

Journalism in the Digital Age. The Wide Ramifications of the Fourth Revolution: The Digital Revolution or The New IT World Order

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Our world, as we know it, is changing. This year's "World Economic Forum", held in Davos stated that "we have to build a common future in a fractured world", something much easier to say than to achieve. We all agree that we are in the middle of the Fourth Economic Revolution which is the Digital one. But are we there? Are we prepared to face the multiple aspects (social, economic, education, living, etc.) that this paradigm brings to us? Concepts like globalization, mobility, a new world (order?), social networking, identity (national or individual) and many others are the new buzz words which govern our lives. In this paper, we shall approach journalism from the perspective of the digital age. Are journalists still the mirrors of their times? And if yes, what kind of mirrors? And, at the end, how has our so noble profession changed in the Digital Age? Finally, playing devil's advocate, I have one more question: does the profession of "journalist" still exist?

When we speak about "journalism" we think, obviously, about the "morning paper" our parents used to read during breakfast. There was the "journal", the news, the headlines, the discussions, the boys running on their bikes throwing the newspapers (we saw this scene in so many movies!) on the doors steps, in brief, an entire world which does not exist anymore.

Now, we might see another scene: young people hurrying up in the early morning to their work, with a smart phone in one hand and in the other a coffee which they sip absently, running fast on the titles written on their small screens. They do not have time to go further, to read more than the title already served via social networking (FB, Twitter, IG etc.), blogs, news

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feed, or any other short messaging tools! Who is providing the news? It does not matter! Is it trustworthy? Who cares? And so, the reader / viewer / listener becomes a USER!

It is a transformation that a very few people are aware of. It has occurred unnoticed and has been naturally embraced by the entire planet. How has it come to this? For a better understanding, we have to look closely at some facts and figures speaking about the wide spread of mobile devices and of the huge market (in terms of money) that this new way of life (we do business on the mobile phone, we pay our bills, we have news and of course, games and entertainment in our pockets) represents. To sum up, our lives have moved in the device the size of our hand. As the song once said, “we hold the whole world in our hands”! So, let the figures and the cold statistics speak:

Just a few facts and figures:

- By 2020 more than 30 billion devices will be connected to the internet: business and communications platforms and ecosystems! A new market place of functions and information with a profound impact on the ways we live, we do business, we provide / consume entertaining, we connect to the world;
- Some key words: AI (Artificial Intelligence), ML (Machine Learning), IoT (Internet of Things), VR and AR (Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality), Block chain Technologies and virtual currencies, Robotics, 3D Printing, Cloud, Social Media, Mobility, etc. They are changing our lives dramatically!
- By 2020, spending for such technologies will increase by 18% per year reaching \$2.1 trillions!
- By 2021 half of the global economy will be impacted by the digital economy and by the digital transformation!
- Social Media + Mobility + Communications = the triangle of the fundamental change in our jobs.

So, are we journalists? I do not think so anymore. We are just users and behind the keyboards there are incredible applications using the above mentioned technologies that have completely reshaped our job. Somewhere, on the planet, there are huge server farms, huge data centers, unbelievable fast computers (even quantum computers) who store, analyze, draw conclusions and make a reality out of what is called Artificial Intelligence. Sometimes I think it is a little bit ironic to name the computer intelligence an artificial one compared to the “homo sapiens” brain which is assumed to be “natural”... Not for long, as some scientists would say!

The Traditional Media (Written / Audio / Video) and the “Tsunami” Technology

How long and challenging is the road from “readers / viewers/ listeners“ to “users”? In our world, we speak a lot about “false news” and “fake news”, two terms which are not identical. Is there a place for us as journalists to make our living in the Digital Age? The rough answer is “YES”, but there are some issues to be taken into consideration, because as our public has changed, and the new generations have arrived, we also have to change our ways of thinking, our mentality, our styles ultimately. We are no longer in the golden age of the journalist as a “king” of the news, the “guru” of opinions quoted during family dinners. We have a widespread competition coming from everywhere in the online media, professionals or amateurs, impossible to ignore! So, what can we do in order to be able to make our living, name and reputation in the Digital Age? And let us take into consideration that the traditional media (TV, Radio, Newspapers) are going down, struggling with huge financial losses, trying to make a mix between online and classic (which is a dead model already) and being in the impossibility to change to the new requirements. But, do not worry, there are some recommendations and steps to move towards the new path.

