizations three aspects were analyzed: how journalists deal with the materials created by internet users, called in this dissertation UGC; how journalists perceive their audiences, given the possible changes in their nature; and how journalists feel about their gatekeeping role, one of their traditional, primary duties that might be affected by this new state of affairs. The idea behind these three research questions was to gain a sense of how UGC has infiltrated into journalists' practices and understandings of their duties and roles.

Since the objective of this dissertation was to study practices and discourses, the sociology of news production was the main theoretical framework used, with a focus on the investigation of the social organization of newswork. Thus, the methodology chosen was ethnography, aiming to contribute to the second wave of newsroom ethnographies attempting to understand how dynamics in journalism have changed with the implementation of relatively new technologies such as the internet. Every research question was accordingly shaped and structured by different concepts and theories.

In the case of the study of how UGC is being integrated into mainstream journalism, Axel Bruns' concept of produsage and Wardle and Williams's classification of UGC were used to explore how journalists in the three newsrooms studied work with these materials. The investigation of how these new practices have affected how journalists think about their audiences was framed by the approach known as the industrial construction of audiences (clearly related to the sociology of news production), and structured according to Heinonen's categorization of the new roles of audiences. Finally, for the analysis of journalists' perceptions about possible changes in their traditional role as gatekeepers, theories on gatekeeping and, in particular, Shoemaker and Vos's distinction between the different levels of analysis were mobilized.

In sum, over the last hundred pages, this dissertation has tried to contribute to a conversation about the impacts of non-professional participatory practices in the media industries by analysing how journalists interact and deal with the materials resulting from these practices in their daily routines. My hope is that the findings and discussions presented here will improve our knowledge of the transformations in contemporary societies made possible through new media technologies.

2. Main findings

Chapters three, four, and five presented findings in relation to three research questions, which were each described, analysed, and discussed. From these detailed results, the most relevant breakthroughs could be summarized as follows:

- **Different approaches to UGC define different news organizations (and vice versa).** In general terms, deciding what to include and what to discard when constructing the news is not comprised of a series of simple actions resulting from random choices, as many studies have shown. Of course, this is also true in the case of deciding whether or not to incorporate pieces of UGC into news stories or cover an event that has been shared and promoted by internet users through social networks. The three news organizations studied deal with UGC in diverse ways, and their attitudes towards these materials mark their approach to the practice of journalism and contribute to their definition of their professional ideologies.

For instance, journalists at *eldiario.es* (a news organization launched right after the squares occupation by the 15M movement members, and directed to discontented left wing niche audiences) are encouraged to read news comments and reply to them, fostering discussion and reader engagement. This is not only related to a specific way of understanding journalism, which closely resembles that defended by those involved in the public journalism movement, but it also aligns with a new wave of politicians and political parties in Spain seeking to improve communication with citizens and be more inclusive in decision making.

El País represents the defence of the status quo in times of change: although they have implemented certain routines to address and consider some pieces of UGC when writing about particular topics, they clearly prefer to maintain most of the practices and routines they have established over the years. Their journalists strongly believe in the principle of independence and in the exclusive capacity of journalists to decide what news is, and these two elements limit the extent of their usage of UGC. These attitudes towards UGC also correspond to their editorial positioning in regard to the political changes happening in Spain: *El País* is generally very critical of the new left wing political parties and social movements.

El Huffington Post is a rare, hybrid species that mixes practices of the early years of digital journalism and the craziness and obsession about viral content and internet culture, blending irreverence with political gravitas. Thus, journalists' practices and approaches to UGC differ depending on the section where they are assigned: whereas it is possible to find some forms of reluctance towards UGC among hard news journalists, soft news journalists pay more attention to these contents and work more closely with audiences. Additionally, web metrics are taken much more into consideration by *El Huffington Post* than by the other two news organizations studied. Moreover, *El Huffington Post* is the result of a franchise model of journalism, where some practices are learned and inherited from their counterparts in the US, who experiment and establish the route for the rest to follow.

Thus, UGC isn't that different from the other elements that define media organizations. UGC management is part of the editorial positioning: paying attention to internet users' demands on social networks, reading the comments and considering web traffic are activities that say something about the ideologies behind the practice of journalism of a given news outlet.

