

WHEN INFORMATION BECOMES VIRUS: NEW PERSPECTIVES IN JOURNALISM

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ABSTRACT

While the apparent chaos achieves a new order in everything that touches the Internet and journalism, information moves faster than ever. What this article proposes is that this affects the viral spread in social processes and how it is necessary to take into account this viral in order to understand 2.0.- journalism. In order to illustrate it we provide several concrete examples of new forms of digital journalism: viral information on this citizens' movement called 15-M in Spain, spring-2011.

KEY WORDS

Viral information, hypermedia, citizen reporter, digital journalism.

INTRODUCTION

Information browses throughout new technology platforms media with the advent of digital space. It has been a breakdown of the linearity in the path that follows a story from the transmitter station to the receiving facility. To be informed, the press has had to reinvent itself and continues in it, while the link and the links we have been taught to read, are anymore between the lines but between media and between systems: information is processed in an holographic space. No longer ink stains fingers as did the newspapers, instead now we press pages. Thanks to the technology people carry in their pockets: such as smart phones, tablets, netbooks; they have become makeshift reporters that, in a few minutes, can hung on the net-work any fact just recorded anywhere in the world.

At the same time, social networks, emails and YouTube channels act as distribution platforms and spread many small pieces of information which rapidly reach hundreds of thousands of hits. This phenomenon has already been defined

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and used from marketing and that is now affecting equally to information: the Viralization.

The Royal Academy of Spanish Language defines a virus from the dual perspective of biology, as a body of very simple structure, composed of proteins and nucleic acids, capable of replication only within specific living cells, using its metabolism, and, on the other hand, from the computer as a program surreptitiously introduced into the machine memory which, when activated, destroys all or part of the stored information (RAE, 2010).

Viral information, in our view, could then be the phenomenon that occurs when a simple organism (a fact or a new) is capable of reproducing cells within the complex: (a digital newspaper, a website, a blog, a social network, an e-mail), which in turn is capable of, if not destroy, at least compromising the stored information. However, studying biology we know that the virus is found in all Earth's ecosystems and transmission vectors have to move from one organism to another. In addition, many viruses reproduce without causing disease in infected organisms. We wonder to what extent viralized information can be a threat to the known information system and, on the other hand, also the possibility that behave like an element that can live in it with other information structure better known and accepted.

It would be necessary to inquire what the contents that viralize themselves are, to know which characteristics they share and so, been able to define the effects that can be generated on journalism and society as macro-structures that may be affected.

THEORETICAL NOTES

In the midst of a rather pessimistic scenario for the media we turn our gaze to the study of some specific information on the network.

The gradual migration of readers from payment media to new digital solutions, have flipped to the expectations of the press in the network to open some versatile communication medium that eliminates costly phases providing visibility on the global environment and endows it with continuous updates. Similarly television has being relegated as the preeminent media played for several decades, and while adapting to changes, it needs to create web-sites that posts their programs and offer users selective review of its content. The radio, for its part, is served on a platter internet pod-cast on demand, and their managers have found in the network a vehicle to store such ephemeral released on the airwaves.

A new culture of consumption in the field of communication has been born. News are consumed, shared, tweeted, forwarded, linked, hyperlinked, and installed on different pages, etc.

Internet has incorporating traditional media, generated new ones, as new social networks all of which have created an environment for information under the name *cybermedia*. Forms of communication based on interactivity and new concepts in the narrative information and its processes, as well as the expansion of new spaces for hypertext mutations, are what we have now.

In the eighties came to pass what Roger Fidler called *mediamorphosis*. This term has been used to define the change that the media began to suffer on their infrastructure.

Fidler argued that new media and media do not necessarily mean the disappearance of previously existing, but there was a recon-figuration of applications, languages and their adjustments to target audiences; an adaptation 'metamorphic' old media through new technological extensions. (Fidler, 1997).

On the other hand *infomorphosis* has been defined as «those change process that are having informational messages or other in-formation content, regardless of media (web, podcast, blogs, mobile, etc.) where such messages are issued». (FLORES VIVAR, 2009: 78)

From this perspective, in the present we will investigate how the virus operates in selected cases, to see if they mean a threat to the organisms they inhabit.

There is already a consensus. Both academic and professional publications manifest that Internet journalism has reached a status at least equal, to that of other conventional means such as print, radio and television (Vivar and Miguel Flores Arruti, 2001, Estévez, 2002, Alvarez and Parra, 2004, Meso, 2006, cited by PA-LACIOS, M. and Díaz Noci, J. (Eds) (2007)). And that makes us recognize the same consensus that the study of online journalism is, at present, a necessary exercise in constant expansion and constant revision, which we call *work in progress*.

