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You get what you give: Sharing as a new radical challenge for journalism

Abstract

Research that focuses on participation in the field of journalism remains undertheorized and overused to explain whatever type of relation with the audience. This tension leads to a shortage of a solid theoretical construct to explain the processes of sharing online content in journalism. This article frames the audience studies in a new paradigm, which is linked to the key concept of sharing. It argues for an unresolved issue between the users' abundant social activities with media content and the lack of explicit strategies by the media to take advantage of how and why people share news on the internet. This article deals with a theoretical framework for journalism built on the convergence of audience studies, the research on participation and the management of online communities. All these approaches converge in the activity of sharing content, which remains undervalued within the academic and scientific field of journalism studies. This article recovers the paradigm of a media landscape made by information flows –instead of information stocks. Therefore, the act of sharing –by the audience– becomes strategic for the media. What it means in the field of research in journalism for the coming years is the main issue of this theoretical article. As part of the final results, the article summarises some research lines that are useful to develop a new framework around audiences and sharing content. We hope this work contributes to the theoretical awareness within a distinct segment of journalism studies influenced by the audience's online activities with media content.

Keywords

Journalism, social media, news sharing, audiences.

1. Introduction

“The newsroom needs to claim its seat at the table [with marketing people] because packaging, promoting and sharing our journalism requires editorial oversight” (*The New York Times*, 2014, p. 23-25). In 2014, a report by *The New York Times* claimed that journalists play a major role in the promotion and dissemination of their own content. Although the variety of theoretical approaches has increased, it was an innovative point of view because the theories of journalism studies in the last years still focus on very traditional key concepts. For instance, if we take a look at the research published in two of the most acknowledged journals dedicated to journalism studies between 2007 and 2013 (i.e., *Journalism – Theory, Practice & Criticism*

and *Journalism Studies*), we will not find terms such as ‘audiences,’ ‘participation,’ ‘communities’ or ‘sharing’ in scientific articles within the top 20 most frequent keywords (Steensen & Ahva, 2015, p. 8). In fact, inside the cluster of the top 20 digital keywords we can only find two concepts: 1) ‘technology’, which is too generic; and 2) ‘citizen journalism’, which is too specific and, as we know now, old fashioned.

For the past twenty five years, the academic research on journalism has mostly focused on quantitative and empirical approaches, being the stronger efforts in studies about content and platforms. Some findings indicate that “new approaches from technology and economics are influencing journalism studies, but in a limited manner”, and “(implicit) grounded theory is still the most dominant approach” (Steensen & Ahva, 2015, p. 12). The first consequence of this global phenomenon is the disappearance of publications with a more theoretical approach and the abandonment of many social dimensions in journalism, mainly those related to audience research and reception studies. In the most relevant bibliographical review regarding the last years about academic journalism research in Spain, some authors underlined how the standard scientific article in journalism would be nowadays: “A work about the informative discourse of mass media on any social topic fixed with a quantitative content analysis” (Martínez-Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2017, p. 164). In Spain, the research landscape is clearly under the pressure of national evaluation processes, made by the National Agency for Evaluation of Quality (ANECA), which is creating a “mismatch between the interest of academia and the media reality itself”, with too many thoughts on ‘the profitability of the research effort’ and less attention on ‘genuinely epistemic considerations’ (Martínez-Nicolás *et al.*, 2017, p. 164-165).

In other words, epistemologically and according to the media consumption reality, the quantitative studies that focus on content are not useful to account for the influence of social platforms over journalism. This research model cannot explain the uses, motivations and trends of the manner of consumption where the news is now something ‘incidental’ (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2017) and under information flows, which are the result of the users’ social recommendation and the algorithms designed by the social platforms. The concept of flow representing the media landscape is not new, and it has been used to explain that the value chain is moving from knowledge stocks to knowledge flows. Basically, this ecosystem is under two challenges: 1) “think of tacit knowledge as the *know how* rather than the *know what*” and 2) “we can not [*sic*] participate effectively in flows of knowledge—at least not for long—without contributing knowledge of our own” (Hagel, Seely-Brown & Davison, 2009). In broad terms, the audience contributes partly to knowledge flows through the act of sharing.

As everyone could agree, the fact of sharing information is the essence of social media, and it is difficult to understand why audience research in journalism still remains focused on many sides, but not on sharing processes. The past years have witnessed many efforts to “revitalising audience research” in terms of methods, new fields and challenges (Zeller, Ponte & O’Neill, 2015). One of those challenges should be to amplify the notion of participation to a wider perspective of the sharing processes on information. In other words, how and why people share some kind of information instead of another, and how these processes are redefining the role of media on a daily basis.

