

Technology, capitalism and the right to information

Resumen: Los medio de comunicación han evolucionado y con ellos lo ha hecho la información. La globalización y el acceso mundial a internet han tenido una influencia determinante en la manera en la que nos informamos. ¿Ha pasado el lector de ser sujeto activo a consumidor?

During the last decade of the 20th Century, societies across the globe experienced the introduction of the internet -and all its associated virtues- as an instrument in our everyday lives. We barely had time to become accustomed to the use of the *sms* when we were bombarded with new concepts such as *e-mail*, *webpage* and *router*. Big media corporations took little time to realise the great potential of the web as a source to reach audiences and by the early 2000s most of the renowned media had launched on-line versions of their actual printed papers.

Later into the new Century, increased connectivity and digital accessibility dragged readers away from the physical newspaper onto consumers' screens. This situation generated a big crisis in the sector which experienced dramatic losses in their printed sales. Concurrently, previously lonely wolves within the *blogging* community began collaborating and community-building while beginning to create their own platforms; examples may range from *Breitbart News* to *Democracy Now*. From there, an open purge for the dominance of the online audience began: big press corporations were forced to shift efforts onto their online sites -once conceived as a complementary tool- which suddenly had become a necessity to ensure the survival of the firm in the new market.

Accordingly, business strategists started questioning the worth of maintaining the high costs of the printing industry. In some cases, print production ceased while focus shifted to the online dissemination of content. Regardless of these decisions, economic concerns as to the survivability of the working structures of media groups was still at stake without the consistent funding previously provided by buyers. The natural idea was then to reach out into the new market in order to obtain online subscribers that would support the newspaper. However, this tactic was proven ineffective as consumers had multiple choices simply a click away, usually opting to draw upon other free sources of information.

Obtaining stable sources of funding was a major priority partially resolved by revenues obtained from digital advertising. This new business model required one thing, and one thing only: visitors. The quality of the content, the information, was deemed almost irrelevant as far as enough unique users were to visit the media's domain regularly. At this stage, the industry decided to advertise itself using other online platforms, particularly social media. Nevertheless, these innovations seemed insufficient and the industry commenced a renaissance of sensationalism that materialised through 24/7 services of information with bold red letters that claimed to have *Breaking News*. Once the market was crowded with such services, a second stage of the renaissance of sensationalism appeared: *clickbait*. Printed newspapers tend to contain provocative or surprising headlines, written in bold, directed to attract the attention of those that religiously attend their nearest kiosk every morning. Similarly, clickbait constitutes the modernisation of the former technique, aimed at enhancing the efficacy in outreaching consumers in the online market.

Within a generation's time, the core of the news business had changed. This implied a steady loss of independence in our media, as businesses increasingly relied more on the sponsorship provided by banks, governments, and other entities. The editorial line of the newspaper and the subjective view of the journalist used to be the only sources of self-censorship while presenting a particular topic; however, the introduction of the above-mentioned reforms included into the equation the hidden interests of those financially supporting the newspaper.

Recently, we have entered a new era. Part of the industry, in an attempt to reach beyond the capitalisation of online traffic, has normalised a deontological and ethically repulsive practice: *fake news*. This new post-truth era appears to be governed by information directed to affect our political opinions and moral values. Fake news is conceived of as information disconnected from reality in which facts are mistreated, intentionally obviated or simply made up. They are the efforts of individuals or groups that, acting in bad faith, seek to swing the public opinion in favour of their interests; an improvement of the Goebbelsian lie. In the mind of fake news proponents, truth is relegated as something trivial, almost impertinent, for the great potential of fake news relies in their ability to serve propaganda dressed up as information.

But, who to blame? It was us, the readers, who contributed to the crisis in the sector. It was us who abandoned our commitments towards whatever newspapers we considered to be rigorous. Fake news represents a new opportunity to refuse to be treated as consumers, to move away from our renewed comfort zone and to stand for what we want. Otherwise, the unending competitive system that rules the market will find new ways to downgrade us to cattle. In the news sector, as in many others, freedom of choice has become an illusion that condemns us to turn us into farm animals who can select the adequate fodder to remain ignorant and meek. Critical citizens are required to defend and promote a journalism of quality. In particular, we must ensure the job of investigative journalists who often serve the noble cause of exposing the hidden deals of our powerful elites, needed to combat the inefficiencies of our liberal democracies. It is therefore in the hands of committed citizens to uphold the core principles of truth and independence that should govern our embedded right to information. We must get reaccustomed to the conflictive process of forming our own opinions and act accordingly.

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