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Co-creation and Curation of Contents: An Indissoluble Relationship?

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Abstract   From the popularization of co-creation as a marketing strategy that enables the generation of joint activities between organizations and users, this phenomenon is explored in the media, especially in digital native ones. Co-creation allows the participation of the public in the ideation, development and marketing of journalistic products, but for this situation to continue guaranteeing the right of citizens to receive truthful information, it is essential to cure content. How the media filters information produced by audiences, how journalistic and non-journalistic products differ and how co-creation could affect misinformation are some of the questions answered in this chapter.

1   Co-creation of Journalistic Products

Co-creation has gone from marketing to journalism. Just as marketing complemented the purely economic sceneries with others linked to social environments or the transmission of ideas from the 70s of the past century, companies started, especially from the 2010 decade [30], to implement strategies based on the generation of joint activities with their clients. Journalism companies are no exception to these types of practices and have involved the public in the creation of the products they offer, especially digital native media.

Ideation, design and production of services and contents are increasingly entrusted in sectors to the collaboration between the producer and the consumer [22], so that consumers constitute nowadays a fundamental part of the organizations and the distinction of their roles is considered obsolete in production and consumption [16, 17]. Products have a greater added value if those who consume them participate in its

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creation process [26, 29] and, thus, the development of individualized experiences based on co-creation suppose a great competitive advantage for the coming years [33].

Co-creation implies, then, that users become collaborators of the companies, so that organizations make value proposals instead of creating them, and consumers themselves are the ones who co-create [21]. This implies that marketing is not directed to the market, as it was traditionally, and it is directed towards users more than ever, because it is involved in the marketing activities to co-create value [27], so that there is a mutual benefit. Some investigators are even talking about a new stage in marketing, which they call collaborative marketing, where any stakeholder is welcomed provided that it proposes a collaboration that could be successful for the organization [31].

Co-creation allows consumers to co-build a self-experience in a personalized context, but also different for each one of them, which supposes, on the other hand, that they could help each other when it comes to solving problems, because partic-ipative forums are promoted [1, 29]. In previous investigations [33] it has been proven that in the specific case of digital native media, several fundamental elements are needed so the public can co-create products. First of all, co-creation could not have been possible without technology [8, 10, 15, 23, 31, 36] which allows users to comment, recommend and participate in the elaboration of products. Technology enables consumers to empower themselves [28] to the point of creating content, but for this to happen a web architecture is needed to favor the visibility of participative spaces and to guarantee its accessibility, because the public produce content moti-vated for its self-satisfaction and knowing that they count with a place where they can share data they have [34], which favors the existence of co-creation practices in corporative spaces instead of other external spaces such as social media.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy [29] synthesize that any co-creative process must be based on dialogue, access with its users and knowledge of the risk that co-creating must imply and the transparency between media and co-creators. From these consid-erations we can deduct that co-creation must be understood as a voluntary process and that in any case it should compel or force the consumer to participate if he or she does not wish to do so. Some recent investigations [35] conclude precisely that public demands more adequate spaces for public debate and interaction with jour-nalists or the editorial department, and not so much production options or personal-ization of contents. Current co-creation processes must transcend the initial stage of co-production [3, 9] and give the possibility of co-creation in different areas of the company, in development (ideation + renovation) as well as in production (planning + execution) and marketing (promotion + distribution) [22].

2 Does Co-creation of Journalistic Products Imply Content Curation?

During the 90s, when Internet is no longer limited and the web becomes massive, users have access to an unmanageable volume of contents. Rapidly, the figure of curators goes from art to digital contents. GeoCities constitutes a fundamental antecedent for the curation of contents starting from the easiness to manage them according to the interests and personal selections [2]. In this case, despite not being curated by professionals or experts in information, contents were administered and selected by users with thematic interests and amateur knowledge.