- **UGC isn't just cheap content; it raises significant issues for journalists.** As we have seen, it is almost impossible nowadays to behave as though UGC did not exist and simply ignore it. If a news organization were to completely disregard UGC, it would make such a strong statement that it would be viewed at the very least as questionable. However, in order to properly use UGC, news organizations must invest adequate human resources. As seen throughout this dissertation, UGC management involves dealing with veracity and copyright issues that require significant time and work to be resolved. It is true that sometimes UGC is used as a soft news content and as a quick and easy method of generating web traffic, but it would be a terrible generalization to affirm that this is the main contribution of UGC to current journalism. When used for hard news sections, the journalistic work of verification and contextualization becomes crucial.

- **Web traffic affects story selection and storytelling**. The fact that a news story has been widely shared and read shows journalists that their audiences are interested in that particular topic. As a result, and always under the journalists' judgment, some of these stories are covered extensively and featured on the news organization's homepage. However, journalists tend to insist that despite their interest in audiences' preferences, they still make their decisions in consideration of other elements such as relevance or public interest. For most of them, the influence of audiences' preferences in TV programing is an example of how following audiences' demands without applying any other judgment can damage the quality of content. Probably the most interesting changes have occurred on news site homepages, the spaces that have replaced the newspaper front page. Whereas newspaper front pages were

designed with consideration for editorial positioning and political impact, the design of homepages also take into account the most viewed news stories. Furthermore, homepages are also constructed according to the audiences' preferences for navigating the website.

Web traffic has also impacted the way news is told: journalists are using new narrative techniques that they know will be more appealing to audiences. Some journalists have noticed that explanatory pieces are particularly attractive, and so they use them for stories of complex events. The same thing happens with lists, which break down current event stories into a set of easily understandable paragraphs that are generally well received. These kinds of news pieces are also headlined in unusual ways (e.g., 'The 10 things you need to know about x') that are intended to attract visitors.

- ***Produsers* and audiences are new relevant actors in making the news.** Throughout this dissertation, the relevance of these two actors has been meticulously described and discussed. Their definitions share many elements, and they have similar roles and play alike activities in the new media ecology. As we have seen, *produsers* can be audiences of certain media outlets and audiences of online media are *produsers* per se. However, in spite of their similarities and confluences, each of these actors belongs to a different theoretical corpus. When we talk about *produsers* we are primarily referring to the participatory practices that can be performed by internet users. When we refer to audiences, we are describing the consumers of a text, no matter what its nature. Whereas the emphasis in the configuration of the concept of the *produser* lies in the creation and sharing of content, the study of audiences has been centered in the idea of reception, primarily because until the arrival of the internet, audiences

had fewer possibilities for action and contestation. As such, these two actors belong to different traditions and bodies of literature.

Nevertheless, both *produsers* and audiences impact how news is constructed: according to the journalists, they act as sources, resources, and pulse-takers before a news story is written, and as proofreaders, factcheckers, and quality controllers when the story has been already published. Again, depending on the news organization, *produsers* and audiences perform these activities to a greater or lesser extent. From all these roles, the ones that are especially questioning the traditional power dynamics between journalists and their audiences are those of pulse takers and quality controllers. In relation to the latter, the fact that non-professional and external actors can publicly value, contest, and question the outcomes of journalists' work, and that these new activities are acknowledged and respected by journalists, grants audiences with a much more active role than their traditional function as spectators and decoders of messages.

- **Despite the changes, most journalists still believe that they are the final gatekeepers of information**. Although *produsers*' inputs and audiences' consuming habits are useful in deciding if and how to cover a news story, journalists believe that selecting and filtering news stories are the core activities of their profession, without which their work would be meaningless, and therefore this role should not be shared with other actors. However, a study of their practices indicates that their gatekeeping functions are continuously influenced and challenged by *produsers* and audiences' contributions. Even if journalists feel they are still 'in charge' of deciding what news is, they may *fear* the audience more than they used to.

UGC has been described in this dissertation as a new, transparent channel through which news items are pushed by internet users under public scrutiny, making the selection process more complex for journalists. Moreover, it has been observed throughout this dissertation that, despite recent critiques, the metaphors used in gatekeeping theory (i.e. channels, gates, forces) are still valid and useful, since the primary and most relevant changes in news cycles are happening once news stories have been already written and published. When published, news stories are freed from the journalists' control and can be contested, redistributed, and even retold. In addition, the activities performed by audiences / *produsers* affect, in turn, new gatekeeping decisions made by journalists.