In terms of transferring scientific knowledge to the media industry, a broader view about the behaviour of the audience could help make a deeper contact between the media and the academia. As Usher (2017) underlines, there are two common claims that try to explain why the scholar research is not useful to journalists and the media industry:

1. The academic work does not result in changes in the news industry.
2. Journalists cannot engage with scholars because they do not make their research understandable enough for journalists to use.

In general terms, Usher (2017) does not agree with these claims, because scholars are paying more attention to the media industry than journalists to journalism research; however, at the same time, it is not less true that the scholarly research does not focus most of the time on the industry's real problems. Let me introduce in this article the full understanding of the audience's behaviour as one of the media's next big problems in the coming years. Everything is summarised in the word 'sharing'. How, what, when and why the audience share a specific content instead of another. Among others, the audience's behaviour is one powerful sign to monitor the consequences of new features in the media landscape. If we consider the media landscape, described by Cardoso (2008) as a "networking communication model" and the "new communicational paradigms" (p. 588), many of their special features are clearly connected to how people use the media, such as: a) networking of mass and interpersonal media; b) different degrees of interactivity usage; c) new dynamics of accessibility of information; and d) users as innovators.

In other words, the networked communication offers "different dynamics of value creation; and different degrees of access, interactivity and participation both *in* media and *through* media" (Pasquali, Noguera-Vivo & Bourdaa, 2013, p. 329). This article deals with the phenomenon of sharing content; in other words, it deals with audience involvement and participation, and here there is always a first tension between the control of the media content and the open distribution by the audience (Lewis, 2012). At the core of the object of study is the understanding of journalist-audience relationship (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2016). Right in the middle of the utopian and dystopian views on this phenomenon, content distribution by the audience should be integrated within strategic models made available by the media. Studies with a broader scope of how people share content on the internet has usually been located around the field of marketing (Nelson-Field, 2013), but this is not the case. In this article, the *social science of sharing* focuses on a journalistic paradigm and how to add value to the news through the people. This perspective is relatively new with some relevant approaches in last years (Hermida, 2014; Kümpel, Karnowski & Keyling, 2015; Trilling, Tolochko & Burscher, 2016; García-Perdomo *et al.*, 2018; Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018; Kilgo *et al.*, 2018).

To some extent, amateurs have no fear of making mistakes when spreading information, they "can afford to lose" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 93) and, on the other side of the spectrum, professionals have access to big data and technological capital. If we combine both, we then have social capital, which is the most important element to face a real process of innovation. For instance, if we look back at the phases of innovation in social networks, such as Twitter, the most relevant achievements came about thanks to social capital and the users' free and creative use of some Twitter features (e.g., hashtags, APIs, replies, threads, etc.). The challenge lies in how to apply this social capital to the field of journalism.

Nowadays, one of the major trends and challenges in communication studies is "researching communication in the fast-changing digital media environment" (Fuchs & Linchuan-Qiu, 2018, p. 219). At the intersection of technology, media and content, we can find what people are doing with the media content and their reasons for doing so. If the media industry, scholars and stakeholders do not face it, the challenge will turn into a threat. The new flows of information in the media landscape require media companies to develop strategies to deal with social filters, but:

the Web gives people more content choices, control, and the opportunity to customize their news consumption... Often media organizations lack a clear strategy and one may get the impression that many of them merely offer new participation features because others do so as well. (Stark, 2012).

2. Reductionist views of participation and sharing as consumption

The revitalisation of participation studies does not only mean developing deeper approaches to the most common fields, such as citizen journalism, multimedia communication or transmedia storytelling, it also requires experimental approaches to (almost) unknown spheres in journalism. In particular, if we consider the processes of sharing as an emergent side of reception studies, we clearly have an opportunity here in this sense.

Historically, technology has been a common key concept to frame the research around participation, with the result of many studies focused on measuring the content made by non-professional users of journalism. The problem with this approach is summed up in the well-known sentence of Shirky (2008), which talks about how communication tools do not get socially interesting until they get technologically boring. In other words, social capital is always more relevant than technological capital. In terms of participation, social capital is the currency that gives real value to content, information and news.