Journalistic products present a particularity with respect to other types of companies or sectors. Journalistic co-creation does not suppose that any citizen can become a journalist or that audiences are necessarily capable to produce journalistic pieces according to the technical demands of the profession and the ethical and deontological regulations. Therefore, the public can co-create products facilitating graphic or audiovisual material, data or testimonies, etc. which provide value to the story created by the reporter—even an online survey can determine the configuration of the topics of a media company [12]—and which compensates the impossibility of the media to have a reporter in each place in which something is going on.

Nevertheless, when there is total co-creation, digital media habilitate spaces in its corporate sites—fundamentally on the Web—so users can publish and spread information they know. In this case there could be several alternatives, from media which grants that space to the public so they can submit their own story to others which habilitate their spaces under editorial supervision. In the first case there is greater creative liberty for audiences, but a questionable journalistic accuracy, because that information has not been submitted to journalistic filters and the media accepts no liability for the contents published in those spaces as happens, for example, in the French digital native *Mediapart*.

Another alternative consists in editorial supervision prior to publishing the co-created contents. In 2000 Yeonho Oh creates the Korean information website *OhmyNews*. The experience suggests that every citizen is a reporter. However, the collaboration is published under the edition of professionals that the media refers to as *news guerilla*. *OhmyNews* consumes and creates its information jointly with users if they are registered. That allows it to send news which are published in Korean, English and Japanese. The creators of *OhmyNews* present a website as a 3.0 journalistic experience or citizen journalism, even though they actively participate in the care of quality of the information.

This is where curation of contents has a fundamental role. It is a concept that is introduced in academic studies from 2010 after having initiated its entrance in the professional sector shortly before [11]. The first definitions over curation refer to a professional profile in charge of selecting and sharing the best and most relevant content over a specific issue, completing thus the function which is done by algorithms [4]. Before this McAdams [24] had alerted over the need to make curation

in Internet journalism, so he recommended the example of museum curators, who selected the most representative based on their experience and knowledge.

In the concrete case of media, curation, along with reporting and the traditional edition, configurate a new journalism [7], but the curator who works in journalism is required to contribute with judgment to become more than just a collector of contents [13]. When we refer to curation in co-created journalistic contents, among the practices which identify López-Meri and Casero-Ripollés [18] for content curators—recommendation of their own contents, of reporters from the competition, non-mediatic actors, alternative contents to those spread by the media, verifying data and information, and debunk rumors—, recommendation of products created by non-mediatic actors or alternative to those traditionally spread by the media would fit among their roles, even though, without doubt, verification of data and information, as well as debunking rumors, result in essential tasks to guarantee the right to an accurate information. Thus, it is also necessary that the curation task is made by a reporter or a communicator [6]. The value provided by co-creators dwells in the role of the sources, but they cannot be requested the same accuracy and professionalism required to reporters because they are not.

2.1 What Does Curation in the Informative Process Mean?

Professionals who interact with citizens who collaborate in different journalistic websites were displaced from their traditional duties. In front of the great volume of circulating data, the management of the informative process is more and more mediated by second-hand sources which publicly intervene through digital platforms. Reporters, facing the new configuration of their jobs, are secluded in their offices, away from first sources [19].

Due to budget matters, from team formation or from proximity with events, it is almost impossible to give an account of the incidents that rapidly gain platforms and social agenda. Online collaboration and the ability of life transmissions allow instant access to almost all events. Coverage, the main ingredient for news construction, remains greatly in the hands of those who are in the place, with a mobile device and being part of some digital network.

Journalists' contacts with traditional sources are made by guidelines and with specific means. In the same way, professional coverage of events is made in cases where it has been planned with enough time. For the rest of events, which feed breaking news and last-minute coverage, users are who contribute with information, photos, videos or testimonies. The journalistic task is not anymore to access to the source in search of information but to verify the data submitted by users, as primary sources for the informative system.

