

Quality journalism: the issue of democracy

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La calidad periodística: Teorías, investigaciones y sugerencias profesionales (*Journalism quality: Theories, research and professional suggestions*)

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ABSTRACT

La Calidad Periodística: Teorías, investigaciones y sugerencias profesionales (The journalistic quality: Theories, research and professional suggestions) is a collection of articles written by researchers from Latin America and Spain on the measurement of quality journalism and journalists' work in television, print and digital media. It also contextualizes the application of the theory and practice of quality indicators in Europe and Latin America and suggests the application of a method developed at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in conjunction with the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, the Journalism's Added Value (JAV), and discusses the importance of journalism for the maintenance of democracy.

Keywords: Journalism, journalists, quality, democracy, public opinion.

The previous edition of *MATRIZes* (V. 7, No. 2, 2013) had already anticipated some of the issues pointed out by the authors of *La calidad periodística: Teorías, investigaciones y sugerencias profesionales* (The journalistic quality: Theories, research and professional suggestions), as the article by Eva Pujadas—head professor of the Department of Communication at the Pompeu Fabra University—about quality indicators in television, published in the section *Em Pauta* under the title *A qualidade televisiva além de um conceito politicamente correto. Conteúdos e perspectivas envolvidas* (Quality television beyond a politically correct concept. Content and perspectives involved), accessible on the website of the magazine, and Claudia Rebechi

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Nociolini's review of the book *O jornalista e os discursos sobre o seu trabalho* (The journalists and the discourses about their work), organized by Roseli Figaro.

On the one hand, the confrontation of the issue more than urgent at the time of abundance of data or, as some call it, “big data”: the quality of journalistic production made possible by the media companies and the balance between business interests and journalistic information quality. It is worth noting that the abundance of data does not mean abundance of information, much less knowledge, let alone wisdom, as established by Russell Lincoln Ackoff's DIKW hierarchy, i.e., Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom. On the other hand, there is the journalists' working condition, which is increasingly precarious. This is an index through which the journalistic media production can be measured, an assessment of what is intangible and, therefore, more complex. For those interested in the topic, in addition to the book in question in this review, the reading of the previous edition is recommended.

Journalistic information is the result of a process. This is a notion discussed in the article *El Valor Agregado Periodístico, herramienta para el periodismo de calidad* (The Journalism's Added Value, a tool for quality journalism) by Gordillo, Valencia and Cross, who also define what Journalism's Added Value (JAV) is and specify the variables involved in the suggested methodology. Briefly, JAV is defined and applied as follows:

The concept of Journalism's Added Value (JAV) is understood as the ability that the journalist has to deliver and process information without distorting the reality, selecting what news is and the sources involved in the fact, giving them the space that corresponds to them. The JAV seeks to qualify the quality of the professional work done by the journalist on the basis of what a certain media is capable of doing and can effectively make. (...) This method makes a difference between process and journalistic product, and states that it is possible to analyze the process on the basis of the product published (Pellegrini, 2011: 26). To that end, it focuses on two stages: the selection of the news (gatekeeping) and its creation (newsmaking), based on applying analysis sheets to the journalistic work in the phase of selecting the event and, subsequently, in its elaboration and prioritization process. (pp. 40-41)

Who would carry out this work in order to measure the quality of the media? The university, as suggested by authors. The proposal is controversial in the Brazilian context, in which there is a historical struggle between the *academy* and *market* in the

field of communication, especially in journalism. The scenario worsens with the emergence of instant gurus in the era of digital communications and social media, a logic in which what matters is the audience measurement (the famous *metrics*) and not the debate and rational argumentation, the generous dialogue, ethics and the search for mutual understanding, according to Jürgen Habermas, fundamental factors for the construction of public opinion, journalism exercise as a mediator of public opinion, without which no democracy can be sustained. This is discussed by Ruiz, Masip, Domingo, Noci and Micó in their article *Participación de La audiència en El periodismo 2.0* (Participation of The audience in Journalism 2.0). The authors present the result of a research conducted on the comments of several news reports in the websites of the newspapers Nytimes.com and Guardian.co.uk, where there are more respectful, of highest quality and most plural conversations “más respetuosas, las de mayor calidad y las más plurals” (p. 139). In the case of publications by Lemonde.fr, Elpais.com, and Republica.it, there is a dialogue of the deaf, according to the authors who conclude that:

While minorities are respected and debates are encouraged in the Anglo-Saxon media, most readers adhere to the ideological line of the media in other newspapers, forming a majority which, as Tocqueville feared, acts as a tyranny. (Ibid.).

If the press wants to continue having political responsibility in the maintenance of democracy, it should focus on citizens' sovereignty in the digital environment. The authors argue: “Why? Because it is possible”. There is a permanent dispute of discourses and this dispute leads to events like the recent case of the SBT Brazil News presenter, Rachel Scheherazade, who on February 4th this year and in national broadcast (also a very reflected case in social networks like Facebook) supported the action of a group of young men who beat a thief—also young and black—and kept him tied by the neck to a post in the city of Rio de Janeiro, RJ, for having committed theft, which is a scene reminiscent of a current practice in the period of slavery. The television station (SBT) said that the comment was not their responsibility. Whose responsibility then? Mompert states that:

those who profess the pessimism of the ineffectiveness, because they believe that nothing or very little can be done to improve a world of great interests and global powers, deny the possibility of journalism sufficiently autonomous, rigorous, socially useful and at the service of the citizens in the framework of a company (private or public), except those who sometimes practice some alternative media to the establishment with old or new technologies. (p. 10)

That is, the discourse that we assume for the quality of journalism is necessary in order to continue the dispute for the quality of information we consume and produce. Because it is possible, as the authors of this book argue, and because it is also our duty as citizens responsible for the democratic process.

In addition to the articles cited, this work features inspiring articles with a variety of perspectives on the major subject discussed, as the already cited professionals' working conditions (Rabadán) under the light of the so-called *media convergence* and the radical changes that the information and communication technologies (ICT) brought to the field. The article that opens Palau and Gómez's book gives a broad historical overview of the use of indicative criteria of quality, theory and practice used by experts. The quality of paid and free newspapers, the management of information sources as a criterion of professional quality, digital culture and news agencies, parameters of network journalism work, indicators of quality information in television, the network quality of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) in Spain, and the quality information on the environment make up the development of the debate on this fundamental approach in journalism. The researchers make an important contribution to the academic communication environment and the market by discussing and proposing a methodology of analysis of the quality in a field that is supposed to be the critical mediator of the society in which we live.

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