The Internet has dramatically revolutionised the concept of participation. It has usually done so with celebratory perspectives and optimistic discourses. These approaches, nonetheless, are devoid of meaning without two traditional concepts, such as professional quality and social relevance (Carpentier, 2009). The key point here is, even in the most innovative participatory practices in the media (i.e., those with quality in professional filters and a relevant social capital), participation is still embedded within the general idea of content made by the users, also known as User-Generated Content (UGC). Even within the idea of UGC, the problem with the (omnipresent) debate participation is how “participation is still used to mean everything and nothing, [and] remains structurally undertheorized” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 13-14). This ‘under-theorization’, at the same time, leaves participation as an ambiguous concept (van Dijk, 2009, p. 45) because the repertoire of activities by the audience with media content is huge: messaging, tweeting, commenting, posting, uploading, editing, etc. (Merrin, 2009, p. 24). Therefore, the activity of sharing is a more accurate term; it is connected to one specific action that can have multiple motivations and effects in the value chain of the media industry.

By following a value chain with different degrees of participation, we find three main stages: 1) the UGC, which was overestimated in the academic field; 2) the User-Edited Content (UEC); and 3) the User-Distributed Content (UDC), which is the stage where people share media content, usually on sites outside of the media. All these stages relate to the concept of participation, except for the fact that they come with very different levels of strength. Sharing is within the stage of UDC.

2.1. Sharing as (part of) consumption

There are studies with a thin but visible approach to the following idea: sharing is not consumption, but daily consumption is more related to sharing. Connecting this idea with a kind of *psychology of sharing*, we already know sharing news is not just connected to the notion of consumption, it is also narrowly linked to how we understand the news. In fact, *The New York Times* (2011) surveyed 2,500 users and reported that 73% of users think about content in a deeper way when they are sharing such content. In that same sample, 85% stated that they understand the news better by reading other users’ comments.

Following this data, *The New York Times* (2014) analysed the future trends in consumption. The team, coordinated by Arthur G. Sulzberger, underlined a key point: not only do the media have to be better by just making content but also by disseminating it, and this is not an issue attached to the marketing department but to the newsroom. Sulzberger further states:

...at *The Times*, Discovery, promotion and engagement have been pushed to the margins, typically left to our business-side colleagues or handed to small teams in the newsroom. The business side still has a major role to play, but the newsroom needs to claim its seat

at the table because packaging, promoting and sharing our journalism requires editorial oversight. (*The New York Times*, 2014, p. 23-25).

The relevance of how people organise the media content on the Web (i.e., folksonomies) emphasises the paradigm shift from the UGC to the UDC, which is identified as a more singular feature of the media landscape and viewed as a common concept in fields, such as the video sharing sites. As Mabilot (2007) states, “the real originality lies in the distribution and structuring of the content via the users, so that we should prefer the term ‘user distributed content’ to underline the real novelty”. At the same time, obviously, we should not forget that there is clear tension between sharing and real consumption. For instance, a huge group of users circulate a headline in social media without reading the entire news. They did not click on the link, and, consequently, they could not see the full text; therefore, they were unconsciously disseminating fake news.

If we want to find the real consumption related to sharing, the number of shares cannot be the only metrics to analyse the success of the published stories. Recent studies, along with a joint analysis of shares and clicks, reveal some clear limitations in this sense, like the fact that 59% of the shared URLs on Twitter are never clicked (Gabelkov, Ramachandran, Chaintreau & Legout, 2016). We need new and mixed metrics of real consumption. The idea of sharing as part of consumption will bring the generalisation of new tools, such as Creative Commons licenses, to improve the media market with more flexible ways to share the products, moving from the old paradigm based on ownership to the new paradigm, which is more focused on the circulation (or dissemination) of content.

In this sense, we could underline the essay by Mao (2014) as a kind of tipping point. The author describes how, paradoxically, the strongest way to protect your content is sharing it as much as possible: “Your audience, who benefit from your sharing, can also be the gatekeepers of your rights” (Mao, 2014). That statement fully applies to the media. For instance, under a landscape of fake news and post-truths, the most active readers can act as a social system of surveillance around news. In a global sense and considering sharing as a worldwide trend, we should underline the work of Nicholas John (2016) as well.

When participation in the form of sharing is part of consumption, we have new business models based on the participation economy (Noguera-Vivo *et al.*, 2014). In this new economy, the product does not exist without the active participation of the audience. In other words, ‘sharing gives back the power to the people... and the novelty lies in the fact that participation is part of the product itself’ because “the flows of participation will decide offer and demand” (Manfredi, 2018).