The news, aesthetic and editorial criteria of users of networks not always coincide with those professionally agreed or the with the corporately chosen for a particular product. The debate over the abilities of citizens to capture events and their conditions for publication seem to impede the circulation of their products, are shared through

personal accounts and force traditional media to negotiate with the users' interests so as not to lose audience [20].

Information users cease to be loyal consumers of the traditional mediatic brands. In their journey they access to the same mediatized sources which arrive at the same time as journalists. They arrive at elaborated news from integrating nodes of thematic interest. In those nodes, information is shared that afterwards circulates through networks in which their members participate. Informative consumption is not given any more exclusively navigating through journalistic websites. Access is given by interactions made with peers within the same network.

Chaotic navigation and intentional diffusion of some information [14] brings closer to an unexpected discovery process. Serendipity is rescued by a good part of studies that work over digital coverage events. Consumers' attitude is inclined not to search for information, but to find it. In the field of theories over journalism this is called incidental consumption of news [5].

While COVID-19 pandemic took back in time some consumptions to traditional ways of information and increased the number of users who pay for professional information [25], the change of habits in searching news became first screen consumption of information from the search engine, or in the best of cases, it is shared by acquaintances and friends who receive it. Digital platforms and messenger services are the main spaces to access information. Confidence is not expressed towards media or reporters but, in the majority of cases, to whom circulates among their network of contacts.

3   Methodology

To understand the co-creation and curation processes in digital media, seven cases of digital native media in Spanish in Spain and Latin America were considered (Table 1). At first, an exploratory work was made which took us to the selection of ten representative media in the Ibero-american culture and curation of online contents.

An analysis of content was made over them which allowed us to adjust the sample to seven cases which constituted the second phase of the work: the instance of in-depth interviews with who produce other media. A questionnaire was designed to make this with open questions that were answered by the responsible person of *Cerosetenta*, *El Pitazo*, *Curarnos*, *Lado B*, *GK*, *Mínimos*, *elDiario.es* and *El Surtidor*.

Those answers were compared with the analysis of content to organize a matrix of analysis that allowed to establish the relations between the producers and users. Starting from the study of these relations the following variables can be established for the interpretation of data. Citizen journalism, cooperation of users, relation with the sources, checking and metadata, traffic and algorithms are the variables established for the analysis of contents and the collaboration of producers.

Table 1 Sample

Digital media and contact	Country	Platform
Lado B Mely Arellano (co-director)	Mexico	Web: ladobe.com.mx
El Pitazo César Batiz (director)	Venezuela	Web: elpitazo.net
Cerosetenta Alejandro Giraldo (director)	Colombia	Web: cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co
El Surtidor Alejandro Valdez (director)	Paraguay	Web: elsurti.com
GK Isabella Ponce (co-founder)	Ecuador	Web and newsletter: gk.city
elDiario.es Ander Oliden (chief of information)	Spain	Web: eldiario.es
Mínimos Fernando Casella (founder)	Argentina	Newsletter: minimos.com.ar
Curarnos Pere Ortín (founder)	Spain, Colombia, Mexico	WhatsApp

Studied digital native media platforms answered to diverse users and realities, as well as submission formats and varied support (websites, newsletters, WhatsApp or blogs) and constitute the opening doors for active participation and generation of journalistic contents.

4   Results

Co-creation from citizen's journalism, understood as cooperation of users, is a process of contact between the editorial department of the media and the sources and this is the way in which *GK*, *Lado B* and *Cerosetenta* work, because they do not have an explicit section for publishing works of the readers-users, but they maintain a strict curation for external participations through applying regulations so the texts comply with the minimum quality standards required. In this way, there is a two-way process of editorial work: to accompany from the beginning the construction of the story or to send a staff reporter or associated to make the verification work, survey of data and writing in different formats.