Interactivity has been added to the practice of information as a multidimensional process that goes from the aspects of technological mediation to media expression [...] extends the concept of traditional journalistic value added other dimensions attached to individual issues and groups. Incorporate other modes of narration and expression. (Cebrián Herreros, 2009: 18)

The present social, political and journalistic situation, meets many of the axioms of the current liquid times, a term coined by sociologist Zygmunt Baumann when it states that

Social forms [...] are not able anymore to maintain their consistency because they decompose and melt before they ha-ve the necessary time to assume them [...], which proclaims the virtue most useful to serve the individual interests of conformity is not the rules (which in any case, are scarce and often contra-dictory) but flexibility: the readiness to change tactics and styles in a trice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities as the availability of time, instead of following their own bounded references. (Bauman, 2007: 7-11)

Our starting point needs a paradigm bring you lightweight flexible enough to meet the task of investigating in a world in constant motion. We will refer from submit work to the proposed methodology for performing Antonio Caro, as he suggests, to «shore in terms of scientific methodology that rooting required between science and life. Which is the starting point of a new scientific paradigm currently in the process of setting». (CA-RO Almela, 1999).

In the online media is moved from a linear model to other interactive where users play very active roles. Especially in social net-works, journalists should be the first to handle and understand the new paradigm of culture and information networking. «Social media is defined by the convergence of individuals in social networks, the use of new media and organizing ideas or links, documents and other content information and opinion. They are participatory media, where information and, by extension journalism is defined as a conversation» (Varela, J. (2005) cited by VI-VAR FLORES (2009)).

Gustavo Cardoso (2001) has spoken of the birth of a new communication paradigm in which neither "the medium is the message" as pointed McLuhan (1997), or «the message is the medium" as stated by Castells (2002) a place where rather, "people are the message. "From an empirical dimension, in which the distribution of the information is immediate and exponential, we are speaking that there is experimental evidence of new practices rooted generate a new structure of social communication.

To cement our proposal, we left for the end Nicolas Martinez (2011) who, citing Bennett and others (2008), and the study of the Civic Learning Online Project of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington, reminds us that there coexist two kinds of information users in the network that establish two models or paradigms of citizen involvement (Bennett et al., 2008, p. 8), which the authors call *actualizing citizen* and *dutiful citizen*.

The dutiful citizen, the first of these identities citizen is for generations and adult civic engagement feels like a duty that is exercised within the scope of traditional political system and through the mechanisms of conventional participation: voting, militancy in parties and social organizations, etc. Younger generations, however, are responsive to actualizing citizen model for civic engagement that would be kind of potential citizen is implemented (updated) to address specific social problems by resorting to any means of intervention available. The actualizing citizen could be, somehow, civic involvement more diffuse than that of the dutiful citizen, but that just may be spurred on effective updating of ICT by the ability of these to build participatory technological environment. What is relevant is that this capacity is being channeled by the younger generation to make an intensive social and recreational use of ICT, but the cultivation of attitudes and participatory skills that these technologies would be easier.

The ability of the Internet to generate new forms of democratic governance and the exercise of active political citizenship depends not only that, as noted by this author (Nicolas Martinez, 2011), «are granted access to the same, but also degree of civic involvement of citizens and societies».

The concept of *viralization* applied to communication and social sciences, has been studied especially applied to marketing (Sanagustín, 2009). The *Viral Marketing*, also known by some as *Viral Advertising* is a marketing technique used to present the public with a product or company.

They use many ways to reach the public without actually promoting the product, but leading them to other media forms through most addictive (e-mail or social networks) that can attach to a person and as they find something fun and enjoyable, fare his friends and acquaintances, along with the product or company advertisement.

In other words: companies play with the idea that if people like the content of what they receive, it will be shared with friends, acquaintances and family for enjoying of it as well.

Viral marketing has become a popular means of advertising and marketing, because it has a relatively low cost. To avoid being tagged as spam mail, viral marketing counts on the enthusiasm of people to convey the contents. And if a person sees that the sender is the name of someone they know, would not locked but open, and will send it to others.

To study the impact of viral information in this study we will stick to an experience around the 15M in Spain. This movement, which emerged following a protest to demand real democracy and denounced the cuts as social, labor and economic changes which threw the financial crisis, resulted in a massive camp in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid and by extension, in many populated areas of cities in the rest of Spain, Europe and the rest of the world. Into this context there was a video about the housing bubble, *Españistán*, who was hanged on May 25, 2011 by its creator, Aleix Saló, on his YouTube channel and in just a fortnight became one of the top videos viewed on the Internet. It was Trending Topic on Twitter, and subtitled in English and Italian. As of August 4th, 2011 has been viewed 3,781,374 times.

WORK METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the viral information to know how far it works like a virus: how is its spread and expansion and if, as informational viruses, actuates destabilizing and under-mining traditional journalistic structures.