2.2. Spreadable news

As Jenkins (2009) says, on the web “if it does not spread, it is dead”. This idea comes into effect when the consumption is so much defined by social activities, such as social recommendations, and not just by the official media channels. We moved from the unidirectional concept of *distribution* by the traditional mass media, to the multidirectional term *dissemination*, where the media needs to have the quality of spreadability in their content. A similar idea is underlined by some Finnish journalists: “for them the *findability* of content is critical... the *social media leverage* can *propel* news stories to a much higher level of popularity” (Villi & Noguera-Vivo, 2017, p. 215). In this sense, dissemination stands out more as a social activity than professionalism; thus, the challenge for the media is about offering more social content, which means offering more useful content. “The more such newsgathering and dissemination pays off, the more it becomes part of everyday behaviour” (Hermida, 2014, p. 34).

Why do users share news? We can find two primary needs to find the answer: 1) the desire to be heard and 2) the expression of self. The more we share some specific content, the more we are seen with the same attributes of that content. This is the reason why the media needs

to define the attributes, the moral values and the community's editorial criteria they want to reach. If they do so, they will be defining their identity as media. As Hermida (2014) says, "the spreading of news, information and commentary through social networks are symbolic declarations of the self... as identity claims that signal to others how we would like to be seen" (p. 38).

The *spreadability* of news has usually been considered as something pejorative and is linked to a type of minor-level journalism or, in the best case scenario, a different journalism that is coined by the influence of the 'Buzzfeedication' (Tandoc, 2018; Tandoc & Jenkins, 2017). However, the truth is that all kinds of news would make the most of it if they get more spreadability within a landscape of social recommendations, viral messages and memes (Noguera-Vivo, 2015). The challenge would be determining how to get that spreadability in hard news and not just in soft news –which are, by definition, spreadable. Moreover, it would also be a challenge to determine how to use those mechanisms of virality to fight against 'Fake News' and show the ethics and expertise of professional media (Beckett, 2017).

2.3. Looking for useful research for media

In April 2018, the Spanish online newspaper –eldiario.es– reached 30,000 paying members. Considering the size of the Spanish media landscape with more than 3,400 digital media (Salaverría, Martínez-Costa & Breiner, 2018), this is a huge community of active readers. It is a huge social capital that is ready to experiment and put into practice the strategy of sharing content designed by the digital newspaper. These strategies need spaces for this participation to occur, which can be internal (i.e., sites created and owned by the media) or external (i.e., social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook). The creation of inspiring and motivating spaces for active audiences to share content will be a competitive advantage in the media market (Nyiro, Csordás & Horvath, 2011).

If the content produced by the audience is a commodity (Fuchs, 2010, p. 191), the next step is to make the social experience around the news a commodity itself. At this point, among a flow of very similar media content, the added value to the media will be the social experience of its community with the news. This translates into more audience research and updated profiles for the Heads of Audience Engagement in the media, among other issues. In this sense, we contacted two professionals who work in two of the main Spanish digital newspapers and gathered their opinions. One of them works in a digital-born medium, eldiario.es, whereas the other one works for the digital version of a historic Spanish newspaper, *El Mundo*.

Firstly, there is not just a single type of audience. Santiago Saiz is a journalist and a community manager for *El Mundo*. In order to analyse the different kinds of audience, he underlines the concept of fidelity and its several layers:

There are different audience circuits because there are different levels of fidelity. In order from biggest to smallest, in terms of importance, the list would be as follows: 1) the reader who pays for the paper; 2) the reader who accesses directly to your website; 3) the casual reader who follows you on social networks; and 4) the one who finds you on Google. You have to know the sum of all those routes and their interconnections. (S. Saiz, personal communication, 28 May 2018).

In the same sense, Antonio Rull, Head of Online Marketing & Audiences for eldiario.es, pointed out two types of users: 1) the *audience* and 2) the *web traffic*. Rull states, "We work a lot with our journalists the difference between audience and web traffic. The first ones can become site members, the second ones are just occasional visitors" (A. Rull, personal communication, 29 May 2018). Both journalists, Saiz and Rull, underlined that social networks are important to get visitors, but they are not the only way for the media. They need to have a holistic view of the audience.

Secondly, the term ‘virality’ does not fit well to journalists. In fact, in the case of eldiario.es, Rull states:

We do not give to our journalists any kind of data about the traffic of their news in order to help them focus doing journalism, without click baits and trying to avoid the approaches focused [on viral content], because this kind of approach does not have value for our audience and members. (A. Rull, personal communication, 29 May 2018).