From the seven digital media studied, only three, *elDiario.es*, *El Pitazo* and *El Surtidor* have sections explicitly dedicated to the participation of users with their journalistic texts, even though they recognize that they have a long way to go for integrating formats and diversifying them, but the process is common: a professional reporter reviews the information, makes a follow-up with the creator and verifies that all data to be published is real. In the case of blogs from associates to *elDiario.es*,

the team has an opinion column that oversees verifying the compliance with the regulations and editorial policies of the digital media.

The ways to participate with themes, initiatives and submission of productions are varied. These include from the contact and submission by email, to writing from the platform in blogs and WhatsApp contact or via social media to the integration in collaborative platforms, such as the so-called *la minga* in *El Surtidor*, which is a brainstorming method to establish a theme and where all the offers are valid and integrated in the creation of the journalistic product.

Participation of those who do not belong to the editorial department team is established through the platform and the creation of an account as collaborator or member, who contributes and is a part of the business model of the digital media. In relation to the active participation of citizens and the generation of stories and information, the representatives of the media consulted, coincide in that with a proper formation by the editor, any citizen can contribute with quality texts. Therefore, they are opened to publishing or participating with information that will be valued and validated for the construction of the informative agenda of each media company, that has a specific focus and has moved away from generalism and daily news.

In this way, the relation with sources is a continuous verification and contrasting, because in many cases, the issues are suggested from the needs of the communities through one of its representatives, who suggest the stories and the editorial team or an associate writes according to the editorial regulations of the media. Checking of information is an indispensable process for all digital media, even for those who have participative spaces such as blogs and newsletters, formats in which the contribution of collaborators are constantly verified, because in their editorial policies express it as a deontological principle and that strengthens the credibility between the community which consumes and follows the diffused information.

Collaborators of media, except those who participate in blogs of *elDiario.es*, are a part of and wide network of professionals linked with the specific themes of the journalistic agendas of each media, that is the directive teams establish the relations of assignment of themes and formats with who do not belong to the editorial department. Thus, digital media are based on the direct collaboration of experts, much more than the spontaneous citizen participation, because from the editorial and information departments, the quality of content is fundamental and for the construction of stories, reports and specials, the work shared and with multiple visions is the most adequate to understand the analyzed reality. An example of this is *GK*'s initiative, having a section of feminine sources validated in various issues, as a network of experts to be consulted and thus open a spectrum of expert voices that are taken as valid and different sources, to equilibrate the informative access.

While journalistic projects in digital platforms, metadata and the relation with other algorithms is necessary, they do not depend directly on them. For all media, its growth and exposure facing searches and search engines is completely organic, because the relationship with their readers-users is the main source of traffic and not clickbaits or paid advertising. In all cases the interviewee considers that in doing so they would betray the essence of the journalistic project and that its users and collaborators would become aware of how the flow and traffic is managed. They are

not behind an accelerated growth of followers in networks, but they want an in-depth reading in their digital spaces where stories are anchored, because they consider that their members, subscribers and collaborators are citizens that do not fall into disinformation or manipulation or information bias.

Active participation of citizenship is indispensable from the various forms of inclusion. Mainly, in generating agendas and submitting texts, especially opinion and analysis, because all the ones we consulted consider that their users combat misinformation with their suggestions and productions since in the digital spaces there is a greater critical reflection facing informative consumption.

Curarnos is a particularly exceptional case, it had an ephemeral life and in its diffusion they adopted the most usual consumption of citizens: mobility and WhatsApp ubiquity associated to a telephone number in Spain, through which cultural contents were submitted and users were in charge of the diffusion and replication of information within their network and contacts.

During this initiative's functioning, users had no direct or indirect relationship with the creation of contents, but they were indispensable in the way of circulating. There resided its active participation, considered by one of its founders, as essential now of choosing who were included in the beginning to form part of the circulation network of content. The same producers and writers of the projects were the ones to define who would be their first contacts for submission. That was their only link with readers, that afterwards they replicated and maintained the contact through the telephone number, as their only way.