Here we have some main ideas to be taken into consideration:

1. Do not think in terms of readers / viewers / listeners anymore: they are all users;
2. Real time interaction; move fast, deliver the information quickly; if not, someone else will surely jump into it!
3. New business models: how to make your living from the new journalism? How to make a profitable business? Traditional media - like newspapers, radio or TV – are on a scary roller-coaster ride. They are struggling with a loss of audience, revenue and attention;
4. So, this is the moment to monetize this drain of money towards your own business;
5. Do NOT fall in the biggest trap: the lost revenues from the traditional media will not come automatically in your pockets, because you address users and not...
6. Who are your competitors? Where to look for them? Vlogs? Blogs? Social Media? Internet (websites)? YouTube?
7. Do not think that the internet (generally speaking) is cheap! It is a very expensive tool...if you want to really make the difference!

8. Decide what you want to be: journalist or “influencer”;

9. There was a time when journalists could “put out the newspaper and hope for the best”. Now, you share a piece of news or you comment on your vlog / blog / social media page, etc., and two fundamental things are happening simultaneously: the cascade of comments (good or bad) and, more important, the traces you leave behind. NOTHING is lost online! It is a public space! (the paper can burn, the physical archive can be lost, but never the bytes!)

10. Who owns the data and the information? Good question! Answers?

11. The tension between the power of the new digital players and the diminished power of traditional media organizations is a reality! Whichever side you are on, remember: “Talent is a gift, character is a choice” John C. Maxwell.

12. Are there any trends? One of them is the Networked Journalism, a concept where professionals and amateurs are working together to produce the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, and perspectives.

13. Freelancer? Is it easier? You are not a unique snowflake! Someone else might publish the same information! Just do it better and different!

14. Journalism as a hobby? Or can you do it as a “jobby”?

15. And finally.... Twitter only matters to journalists. And tech folks. All of the civilians are on Facebook.

Still valid remain the core values of journalism: to filter, edit, check, pack, analyze, and comment – fundamentals of verification that have existed for decades and will not become obsolete.

Fake News – The New Face of an Old War!

It has been one of the most hotly-debated socio-political topics of recent years. And of course, it is more and more associated with the 2016 USA elections. Just to put in other words, these are called “post truth” and / or “alternative facts”.

How we can define fake news?

1. Intentional false information of hoaxes spread by the so called “yellow journalism”;

2. Catching headlines or entirely fabricated news stories to increase readership, online sharing (social networking) and internet click revenues;

3. Information written and spread with the precise intent to mislead, to confuse, to derail from the real purpose;

4. News that can undermine the real media coverage, making it more difficult for the professionals to share the real story;

5. The rise of the social media and the increase in mobility is the perfect channel to go beyond borders and to reach wider audiences in order to intoxicate the users with fake news;

6. Who, at the end of the day, started the game? The advertisers! But of course there are also other factors to be taken into consideration: the consumers behavior and necessities, the false buying incentives, the sources of information (reputable websites, well established media, social media...etc.);

7. Fake news could be not entirely fake! For a greater impact has to have a small truth inside!

8. A weapon of war with the enemies?

9. The non-profit organizations to combat fake news and not the Governments! It is a matter of trust!

10. And finally, but more important, a question: how can we balance the freedom of information with the real impact of fake news and with filtering and controlling the information flux?

This is the QUESTION! And with no easy answer. Because, at the end all depends on the level of education (of the user), on the source(s) of information he / she has (mainstream media can be held accountable if a piece of fake news is spread!), and on the curiosity he / she has to check the information from other sources as well!

The Digital Age means change. And this change is like a quantum leap. It is not smooth and easy, it is not predictable in the sense of the trends or of its direction. But here it is! And it requires profound changes from us, or within ourselves. We can no longer be the journalists we used to be! And we cannot act with half measures hoping that somehow the good old times (with the smell of the printing newspaper to be read at the morning coffee) will come back! It will not! Are we prepared?