Saiz explained the same idea but with different words:

The parameters of tracking (e.g., clicks, reading time, sharing, interaction, etc.) an article matter, it would be stupid to deny it, but they cannot be, in general, the only thing that matters, especially in a scoop. Even so, reputation is as or more important than traffic. We should not limit ourselves to viral articles. (S. Saiz, personal communication, 28 May 2018).

In terms of collaboration with third parties, such as the so-called ‘influencers’ in social networks (i.e., something quite usual in the media, like TV channels), Rull says that ‘we do not work with influencers, our best influencers are our journalists and their followers’. This strategy is a good point to remember how difficult it is for the media to work in horizontal media landscapes, where everyone is creating content and the audience is kind of a blend among sources, companies, people, media and journalists.

Usually, the media focuses on the short term, and this could be the reason why “all our studies and reports are focused to specific actions”, as underlined by Rull. According to Saiz, the point is whether ‘creating content’ and journalism is the same thing. However, it is clearly not:

If the journalists do not dominate the data, the data will dominate us. And, then, we will do something that is probably easy to distribute and consume, but without added value and without awareness of our journalistic function. That is the difference between generating content and doing journalism. (S. Saiz, personal communication, 28 May 2018).

Finally, Saiz underlines the fact that social networks are not “separate compartments”; therefore, the holistic view of web traffic and audience behaviour is always needed. Following a conceptual framework, as mentioned previously in this article, we are faced with a cross-media perspective. “Sometimes the spark goes on Twitter but you go viral two or three days after on Facebook, where tracking and measuring the traceability of articles is much more difficult”, added Saiz.

Traceability of articles is a challenge when you want to research which news gets shared. As we have seen in the introduction of this article, the new media landscape is defined by the ‘incidental news’ (Boczkowski *et al.*, 2017), which is a key concept based on the fact of which news we share and why (Hermida, 2014). In addition, we think that the research on sharing news is not just a temporary trend. At the last International Communication Association (ICA) conference in Prague, Hermida (2018) presented a few key paradigms that can help explain the future research on sharing news. Some of those paradigms are as follows (Hermida, 2018):

- Journalists and the media have to deal with new ‘social spaces for attention’ (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, etc.).
- Sharing is an expression of the self.
- Emotion, empathy or experience drive us to share or not to share.
- There are, of course, other factors that may drive us to share or not, such as environment, proximity, solidarity, etc.
- Sharing is considered as a currency of attention.
- Circulation is considered as a way of gatekeeping.

We could even consider the notion of ‘circulation as gatekeeping’ as a type of social surveillance of news, where the challenge is to give more visibility to those channels that are

more trusted and believed. Continuing along those lines, if sharing (news) is an expression of the self, the challenge here would be to clearly communicate the social value and the benefits that the community of the good journalism will obtain.

3. The need of audience studies in journalism to manage communities

Due to the constant, increasing fragmentation of the social media audience, community management will become a strategic approach to all the media outlets. However, we should not forget that community management is not a novel approach in the activity of a journalist with their social media accounts, because “the journalists themselves are social in social media and include UDC in their daily work processes, e.g. acting as such messengers that inform online communities about content the newspaper has produced” (Villi & Noguera-Vivo, 2017, p. 215).

The media’s currency is composed of the news and the information, and they are used by people to shape the ideas we decide to share within our own social circles (Hermida, 2014, p. 51). The more social capital this currency attracts, the richer each medium is because people are the true value of this currency. In apparent self-contradiction, we still do not know very much about how the journalistic audiences behave. We could consider the audience studies in journalism as a kind of contemporary or modern research field. In regard to the media, we know some general attributes of *our* audiences, such as they operate in a cross-media scenario (Schroder, 2011). What do the audience mean in a cross-media scenario? First of all, it means *community*, communication and sharing processes in participatory communities on different platforms (Noguera-Vivo *et al.*, 2013).

There are many implications of audience participation in a cross-media scenario. The digital audiences’ actions and behaviours are reshaping the nature of journalism itself by creating many tensions between concepts, such as control and collaboration, amateurism and professionalism, copyright and copyleft or the individual and the collective (Pasquali *et al.*, 2013, p. 330). Moreover, from the perspective of participation, the media industry is ‘the most directly affected by the consequences of the interactivity’ (Deuze, 2006, p. 691).