The experience, that could be understood as a case of diffusion or viralizing contents, places the users in an indispensable role so that the material can circulate, be shared and disseminated. Even so, the most usual formats for participation of the users are texts, expressed in blogs and, in the case of *El Surtidor*, are focused on audios and graphics, with memes and illustrations, due to its origin and aesthetic style as digital native media. Also, professional intervention is indispensable for arranging the information that socially circulates through digital networks. In the case of *Mínimos*, the publication by subscription sets out the rules of the game in the section.

Mínimos occupies the curation space from which interacts with users organizing the issues over which they look for information, through submitting electronic bulletins, in which the readers-users participate. *El Pitazo* makes a network from incorporating allies that allow to reach the whole territory with professional coverage. Its objective is to "guarantee the rights of the information to the sectors of the population economically less favored in Venezuela" and for that, it generates associations of professionals engaged in networks. Nevertheless, it does not include the underprivileged as sources or collaborators, but it guarantees the professional quality of the information it considers relevant for them.

All the interviewees recognize that co-creation and citizen participation must be greater in digital media, accompanied by a continuous formation so that citizens can have the journalistic point of view and not the private complaint or to look for a personal benefit.

5   Conclusions

While curation appears as a loan from the artistic and marketing systems to the information industry, there are not many cases found with respect to co-creation. Mostly, information volume that circulates in digital platforms is so great that it complicates its checking and organizing and that constitutes a preoccupation for whoever tries to establish interactions with users.

For the moment, while everybody thinks that they can learn to communicate and that citizens' participation is important, they tend to prefer being them those who control the quality and scope of what is published. At some point, the relation between asymmetry that journalists establish in their traditional forms of relationship with their audiences is sustained in the digital ecosystem. To the extent they allow collaboration for co-creation, they reserve curation for themselves.

The contribution of audiences for the generation of contents usually is resumed as their own in the majority of digital media. In those cases, in which these contributions are considered as less professional, they are dismissed. In general, there is an agreement with regards to the value of citizens as information sources. Nonetheless, there is clear reticence with regards to citizens as possible managers to establish the dynamics, editorial lines and criteria over the socially necessary information [32] which is intended to circulate.

Anyway, spokespersons from the community are included who request the inclusion of subjects to be contained in agendas with respect to what could be considered as the general collection of themes. In an environment in which a sense of infinity is presented, there are immeasurable volumes of information without hierarchies. These productions are unapproachable for users and producers. In a first step, curation establishes the parameters of ordering the information and a hierarchy which responds to sectorial interests, group positioning and professional valorizations.

From a well-intentioned place, it tends to question non-professional actors but with the vocation of adapting to conventional suggestions. Where it is possible— even if it flags co-creation—it is supposed for users not to have the pretension of managing for themselves their communication modes. Even if in the context of overinformation, it is indispensable a professional management of data, the interactions with users tend to be utilitarian. They are asked for collaboration, but not always their recognition is visible.

In some cases, the intention of curators is to open a space for co-creation. Nonetheless, there is also reticence of the citizens to get involved in information systems. The need for training, for reporters as well as for citizens in a condition of co-creation, is an effort that, in many cases, there is no one who wants to do it.

With respect to the actions for spreading and sharing they entail less effort. However, in systems in which the confidence is in a critical stage, it is very difficult to make a network that collaborates with the circulation of information. It is feasible to understand that first it is necessary to generate community and from there look for collaboration and co-creation. Even so, if it is possible to accomplish a loyalty mailing of users who replicate contents, the alliance of confidence between peers

guarantees the construction of a community which relates in two ways. On the one hand, a vertical communication between a digital media and a small community. On the other hand, the ties between users and their own networks, with which it establishes horizonal links for distribution of those products.

Even if incipient, the co-creation process is thought on three ordered forms. On the one hand, in relation to the contribution of ideas and issues of coverage; on the other, for the concrete provision of elaborated contents in the form of images, audios and videos or data cloud; finally, as indispensable nodes for the circulation and diffusion of contents on the Web.

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