3. Implications

Taking all these conclusions into consideration, it is possible to state that UGC matters and that we should continue exploring how it affects the media professionals' daily practices. Many studies have already investigated the role of UGC in the coverage crisis events, particularly during 2011, at the time when the Arab Uprisings were occurring, but significantly less interest has been directed to analyse how these materials have infiltrated journalists' routines. As this dissertation has shown, attitudes towards UGC vary between journalists and newsrooms, but in some cases (*eldiario.es*), journalists are encouraged to pay attention to types of UGC, such as news comments, that would be dismissed elsewhere. This contradicts previous studies (Nielsen 2014, Locke 2013) that concluded that comments are useless and problematic, and requires us to inquire why news comments have been such an issue for some news organizations that they have decided to eliminate them, while others

continue to insist on their relevance and are still trying to figure out how to use them more effectively. Researchers should not conclude that participatory practices such as news comments have been proven a failure but rather they should question why these practices have not been successfully implemented in certain news outlets, and what should we learn from that.

This study has also shown that newsrooms are still worthwhile places to study. Although the methods applied in this dissertation showed some limitations, as will be discussed in the following section, we can still learn about the practice of journalism by investigating these spaces and the activities that take place on them. For instance, this dissertation has shown the relevance that homepages have for journalists, and how they dedicate more time to strategizing how to organize their homepages than thinking about how and when to distribute content through social networks. In social networks, they want to be first; with their homepages, they want to show who they are. This information was conveyed to me through my observation of journalists' practices and their conversations in the workplace. Thus, while studies such as David Ryfe's *Can Journalism Survive?* suggest that we should go beyond the newsrooms and examine other actors implicated in constructing the news, such as bloggers or activists, this dissertation has proven that in the initial stages of a news story life, final decisions are always made within the same place: the newsroom.

In its consideration of journalists' relationship with audiences and *produsers* and the delegation of tasks, this dissertation has described situations similar to those presented by Singer et al. in *Participatory Journalism*: a defence of their profession was repeatedly raised by journalists when asked in interviews about sharing the gatekeeping role with their audiences. As Hermida explains in this volume, this behaviour suggests that journalism is a

well-established profession, with clearly defined obligations and practices. However, I have found more openness to dialoguing with audiences than what Singer et al. describe in their study, though admittedly, in practice, this was only the case at *eldiario.es*. Whereas Singer et al. found variations in attitudes among journalists, I have also found them between organizations. This can indicate that it is not only the individual predisposition towards UGC that matters, but also the mandate of the organization. As a result, I believe that we should continue studying and contrasting the practices of news organizations with different natures and editorial positioning in order to fully grasp the relevance of UGC in current journalism.

Finally, although journalists reject the idea that they are sharing their gatekeeping capacities with their audiences, and despite the fact that news organizations build the structure of their agendas around what has been called in this dissertation the *official agenda*, none of this means that audiences aren't having an effect on the life cycle of news. News should no longer be understood as finished products that, once out of the hands of the journalists, are unable to mutate; rather, they are vivid entities that can be easily brought into question and resignified. They can be resuscitated, contradicted, and publicly mocked by common pedestrians; news organizations are no longer solely responsible for the life of a news item anymore. For instance, Delia Rodriguez analyzes a common phenomenon in online publications that she calls 'the Lazarus effect': news stories that were published some time ago are resuscitated by internet users who share them through social networks, bringing them back to the public debate – and to the 'most read' sections of the newspapers where they were published. It seems that nowadays the news life cycle takes place in at least two parts: the first, under the domain of news organizations and controlled by journalists; the second, in the

unstructured, apparently non-hierarchical world of the *produsers*, and both steps influence and complement each other.