If we consider sharing as part of consumption, the research on this very topic puts itself at risk when it pays so much attention to the trending content, even more than the content itself. Furthermore, we do not need more audience studies in journalism to manage content in a ‘viral way’; instead, we need to manage online communities. We need people with media literacy who can add additional value to media content. As Diakopoulos (2018) underlined, the presence of bots in journalism justify that “trends are basically over –they are too easy to manipulate... Journalist can no longer rely on information sources reflecting some form of online *popularity*”. Journalists need to reach people in a different way on social media when they cover stories; however, journalism that focuses on the concept of ‘the most’ is not the answer. There are better ways than going viral. Virality highlights the *most*, but not the *best*. The utopian idea of online popularity has been misunderstood if we consider the audience as a mass (again) because the internet power is based on the idea of communities, which is almost the opposite of the idea of ‘mass’.

Under these terms, if we want a community, then we need a space. Of course, it is not a physical space, it could be a network of people and common interests. In a media ecology, it could be a media ecosystem. From the perspective of the systems theory, it could be any kind of interface. As we already know, “in a networked culture, the products co-evolve with their customers, in the same way that institutions (e.g. media) co-evolve with its users” (Scolari, 2018, p. 91). This network is the place for the community and the space of interaction between content, technology and users in a similar way. As Scolari (2018) explains the interface designers’ new role: “from engineering to the creation of media spaces... the interface designer is emerging as an expert in the construction of places of interaction between human and technological actors” (p. 167).

The challenge for the media is to design these places of interaction out of the non-media companies' reach because they are driving a big part of the media content flows, and Facebook is an example. The power of a strong community of active readers is a powerful tool for the media against the new landscape, where the audience increasingly visit the sites because of social recommendations. The time when people searched media with the help of search engines is over. People currently search and find the media through other people (Noguera-Vivo *et al.*, 2013). Importantly, when we say *people search and find the media through other people*, we obviously do not intend to say that this is a kind of fact that applies to *everyone every time*. Instead, this is a statement created by some tipping points from those (recognised) leaders in each community. Cardoso (2008) reasons that:

the continuity of innovation by users seems to depend also on the development of a group of core members that can motivate the passer-by contributors and, by doing so, to sustain the evolution from episodic networking into structured networking during a given timeframe. (p. 607).

Thus, the media needs to put their content into a deeper level of reach, and they will accomplish this mission by detecting the informal channels (i.e., the leaders, tipping points or 'core members'). Moreover, you do not have any kind of core members if you do not create a community beforehand.

4. Conclusions

Sharing content was a key concept at the beginning of the so-called Web 2.0, thanks to the spread of technologies (e.g., the Really Simple Syndication –RSS–), which allowed the growth of mash-ups and an endless list of sites created with imported content. At this moment, the media industry can recover this new wave of sharing, but it involves a new and social dimension in the media landscape. Here, the social media is the third option for obtaining news, given the fact that direct access and search are the first two choices (Reuters Institute, 2017).

In terms of the dissemination (instead of *distribution*) of media content within the social flows of the Internet, we can tell journalists that 'you get what you give'. Your content gets more social promotion when you give your audience the appropriate ecosystem, clear rules and a fair system of commitment and acknowledgement. Within the media industry's main stages (i.e., production and distribution), the paradigm of social recommendation has redefined the phase of distribution by adding more specific stages, where sharing is one of the most addictive actions for the audience and is more appreciated by the media.

According to the issues aforementioned in this article, the key topics for a better understanding of the audiences and taking advantage of their processes of sharing content could be the following research lines:

- Help the media to find the 'core members' in their audiences.
- Design social systems of surveillance around the truthfulness of news.
- Improve mechanisms of spreadability for hard news.
- Research the layers of fidelity in the audience and their interconnections.
- Assess cross-media perspectives to understand the interrelations between platforms.

We have seen some authors (Hermida, 2018) highlight the circulation of news as a new way of gatekeeping, which is the media industry's point of view. Under the view of the audience, what we find is the so-called 'incidental news consumption' (Boczkowski *et al.*, 2017). This pattern does not only rely on the problems to deal with facts (e.g., 'Fake News'), but it also relies on the real need for a deeper understanding of the audience and why they

consider some news as more valuable than others or why they think some news deserve to be shared more than others.

The five research lines suggested in this article are the result of the proposal of this theoretical framework, which is based on the assumption that we cannot make a better journalism if we do not fully understand the people who are circulating the news in this new media landscape.

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