This is explained from two case studies in which information moves through the network *viralize*. We will try to establish a categorization of its parts and also we will see if we can establish a common pattern from which causes such *viralization*.

General Objectives

We will analyze the case of the comic *Españistán: from the housing bubble to the crisis* by the author Aleix Saló hanged on Youtube May 25, 2011, in the time of the euphoria of the movement 15M. It was quickly viralized

- a) through e-mail.
- b) through social networks.
- c) on Youtube.

Specific Objectives

- a) Identify what kind of facts appear in this information.
- b) Categorize what kind of emotions it promotes on consumers.
- c) Identify the ethical, social and cultural rights that are appealed.

Sample

A. ESPAÑISTAN ESTATE BUBBLE BY THE CRISIS ALEIX SALÓ

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7P2ExRF3GQ&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

B. INFORMATION appeared on La Sexta TV: ESPAÑISTAN

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BUN00STr2s&feature=related>

Justification of the sample

For *Españistán*, a comic created by Aleix Saló and distributed on YouTube, we noticed from the time it was received in our own email or appeared on the walls of a group of Facebook friends during the four weeks following to May 15, 2011. The criterion of choice to understand that information that has been viralized lies in the fact of how many times it has been seen or shared. These data can be quantified on a platform like YouTube, which offers next to each video the number of visits or views you have had. Not so happens when we are talking about distribution through email or social networks. So it makes very difficult to predict the effect of a viralized information, nearly impossible to establish patterns or algorithms to explain how it happens.

THE VIDEO-CLIP "ESPAÑISTAN".

The claim is to announce a comic that explains the gestation of the housing crisis in Spain very ironically. Aleix Saló, its creator, made a video clip that completes the vision and the story that unfolds in the comic to make it known on the network. Taking advantage of the situation of the preceding days, in which many people belonging to the movement 15M camped in the Puerta del Sol, in Madrid and other nerve centers of many Spanish cities. It were at their peak after the regional and municipal elections, on May 22nd and he decided to upload the video to YouTube on May 25th, 2011. This video relates, in a suitable language for all audiences, rooted in popular culture events which ignited through the moral behind what is told them. The crisis explained for the general public, which provides official data and draws conclusions that quickly seized between the movement of so-called "outraged".

In the words of its author in an interview posted on its more YouTube channel, "the drama of audio-visual language of the net power generated this pump is called *Españistán* and has resulted in only two months a number of consequences that the network motivated by appropriating the name from multiple

perspectives to explain the current crisis". The comic had to be reissued in just two weeks and the paper industry, to say of himself Saló, revealed slow to demand that the Internet is able to generate.

There are positions (DE LA ROSA, 2011) who argue that the reputation that supports the brand enables information to spread like a virus over the Internet, *Españistán* quickly has become a brand that drives users to want to extend the content in she related. However, the content is one of the most important drivers of the Internet. With good content attracts traffic to a website. It also helps to position itself well in the results pages of search engines and, therefore, be visited. Accordingly, having a good content is a necessary condition to generate interest, although not sufficient.

The format also matters: since time is very limited concentration in front of a computer, the format most suitable for consumption of Internet is the microcapsules.

In this sense the viral studied does the job. Usability and design are fundamental to consumer experience satisfactory content. Anything can be digital contend, because with a camera or video, or a computer can scan any content. Another thing is that the content is of value. The contents without some diffusion may be lost or it may take forever to get to a certain mass of people.

CONCLUSIONS

In our view the key underlying *Viralization* of this case are that the video is able to mobilize a range of emotions such as anger, which promotes anger, sadness, which promotes reflection, the joy that promotes enthusiasm and the excitement and fear that lead to the complaint. A large number of citizens were immediately reflected by what the video-clip summed up in an agile, entertaining and smart and decided to share it massively getting into one of the most watched in the first two weeks of hanging. In addition, the social conjuncture stirring around 15M movement was the key to their widespread dissemination. The video has been translated into Italian and English and has been "trending topic" on Twitter.

The viral information requires the enthusiasm and participation of people for dissemination. When readers, viewers or media consumers find some information that deserves to be disseminated, share it with your acquaintances via email or social networks or posted on YouTube with an identification mark that makes it accessible to a search related by it can be related and easily found.

This brings up an interesting scenario of information activity that comprises among citizens with the same tools that have been used advertising and marketing in recent times in the transition from 1.0 to 2.0 web. In the digital environment of social networking is becoming increasingly necessary to consider the evidence that, some information became virus for their use: they share exponentially, making a number of online views often unpredictable. When information becomes virus it is also observed that emotionally moves the users, there is a social climate, a fertile breeding ground for the virus to spread. We doubt that without the opportunity of what was happening in

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the streets and squares video Aleix Saló, like many other content circulating the web these days, have found little support.

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