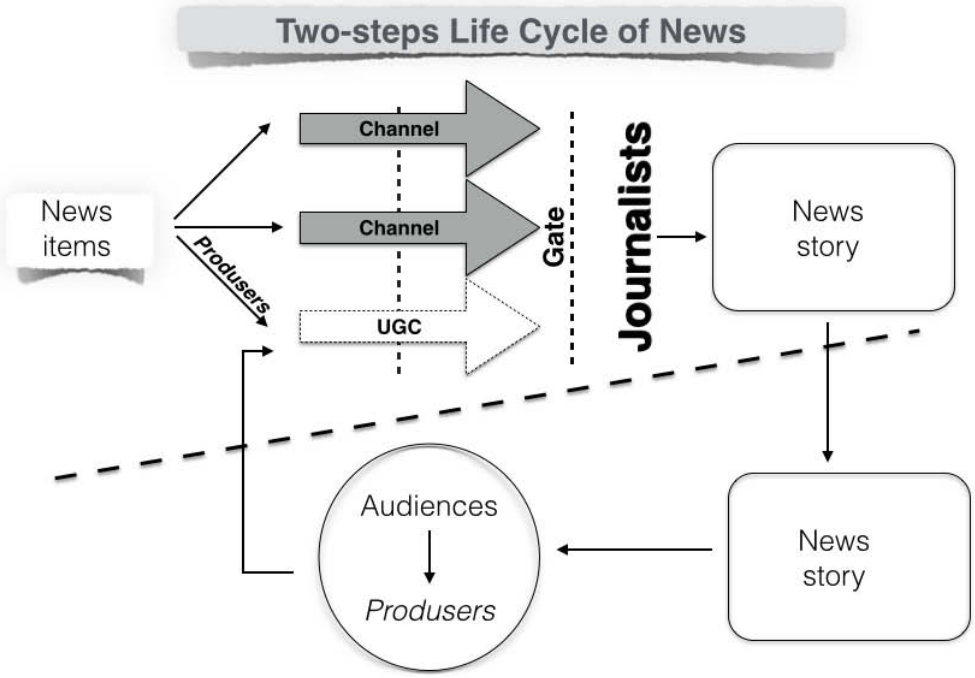

Figure 10: The Two-Steps Life Cycle of News

4. Limitations

Given all these new actors and considerations about the life of a news story, the main limitation of this dissertation lies in its exclusive focus on journalists. However, this study aimed to contribute to a tradition and a body of literature that since the mid-twentieth-century has concentrated on the study of newswork and the figure of the journalist. For these reasons, I decided to follow the traditional triangulation of methods (observation, interviews, textual analysis) that most researchers have applied when conducting newsroom ethnographies.

Although I was provided with a very rich and vast array of material that helped me understand how journalists deal with UGC, there were nuances and specificities in relation to the journalists' work that I was unable to grasp since they are not visible to the eyes or audible to the ears. These are the things that happen on the journalists' screens, in their instant messaging chats, on their personal Facebook accounts, in their Twitter Direct Messages. In the newsrooms, there are moments of complete silence where the action, negotiations, and decision-making are all happening virtually. Of course, it is possible to learn about these practices in interviews, but in this case our information and knowledge about these activities becomes limited to journalists' self-reflections and perceptions. Thus, there is a need to rethink how to perform the newsrooms ethnographies to include these activities without being too intrusive and respecting the journalists' privacy.[60]

In order to address some of these online activities, I decided to conduct what can be described as virtual ethnographies: while being in the newsroom observing and listening to the journalists, I also followed their activity on Twitter. This was particularly useful at *eldiario.es*, but it proved less interesting in the other two newsrooms. Again, depending on the news organization and the journalists' approach to UGC, their Twitter accounts will have more or less (relevant) public activity. Moreover, while at *eldiario.es* and *El Huffington Post* it was easy to trace the Twitter activity of most of the journalists, at *El País*, I found a much more complex situation and an impossibility to effectively track all journalists contributing to the current news sections. Hence, these limitations can be extended to other studies dealing with

[60] In this regard, it is important to note that computers in the workspace are spaces where both private and personal communications as well as work assignment and job-related communications take place. Tracking the journalists' computer activity with, for instance, tracking software would be an aggressive and ethically questionable method that I doubt not many journalists would personally allow.

the observation of computer-mediated interaction, where gaining access is a delicate issue and the boundaries are blurrier.

The textual analysis also showed certain limitations. Despite serving as a great tool for gaining a sense of how often journalists make use of certain types of UGC (especially *produsers*' footage and *produsers*' experiences), it was not sufficient to fully grasp how others are used. That is, while it was easy to identify when a journalist was using a picture or a video by a *produser* to illustrate a story, recognizing whether a piece had been developed following a *produsers*' story was an impossible mission, since most of the time, the individual who provided the initial lead is not identified. This limitation in the textual analysis was overcome to a certain extent through interviews with the journalists where they were asked about their specific practices in relation to pieces drawing upon UGC. However, it would be valuable to find a more empirical way to examine how journalists deal with these types of materials.

In sum, while we should continue conducting studies that follow the examples of the traditional newsroom ethnographies, it is necessary to rethink the methods applied in these ethnographies so that they adequately address both new practices and new actors.

Finally, although the case studies selected have proven useful (the variety of approaches to UGC has given an account of the different ways of looking at the phenomenon), every selection results in remnants left behind. It is important to note at this point that the three newsrooms under study can be categorized as leftist to various degrees. Thus, one could wonder if the political approaches of news organizations also affect the way journalists manage UGC. Nevertheless, the objective of this dissertation was never to demonstrate the definitive roles of UGC, but rather to explore different ways of dealing with UGC, without suggesting that these are the only ones.

5. Further studies

Considering the limitations of this dissertation, further studies seeking to contribute to the sociology of news production should consider incorporating literature into their theoretical framework that examines other actors implicated in making the news. As seen, the life of a news story doesn't end when it is published by a news organization; instead, the set of relevant practices performed by *produser*s / audiences can potentially reshape and redirect a story, sometimes impacting journalists' work as well. It would be interesting for future studies to track the life of a news story by examining the different actors involved in developing it. For instance, Domingo, Masip, and Costera (2015) suggest using actor-network theory (ANT) "to problematize and trace the diversity of actors involved in changing news production and news use" (54). ANT proposes to examine both human and non-human actors, referred to as actants, which form news networks that define the production, circulation and usage of news. In this way, newsrooms "are not the centre of specific news networks, but just one of the places where it is reasonable to start tracing how news is collectively used" (56).

Following this line of reasoning, and returning to the idea of news construction as a two-step process that takes place first in the newsroom and later after a news story has been published, it would be a good idea for future studies to track different actors, or actants, throughout the life cycle of a news item. That is, future research could investigate how a news item travels through different gates and makes it into the news, to then start a new life in cyberspace where it is reshaped and redistributed. A study as such would add new layers and dimensions to the body of literature of the sociology of news production. To achieve this, researchers must consider new methods for exploring the role of technologies along this *news journey*.

Moreover, while some efforts have already been made in this direction, we should continue to explore the effects of web metrics in journalists' practices and in the ways news is told. Whereas the usage of certain types of UGC has been proved problematic in some situations and verification is not always possible, web metrics appear to offer a 'safer' form of audiences' input whose use does not necessarily compromise journalists' norms and values. In this sense, it would be necessary to analyse the role of sections dedicated to viral and highly shareable content that are being developed by many news organizations.

To sum up, researchers examining newswork should consider the new actors and technologies at play in news making, as well as new methods to study these new actors and technologies when designing their projects. Although we still need to continue observing and analysing journalists' actions, as they are the main actors responsible for constructing the news, it is also necessary to closely investigate other elements (no matter their nature) impacting and influencing their decisions, as well as examine those audiences members in charge of reshaping the news. In order to be able to conduct such studies, future research of this kind should explore and implement innovative research methods that will allow them to contribute to the new ethnographic body of literature.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Do you read the comments that your readers leave in the stories you have written?

2. Do you consider the opinions reflected of these comments when writing new stories?

3. Have these comments helped you some time with the coverage of a story?

4. How have the comments in the news changed your working practices?

5. Do you see any difference if you compare it with your pre-internet jobs?

6. How often do you check online social networks such as Twitter or Facebook?

7. Hoy do you decide who to follow?

8. Do you use contents –images, videos, texts- that have been shared on the online social networks for your work?

9. How do you check their veracity?

10. Do you discuss and debate with your readers about the stories you write?

11. Have you ever had any problems with the use of user-generated contents?

12. Have you ever started covering a story you heard about on the online social networks?

13. How do you think the online social networks are affecting the agenda setting?

14. Do you discuss in the newsroom meetings about you have read/seen in the online social networks?

15. Do you think journalists share their role of gatekeepers with audiences?

16. How the online social networks have changed your journalistic routines?

17. How the online social networks have modified your relationship with your readers?

18. How the new possibilities for audiences' participation have changed you relationship with your subscribers?

19. Do comments of subscribers have any kind of priority/ special treatment?

Appendix B

Textual analysis summary:

The homepages of *El País*, *eldiario.es*, and *El Huffington Post* were methodically examined from July 7 to July 20 of 2014, once a day, between 11 a.m and 2 p.m (Montreal time). The textual analysis included the 10 top news stories on the newspapers homepages. A total of 420 news pieces were scrutinized in search of UGC. Given the mutable nature of online news and UGC, the selected stories and UGC found might have been altered after the analysis. The following elements were considered in the analysis:

(1) the place where the news story was situated within the homepage;
(2) the genre and section of the news story;
(3) the type of UGC inserted (Tweet, YouTube video, Facebook comment, Flickr photograph, etc);
(4) how UGC was inserted (as raw material, as a quote, etc.);
(5) relationship between UGC and other content (was it the main source? was a quote added at the end of the news story?, etc.).

	El País	***eldiario.es***	***El Huffington Post***
(1) Situation within the homepage	With the exception of a breaking news story about a plane crash that was placed as the lead story of the website on July 17th, what little evidence of UGC found had been inserted in news stories placed in the second half positions among the first 10.	Only once as a lead news story (same breaking news story about a plane crash). Rest of news pieces situated in different positions among the first 10 (from position 2 (the most prominent after the headlining story) to 10.	All kinds of positions.
(2) Genre / Section	National Politics and International sections	Technology, International, National Politics, Society	Soft news, National, International, Sports, Technology
(3) Type of UGC	*Produsers* experiences: mostly tweets of the protagonist of a news story. For instance, on July 8th, El País published a story about a fraud case in a	*Produsers* footage: shared on Flickr and YouTube. Normally verified by activists groups, NGO's or news agencies. For example, on July 8th, eldiario.es published a	*Produsers* experiences: shared on Twitter, Facebook and news comments sections. Reactions of sports team supporters and fans of celebrities, but also the experiences of individuals

	technology company called Gowex and included tweets by the CEO of the company, Jenaro García, main responsible of the fraud. El País also published, as part of their coverage, a letter that Mr. García distributed on the internet explaining his side of the story. Most media organizations in the country (including eldiario.es and El Huffington Post) used these same materials for the coverage of the story. On July 12th, El País also used the tweet of the CEO of an oil company in a story about the price of oil in Venezuela. In this case, the tweet was quoted and not embedded, and it was used to start the story.	special report on a series of demonstrations that happened in Cataluña under the motto 'Rodea el Congreso' (Surround the Congress). In this report, YouTube videos and photographs, some by independent photojournalists, others published by the 15M movement, were inserted as part of the coverage of the story. On July 9th, another story on police aggressions to citizens during the protests that took place in Madrid under the motto 'Rodea el Congreso' also included videos posted by the 15M movement, recorded by citizens who assisted to the protests. Also, on July 10th, eldiario.es used some images of users of bionic legs published on Flickr to illustrate a story about how people use technology to surpass their limitations. *Produsers* experiences: shared on Twitter. The tweets found were written by politicians, and then out of the scope of this study.	affected by politically relevant events. For example, on July 10th, El Huffington Post published a piece about a concert of the One Direction band and embedded tweets by fans of the band. In the same line, on July 13th, El Huffington Post used tweets of soccer fans in the live coverage of the World Cup match between Germany and Argentina. In the hard news sections, on July 18th, El Huffington Post included snapshots of Facebook comments with Spanish soldiers testimonies in a story about the incarceration of lieutenant Luis Gonzalo Segura for his critiques to the army in a book. *Produsers* stories: YouTube videos used for soft news stories. An explanatory YouTube video about a hard news story, used as the central topic of the piece. For instance, on July 7th, El Huffington post used a YouTube video where an airplanes aficionado explains some features of the Spanish airport of El Prat to start an explanatory piece about an ongoing investigation on a forced landing in that airport. *Produsers* footage: YouTube and Vine videos from citizens and NGOs.

			For instance, on July 7th, El Huffington Post published a story about the trial against some participants on the 'Rodea el Congreso' protests in Cataluña and used a video about the protests posted by an NGO on YouTube to illustrate the piece.
(4) How it was inserted	Tweets were both quoted and embedded	Raw material	Raw material
(5) Relationship UGC – other content	Mainly used as quotes – it seems journalists weren't able to obtain any other quotes by these individuals.	UGC used like any other source, to illustrate a news story, to initiate news stories about politicians' reactions, or to introduce a person involved in the story.	UGC used as quotes in hard news, as main source for entertainment. Videos to illustrate news stories.

Appendix C

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Irene Serrano Vazquez
Department:	Faculty of Arts and Science \Communication Studies
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	'Silence. Journalists Talking': An Analysis of Audiences' Participation in Making the News Through Journalists' Practices

Certification Number: 30002457

Valid From: January 19, 2015 to: January 18, 2016

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Irene Serrano Vazquez

Department: Faculty of Arts & Science / Communication Studies

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: 'Silence. Journalists Talking': An Analysis of Audiences' Participation in Making the News Through Journalists' Practices

Certification Number: 30002457

Valid From: December 11, 2013 to: December 10, 2014

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee