THE INFLUENCE OF TWITTER IN THE AGENDA-SETTING OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA

LA INFLUENCIA DE TWITTER EN LA AGENDA-SETTING DE LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN

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ABSTRACT

The great bet that the media have today is to incorporate social networks into their journalistic work as an information source. The influence of social networks when composing the agenda-setting of the media is the great uncertainty on which the present and future credibility of the profession depends. This article is based on research carried out by media editors and journalists belonging to the most relevant Spanish Professional Associations during the last quarter of 2019 to learn about their use of Twitter as an information source in the preparation of the agenda-setting the middle. The methodology was qualitative and quantitative, contrasting, on the one hand, the criteria of the editors about the use of Twitter in their médium and, on the other, that of journalist receiving. Messages through this social network as an information source. The study reflects that Twitter is considered one more informative source, which must be verified through other channels directly involved in the information, and that their incorporation into the journalistic task is being done progressively. Those responsible for the digital media that use Twitter regularly consider it a requirement to contrast the information that comes from this social network since the platform is made up of different information sources.

Keywords: Agenda-setting, Credibility, Information sources, Mass media, Journalists, Twitter, Social networks Communication process.

RESUMEN

La gran apuesta que tienen hoy en día los medios de comunicación es la de incorporar las redes sociales a su labor periodística como fuente informativa. La influencia de estos nuevos sistemas de comunicación a la hora de componer la agenda-setting de los medios es la gran incertidumbre de la que depende la credibilidad presente y futura de la profesión. Este artículo parte de una investigación que se ha realizado entre editores de medios de comunicación y periodistas pertenecientes a las Asociaciones profesionales españolas más relevantes durante el último trimestre de 2019 con el fin de conocer la utilización que hacen de Twitter como fuente informativa en la elaboración de la agenda-setting del medio.La metodología fue cualitativa y cuantitativa contrastando, por un lado, el criterio de los editores acerca del uso de Twitter en su medio y, por otro, el de los periodistas receptores de mensajes a través de esta red social como fuente informativa. El estudio refleja que Twitter se considera una fuente informativa más, que debe ser contrastada a través de otros canales directamente implicados en la información y que su incorporación a la tarea periodística se va haciendo de manera progresiva. Los responsables de los medios de comunicación digitales que utilizan Twitter de forma habitual consideran una exigencia contrastar las informaciones que proceden de esta red social, pues la plataforma está compuesta por distintas fuentes informativas.

Palabras claves: Agenda-setting, Credibilidad, Fuentes de información, Medios de Información, Periodistas, Twitter, Redes sociales, Proceso de comunicación.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The appearance of social networks has meant a change in the communication process. Receiver and sender have had to rebuild their roles. Making information and disseminating it has become a shared task between information professionals and individuals who do so by participating in their social networks and blogs.

In this sense, "there is already a large literature that shows that social networks play a key role during crises and conflicts" (Nganji, J.T. and Cockburn, L 2020: 270). For both, "besides traditional media, social networks are used to mobilize people for a common cause and to communicate vital information" (Nganji, J. T. and Cockburn, L. 2020: 270).

In a study that Barranquero and Rosique (2014) carried out, based on a bibliographic review of the theoretical foundations of education and communication, they concluded that social networks should be treated as a new means of communication thanks to the technologies that are being implanted more and more in society.

Likewise, De la Piscina et al (2016), through research carried out with the opinions of European professionals and Internet users on the changing reality the world of journalism is facing after the explosion of digital media, express the coincidence of professionals and users that the news in the future will be better and more interactive than now.

Many research works have studied the relationship of social networks with journalism but first, it is interesting to define the concept of a social network.

Thus,

> Social networks are a specific set of ties between a defined set of people, with the additional property that the characteristics of these ties as a whole can be used to interpret the social behaviors of the people involved (Clyde Jame Mitchel, 2014).

But what is truly important is the progressive normalization of social networks on the Internet and what it means for the world of journalism and the media. The emergence of the phenomenon of social networks in Spain in 2007, together with the increasing implantation among citizens and the use they make of them, should provoke a deep reflection in the communication process. According to the data of the latest Annual Study of Social Networks 2020, carried out annually by IAB Spain, in Spain, 85% of Internet users between 16- and 65-years old use social networks, which represents more than 25.5 million users in our country.

The consequences of its generalization among the population are clear. The media lose their monopoly on information. Thus, "the professional media have lost their traditional mediating exclusivity between elites and audiences with the aim of a collective synchronization of perceptions" (Fresno García, 2014). Also, as the same author recognizes, the social networks of which we are part play a central role in our activities and social deployment, and condition or define the resources that we can access.

Because, as Ventura (2018) states, "networks generally fulfill three functions for the media and journalists: the first, to be in contact with what is happening; the second, to be able to directly and personally debate and contact with other users; the third, and perhaps more relevant, is to be a content showcase" (Ventura, 2018).

In this context, Twitter appears, which was born to answer the question, what is happening? That was the proposal of its founders, Evan Williams, Jack Dorsey, and Biz Stone who imagined a space for conversation in which people entered to tell what they were doing at that moment. The question was short-lived. Users decided to talk about other things, they thought to use it to exchange information and to comment on what was happening both around them and in any other part of the world, and it is users who discover a new use that was not planned every day (López Sobejano, 2012: 383).

In this way, Twitter is considered a generalist and horizontal network, that is, one that "is focused on all users without distinction, so that they make use of the network according to their personal preferences."

For this researcher, in no case "are there limitations regarding the entry of users, or their age or condition, and they are even used corporately as business profiles. The distinction is made by the users themselves with the use they make of them" (López Sobejano, 2012).

In this sense, Gumersindo Lafuente, founder of elpaís.com, recognized in the Ibero-American Congress of Social Networks, held in Burgos (February 24th, 2011), the incredible immediacy of this communication platform, influential and decisive in the configuration and the agenda of the digital media, and sometimes used by this newspaper as an information source, even ahead of the most prestigious official news agencies, referring to the EFE agency. A fact corroborated by other forum participants such as Ignacio Escolar, author of escolar.net, and by Rosalía Lloret, director of digital development at Unidad Editorial, who highlighted, besides the incredible instantaneousness, the ubiquitous nature of this communication and information platform.

Along the same lines, for today's multimedia journalism is not enough to "tell stories and know how to tell them in the best possible way" (DiezHandino, 2012) but rather needs to know where and to whom to tell them. In this sense, some appeal to the global, social, and synchronic character of this social network that facilitates the rapid circulation and multiplication of messages (Orihuela, 2001).

For this reason, the following are identified as distinctive features of Twitter: social, intuitive, versatile and affordable, synchronous, communicative, fleeting and concrete, global, open and interactive, symbolic, with hypertextual language, flexible, and asymmetric and informal (Salgado Santamaría and González Conde (2014).

And this is where we have to start mentioning this social network as specific in the field of communication. No one doubts that Twitter has become:

> An informational alarm system, which even surpasses them, due to its ability to instantly detect any type of incident that occurs anywhere and at any time on important news of interest, trends, catastrophes, complaints, curiosities, social and citizen mobilizations (Salgado Santamaría and González Conde, 2014: 118).

Along these lines, the work presented How Journalists Use Twitter: The Changing Landscape of U.S. Newsroom is striking, where its author, Alecia Sway, after analyzing four major newspapers for two years, concludes that the platform has a decisive influence on news coverage.

In that sense:

> The primary function of social networks in digital journalism, firstly, in the creation of content, and, above all, in its subsequent dissemination, both among the communities of readers and also through search engines" (Zamarra, 2014: 149).

Twitter has revolutionized the field of journalism where the sources of information that were traditionally very limited, have now multiplied. For Zamarra, in (Flores, 2014), it is necessary to distinguish the sources from which Twitter is supplied from those that come from citizens, agencies, and the media. Although they also warn of rumors and inventions that circulate on social networks.

They ensure that:

The agenda-setting, historically shaped by the media that decided what was important and what was not, is increasingly in the hands of the general public. The existence of "trending topics" is beyond the control of the media". And they insist that "all this is because now the sources themselves are the ones that publish the contents and these are directly accessible to any netizen. But, sometimes, instead of being the social network the one that feeds on the content of the media, they are the ones that get the news from the social network (Zamarra, 2014: 155).

In this way, the media began to approach social networks, partly as a showcase, partly as "trend hunters": seeing what topics people were talking about, it was decided to include certain content on the agenda in the hope of bringing back that lost audience (Ventura, 2018).

In this way, we think of the function of Twitter as a social medium "since it tends to standardize messages and are part of the life cycle of news" (Fernández-Rovira and Villegas-Simón, 2019).

In this sense, they also affirm that,

Although Twitter is considered a tool for interaction, the politicians in our sample -for two months they analyzed the tweets about feminism of a male and a female representative of the four main Spanish political parties- PSOE, PP, Ciudadanos, and Podemos- use it to provide information and express their political stances on certain issues but not to promote dialogue (Fernández-Rovira and Villegas-Simón, 2019).

Both arguments challenge the idea of Twitter as a space to create a different media agenda and generate debate (Fernández-Rovira and Villegas-Simón, 2019).

This is not without dangers because it is not known to anyone that Twitter has more influence in journalism because the media use it as a source of news (Bahón, 2016).

This is what the New York Times says, which warns that Twitter "has become a place where many journalists unconsciously build a worldview, where they develop a sense of what is important and deserves coverage and what is not" (Bahón, 2016). For the Times, if a story becomes a trending topic, it seems inevitable that the journalist will echo it. But the operation of the social network can be manipulated, which can lead to interested coverage. A single user can create many accounts and some programs exponentially multiply tweets". For the Times, "the main danger of Facebook is the dissemination of false stories; of Twitter, that it is a factory of false people" (Bahón, 2016).

Thus, in recent years, with social networks and mobile devices, news publishers have launched, directly, to deliver the distribution of news to these large platforms, betting on the power of taking our content anywhere in the world so that this would give them more visits, more users, more advertising revenue. However, what has been achieved is to completely modify the consumption patterns of users, who now inform themselves and access the news more through social networks and platforms than through the media websites, completely losing control of the distribution of the product they offer. In this loss of intermediation between the facts and the readers,

the news from the media reaches our Facebook or Twitter account interspersed with multiple impacts, opinions, entertainment, comments from our friends, or directly false informative profiles and links. The complication for the reader when granting truthfulness to content increases, and the credibility and brand recall for publishers becomes a problem that, for now, is difficult to solve (González Alba, 2018).

On the other hand:

Twitter has its own problems, of course, such as the creation of fake profiles, the bots so often used by politicians to repeat slogans, and the much-vaunted anonymity that Facebook has been able to fight. Although, due to its immediacy and its ability to provide direct access between users, it has become a benchmark in the media sector as recognized by some authors (Ventura, 2018).

The Town Center for Digital Journalism carried out research (González Alba, 2018) carried out by the Town Center for Digital Journalism to evaluate the adaptation of newsrooms to the growing influence of technology companies. And among the results obtained, it stands out how publishers are experiencing a change in distribution "faster than expected" towards platforms, the concern of editors for the loss of control over the destination of the stories and for the power that their brand loses, as well as that media professionals lacked the necessary resources to create the level of innovation and access to new audiences offered by social networks and platforms. The study analyzes 14 major US media outlets (*The New York Times, The Washington Post, Vice, BuzzFeed, Fox News*, and *Vox*, among others) and 23 different social distribution platforms. The *Post* published its news in 22 of the 23; CNN in 21, and the *Times* in 20. All the analyzed media also distributed their news through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Apple News.

2. OBJECTIVES

The social network Twitter has become an essential element of digital newspapers - both those that combine their daily edition with the paper format and those that are only offered through the internet, to convey reality to public opinion. So much so that there is the possibility that Twitter is the true catalyst of reality, beyond the conventional ways through which journalists obtained the information they brought to the attention of citizens.

The objective of this research is to know if the social network really has such an influence that it has superseded the parameters known up to now and that were reflected in the so-called agenda-setting, that is, how newspapers influence current issues that should interest society.

It is based on the fact that information sources are those that provide information of interest. These sources -either direct, personal, institutional, or of any other sign that has real value for journalists- have established codes of behavior with the media. In this duality, the sources are nourished by what the newspapers capture and the newspapers use the sources as a resource to obtain information.

If these modes have been modified with the appearance of Twitter is the objective set by this research.

3. THE THEORY OF THE AGENDA-SETTING: A BET ON THE GENERAL INTEREST: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

After World War II, the press came of age in the West. Added to the airs of freedom that the end of totalitarian regimes meant for all of Europe, the technological advancements that led to a greater and faster diffusion of the written press, the introduction of radio as a great means of consumption, and the appearance of television were added. The concept of the mass press was then coined, which is the same as recognizing the value and influence of the media in society in general.

It is from that moment when the true role of the press begins to be questioned, given the power it has acquired and the effects that the media have on public opinion. It starts from a premise, formulated by Bernard Cohen at the peak of information consumption when radio and television had joined this facet: "*The press is not very successful in telling people what to think, but it is in telling its readers what to think about.* What do press consumers have to think about?

In this way, a new way of constructing reality is born. What the press publishes is what is truly important, not interesting; what the press does not highlight, has no value and does not deserve to be taken into account by public opinion. It is the so-called "agenda-setting theory"[1], according to which the defenders of this theory in the last quarter of the last century affirm that the media can determine the value and importance of the information they disseminate and that will clearly and precisely influence press consumers, through different criteria (McCombs, M. and Shaw, DL, 2004). The agenda-setting gives citizens freedom of opinion so that each one makes their own assessment of the facts and builds their opinion on the matter. But always on issues that the press has previously selected and decided to elevate to the category of important.

This seems that nowadays, with the emergence of social networks, it may change as "the fragmentation of the audience in today's digital media environment threatens the traditional agenda-setting power of the media" (Feezell, J., 2018).

In any case, the agenda-setting tries to determine which issues are a priority for the press and convey them to the public. In this case, the media would act as a bridge between the sender of the message and the receiver, as Walter Lippmann already recognized almost a century ago. And in this interaction, the active and the passive subjects are not alone since the value of what the press has decided is important and that the reader receives as such is also taken into account by the public authorities since they know where the focus of interest of citizens is. This is how Maxwell Mc. Combs defended it, one of the fathers of the agenda-setting, and justified it by adding that, among all the sectors involved in the communication process (journalists, readers, and social leaders), a reality is built that, on many occasions, generates a consensus among the different sectors of society (McCombs and Shaw, 2004).

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[1] The term setting in Spanish has a difficult translation to define this communicative theory. Perhaps the most appropriate meaning is that of adjustment. An agenda, a list that adjusts the current issues on which you must have information.

Once the value of the "agenda-setting" has been determined, it is worth wondering about the impact on public opinion. There are several theories about it. It has been shown, for example, that what does not enter the agenda of the media does not exist, or that the aspects that they select and place their focus of attention on directly affect the perception that the press consumer has about a current issue. And once the impact is known, the next question is to establish what could be called hierarchical criteria, that is, the criteria used by the media so that citizens focus their attention on certain news items and not on others. They would be, among others, the size or extension -the number of lines that a journalistic text has-, the frequency -the number of times the information is broadcasted-, and the location within the medium.

And all this, under the premise that "the decision process of a company must be based on market preferences." This is the reason why, as they point out, "many companies consider that the key to success is knowing their clients on a personal level" (Espinosa and Xiao, 2020).

For these authors, customers cause the evolution of the market, and, for this reason, companies are investing large amounts of money in smart business tools that allow them to predict the preferences of their customers. If companies know the preferences of their customers, they can anticipate changes, assess risks, reduce costs, and increase profits (Espinosa and Xiao, 2020).

The irruption of the digital press has led to a change in traditional approaches and has sparked a great debate: how digital media influence citizens and whether the traditional criteria for setting the agenda are valid.

The greater the proliferation of digital media (without taking into account social networks, blogs, forums, and other alternative information transmission systems), the greater the ideological burden at the service of the citizen to choose the medium and the model with which to obtain information to have a criterion; in short, what to think about. But the agenda-setting does not stop to analyze the ideological differences between some media and others. It simply confirms the multiplicity of informational criteria that make up reality. Thus, the concept of agenda-setting continues to be operative, despite the proliferation of the media since it is those media in digital format, as they used to be in traditional format (paper, radio, or television) that draw up the agenda with their priorities, ranking, and presentation. And although digital media may not attract large masses of consumers as traditional media does, they are increasingly expanding. From a study carried out in the media of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (Lumban Gaol, Matsuo, and Maulana, 2019), where through the use of the filter disparity method suggested to identify the most significant overlaps on the internet, it was shown that:

> "The analysis of the data network of Twitter followers can offer relevant information on the agenda-setting of the media and how readers browse through the various news sources available on social networks" (Majó-Vázquez, 2015).

If we take into account that these digital media that have proliferated so much in the communication landscape for a decade are strongly politicized, it is not unreasonable to think that there is a relationship between the agenda provided by the media and

the political agenda (Aruguete, 2016). The agenda-setting is much more active in the digital media, precisely because of that vocation to influence not among large sectors of the population, as was the intention of the traditional media but to make a gap between sectors with reduced consumers but with a great ideological predicament. What to think is implicit in the information transmitted by these media.

But the questions that do not have a single answer or perhaps do not have any sufficiently objective and honest to be taken as true are: what is the criterion used by the media to decide which news should be taken into account by public opinion? Why do they rank some to the detriment of others? What are the factors that cause a media outlet to decide to elevate a story to the category of important so that it is taken into account by public opinion and influences what it should and should not know?

In this regard, there are two completely different approaches but they may very well be complementary, given the wide panorama of media and platforms available to all citizens. On the one hand, "the agenda will be the objective of a great variety of organized pressure groups (...) because the large elite groups also influence the media agenda of the rest of the media" (Odriozola Chené, 2012). The power of large political, economic, and social lobbies, channeled through large traditional media, have a powerful influence on small digital media, many of them simple providers of information, without their own sources or sufficient infrastructure to provide an informative alternative to the most powerful. These digital media, which, as has been said previously, have a reduced penetration capacity, only among certain social nuclei ideologically closely linked to the medium, serve more as a complement than as an alternative.

Faced with this influential factor, the antagonistic one that, as has been said previously, can even be complementary, having seen the current panorama from the perspective of the proliferation of media and other ways of communicating information:

 Since the explosion of the dot-com bubble and the flourishing of blogs and social networks, the recipients of information can become transmitters of information (…) Citizens have at their fingertips an extremely simple way to create their own mass media (Antón Crespo and Alonso del Barrio, 2012).

In any case, whatever the power of influence and, above all, through what means, the theory of the parents of agenda-setting must always be respected: if the media have the power to construct reality, it has to obey honest and universal criteria, and the criteria of general interest must always be applied to highlight some news ahead of others.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to empirically check what place Twitter occupies in the agenda-setting of the media or what percentage of journalists consider that Twitter is a source of information from which the media mark the main topics on their agenda.

4. METHODOLOGY

For the research to be truly an effective measuring instrument and achieve the proposed objectives, a mixed type of research was used: qualitative and quantitative.

For qualitative research, a "descriptive" exploratory study was previously carried out, as it sought to reflect attitudes towards an event that was "cross-sectional" since the information was acquired in one go, and "simple" since it was obtained only from one sample of interviewees (Bigné et al, 2000). Specifically, the main social media managers of the main traditional newspapers (elpais.es, abc.es, and elmundo.es) and the main newspapers in the digital world (elespañol.com, elconfidencial.es, eldiario.es) were surveyed about the use of Twitter. All the media outlets that have participated in this work have national coverage.

In any case, the objective was to confront journalists with the use of Twitter as an information source and its impact on the agenda-setting and discover the richness or not of this network in the daily news story.

The personal survey was chosen to carry out the fieldwork that favored obtaining a greater number of responses and, thus, the questions could be posed in the same way. The main drawback was the possibility that the respondent did not choose any of the required answers or chose several answers, which was corrected by adding the option " NA".

The personal survey also offered a series of guarantees:

− First of all, because of its external validation. It allowed research in an absolutely realistic framework, without removing the interviewees from their natural work environment, which was where they worked on the concept, object of the research. It was not about creating fictitious situations but rather that the interviewees described what they usually did.

As the respondents had analysis conditions identical to the natural environment, they provided a more realistic image of their normal behavior and did not act influenced.

− Respondents would not be influenced by third parties, thus ensuring that the information came from exactly the person that was intended.

− All the surveys were presented in the same way, being the base where the data would be collected and analyzed.

The qualitative questionnaire was applied before the quantitative questionnaire since its results would serve as support for its better design. In short, it was a pre-test before the quantitative research whose objective was to put the questionnaire in front of professionals to detect possible errors, discover ambiguities, and add or reformulate some questions.

An open question type was chosen to offer the interviewee greater freedom to reflect the true opinion of how they perceived the topic.

Furthermore, the aim was to obtain responses unanticipated during the preparation of the questionnaire and which could point to new relationships with other responses or variables. Therefore, the spontaneity of the interviewee was sought by not being influenced, in this way, by a predetermined set of response alternatives and, therefore, having to respond by their own will, without any help.

To this end, the same script was applied to all the media where they were asked:

a. On a scale of 0 to 10, what is the value you give to Twitter as an information source?

b. As those responsible for the newspaper's content, do you ask that the information received through Twitter be compared with other information sources?

c. What is the value of a news item disseminated through Twitter in the hierarchical order of the information offered by the newspaper?

d. Does the newspaper you work for keep track of the number of readers approaching a news story that has spread through Twitter and that you have collected in its edition?

e. What weight does Twitter have in the agenda-setting of the newspaper for which you work?

After surveying these social media managers in their media outlets and, therefore, verifying its validity since it was aiming, in this case, to editors and not journalists (hence the number of respondents), we proceeded to the quantitative research.

For the quantitative research, a questionnaire was applied to a universe of 8,000 journalists from the Madrid Press Association (APM) and the Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (FAPE). More than 1,500 responses were received from the associates of these two professional institutions that group Spanish journalists. The survey was conducted through the respective web pages of the two associations and was valid from October to December 2019.

For quantitative research, the type of sample was classified as *non-probabilistic* (Wimmer and Dominick, 2001) since the purpose of the study was not so much to generalize results but to reach conclusions through data collection, considering the relationship between some variables or others.

Furthermore, it was of the *accessible or convenient and intentional* type (Wimmer and Dominick, 2001) and *by quotas*, (Bigné et al 2000) because it is a group of people easily located and accessible and, at the same time, fulfilling the characteristics that were requested for the effectiveness of the research.

The application of the empirical study, for it to really be an effective measurement instrument and to achieve the objectives set, required a specific type of people, specifically practicing journalists.

It was not a matter of choosing a specific number of teachers from various centers but rather of carrying out a study among journalists belonging to the Madrid Press Association and the Federation of Press Associations of Spain.

The object of the research required a type of questionnaire that was practically closed, which would subsequently allow all responses to be measured under equal conditions.

A type of questionnaire classified as structured was chosen (Bigné et al, 2000) in the sense of presenting the interviewees with formalized and standardized questions.

The questionnaire was formally divided into 8 questions, all of them aimed at validating or refuting the hypotheses raised.

The choice of questions of the closed type (Bigné et al, 2000) was made considering the obligation of the interviewee to choose between a set of alternatives, which would allow a better measurement of the sought object.

When respondents choose an option from the list presented to them, this endows the total survey with a uniformity of response that provides easier quantification.

The questions, therefore, are formulated in the same order and the interviewee follows them as they were written.

The questions were *multiple choice* (Bigné et al, 2000) to force the interviewee to choose between a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives taken collectively from where they should choose the one that best corresponds to their answer. Therefore, each respondent would find only one possibility of self-classification (Wimmer and Dominick, 2001) minus the last one, as has already been said, where they were questioned about the section most receptive to the information received from Twitter.

Logically, it allowed homogenizing the responses of all the interviewees.

The questionnaire was carried out through the official website of the Madrid Press Association and the Federation of Press Associations of Spain in October 2019.

It consisted of 8 items related to this use by Twitter journalists. The answer options were different depending on the questions asked. All responses, except the last one, were on a scale of 0 to 10, with zero being the lowest option and 10 being the highest. Next, we detail the questionnaire:

Questionnaire: Survey on the influence of Twitter on the agenda-setting

1. On a scale of 0 to 10, do you regularly use Twitter as an information source?

2. On a scale of 0 to 10, what value do you give Twitter as an information source?

3. On a scale of 0 to 10, do you contrast the information you receive through Twitter with another source?

4. On a scale of 0 to 10, do you cite Twitter as an information source in your journalistic texts?

5. On a scale of 0 to 10, how reliable is a tweet that is sent through a personal account, in which the author is identified as an information source?

6. On a scale of 0 to 10, how reliable is a tweet that is sent through an institution or communication office?

7. On a scale of 0 to 10, indicate whether the media outlet for which you work is mediated by the information received through Twitter

8. Which section of the media outlet is more receptive to the information received through Twitter, as it has a higher degree of reliability?

5. DISCUSSION

The results obtained after qualitative research show that those responsible for the social networks of the main newspapers have a moderate assessment of Twitter, as a platform in which many sources are included, that has discrete reliability. From this point of view, they consider it one more informative source but one that must be contrasted. They prefer to contrast the information that reaches them in this way with other information sources, specifically with the web pages of the institutions from which the news comes. They consider that there is the possibility of manipulation of data or statements if only Twitter is used as a source since what this network emanates should only be given a guideline value. In fact, for publishers, their own sources prevail over those that come from social networks. Regarding the hierarchical evaluation, the editors coincide in pointing out that each media outlet has its own editorial policy that suggests its hierarchical evaluation. In fact, the hierarchical order is not established by the source from which the news comes but by the news itself.

Likewise, they acknowledge in the survey that, for them, the monitoring of readers who connect to the media to get informed has a high value, regardless of the origin of the news. The immediacy and impact are what is valued from the editing positions. The constant measurement of the arrival of readers and the assessment that they make of the information serves to make the work of journalists profitable, regardless of the sources they use.

For its part, the survey carried out among communication professionals indicates that more than 75% of the consulted journalists use Twitter as an information source. Respondents acknowledge that this social network has been regularly incorporated into their daily agenda to find out about informative events of interest, which they will later incorporate into the media outlet for which they work. 40% acknowledge the high value of Twitter as a source since on the scale that they have been offered they place it between the two highest values (9 and 10), and 35% do so on the immediately lower scale (between 7 and 8). The value of the network is highly acknowledged because even journalists who consider the use of this network as a source is lower (the remaining 25%), keep it in mind and believe that its use is important since none have valued it with less than 5 on the scale, half the table.

These data support the thesis that, in this research, is indicated regarding the consideration of Twitter as a decisive platform, as described by the aforementioned authors.

However, professionals are cautious when assessing the quality of Twitter as an information source. 60% of those surveyed affirm that its quality is relative since, on the scale offered to them to give their answer, they place it between 5 and 7. Only 12% of journalists raise this assessment by one point and raise it to 8, and another 12% believe that it has a higher consideration. The two extremes must be highlighted: for 4% of those surveyed, the network has a high value as an information source since they have rated it with the highest level. On the contrary, this same percentage, 4%, thinks the opposite and disqualifies it, thinking that its value is 0. Thus, the highest percentages are in the center of the table (6 and 7), which suggests that journalists consider the value of the social network as a source to be relatively moderate.

However, there is unanimity when it comes to considering that not only Twitter should be used as the sole source of information. 72% of those surveyed acknowledge that the information transmitted to them by the social network is contrasted with other sources to verify its authenticity. The usual practice of journalists, who are supposed to contrast information with more than one source, here acquires greater force since in the previous question it has been explicit that the use of Twitter as an information source is moderate, which means that it has relative reliability. The source contrast is essential given the opinion that information professionals have of that source. Even so, 20% of journalists are not so forceful when answering and place the fact of contrasting the source on a medium-high scale in the table (between 6 and 8). Only 4% admit that they are not conclusive when it comes to contrasting the information they receive through Twitter. Above all, because, as indicated in the article, Twitter has its own problems such as creating false profiles (Ventura, 2018).

It is surprising and contrasts the disparity of criteria that journalists have when it comes to recognizing the Twitter quote as a source in their informative texts, especially if it is taken into account that in most of the Media Style Books it is indicated that the journalist must cite the information source through which they have obtained the information they offer to public opinion. And it also contrasts the answer that professionals have given when asked if they cite the social network as a source since in previous answers, they have acknowledged that, first, its reliability is relative (question 2) and second, that in the vast majority of the cases they contrast the information emanating from the social network (question 3). At the point of knowing if professionals cite Twitter as a source, 36% of those surveyed believe that they do not consider it necessary to cite the source from which the news comes. To a lesser extent, 20% do prefer to cite this source. And we must take into account two observations of interest: almost a quarter of journalists (24%) place their answers in the middle of the evaluation table that was offered (5), which means that they do not always cite the source in their information. Finally, 12% do not know or do not answer, a high percentage for a simple question.

Again, the extremes coincide when evaluating the personal tweet, and moderation is installed in the responses of professionals. 36% give the individual and personalized message a relative value since it places it on a scale between 5-6-7, which shows

certain prevention when it comes to trusting the news offered by a social network user. On the contrary, 24% give it a great value, which means that they trust the personalized information source through Twitter; the same percentage for those who distrust the message (on the scale of values 2-3 and 4). Journalists relativize this value, something that contrasts significantly with the following answer. Already, in the approach to the article, some authors pointed out the dangers that this network can embody and that can lead to unwanted coverage or loss of control of the stories.

When assessing the Twitter network as an institutional source, journalists do consider the source. 72% of those surveyed recognize the reliability of a Twitter message from a communication office of an institution. If in the previous answer (personalized messages), the journalists relativized the content, in this case, they consider the message good if it is not signed personally and emanates from an institution, a much more reliable source as can be seen. Also, high responses, 24%, in the middle of the table (6-7). Less than 5% do not give value to the institutional message.

There is sincerity on the part of information professionals when it comes to recognizing the influence that Twitter has on the media outlet for which they work. The answers are located in the highest peaks of the table since 40% of the consulted informants distinguish this mediatization since their answers are situated in the range between 8 and 10. The answers on the influence or null show similar percentages: 28% of journalists consider that the media outlet for which they work is relatively influenced since their responses cover levels 5, 6, and 7, while for 24% of journalists, the media outlet in which they work barely looks towards Twitter as an informative reference (scale between 0 and 3 in the survey table).

By informational areas, the two sections most receptive to the information that comes from Twitter are those of National and Society, according to the responses of communication professionals, in very similar percentages: 28% National and 24% Society. To analyze and interpret these data, two factors must be taken into account. In the first place, the National section, for obvious reasons, is the one that occupies the most space in the media and distributes the greatest amount of information. And, furthermore, the survey is carried out at a particularly sensitive time for the information included in this section. It is, therefore, decisive that professionals consider that the influence of Twitter is greater in the information included in these pages since the flow of information, and Twitter as a source, is constant. Society covers a large part of the information that is of interest to public opinion and that is directly or indirectly linked to the evolution of daily politics (Health, Environment, Education, Security). Twitter also has a channel as a source for this type of news. It is significant that two sections of high informative interest, such as International and Economy, are not considered to receive news through Twitter, given the weight they have in the media. And yet Events and Sports are considered by those surveyed as receiving information from this network, although in low percentages, 8% for each of them, as is Culture. Also bear in mind that 28% of those surveyed do not know which section is the most receptive to Twitter messages.

6. CONCLUSIONS-RESULTS

The research carried out raises the role of Twitter as an important part of the communication process. The media have lost their traditional exclusive mediator (del Fresno García, 2014) which makes social networks, as this author has already reflected, play a central role in our activities.

In this way, the most relevant function of social networks for media and journalists is to be a content showcase (Ventura, 2018).

Those responsible for the digital media that use Twitter regularly consider it a requirement to contrast the information that comes from this social network since the platform is made up of different information sources. When it comes to evaluating the news, they do not do so according to their origin but the importance of the news event that they are going to report to the readers, who, through the follow-up and monitoring that the media outlet does of them, provide a high value that makes the work of journalists profitable.

It is precisely journalists who value Twitter as an informative source of relative reliability, although 75% admit that they consider it as such, although with some precautions since more than 72% of the informants who have this consideration of the social network acknowledge that they contrast the information they receive through this channel with other information sources that offer them credibility.

It is necessary to rethink the traditional concept of the communication process where the roles of sender and receiver were very defined in the media, since the profile of the receiver has changed and has become a prosumer, content creator, and this is a complication for the media outlets that lose control of the distribution of information (González Alba, 2018).

Likewise, it is necessary to study the new profile of journalists and even their education for the future that derives from the technological impact that affects their professional activity (Salaverría, 2016).

Furthermore, the irruption of Twitter in the agenda-setting can affect credibility or at least doubt because there is no custom and tradition in the use of social networks, and that is seen because, according to the study, journalists rarely cite Twitter as a source, since only 20% of the informants who use it as such use it. Either because of the value itself or because of the reliability that it produces, journalists who see an information source on the platform -even if it is one among several- prefer the information that comes through this channel from an institution, compared to that which is sent to the media through a personal account. Either through institutions or in their personal capacity, journalists acknowledge that the media are relatively mediated by Twitter, with the National and Society sections being the most receptive to using the platform as a source of information, compared to those on Economy or International, in which Twitter hardly has an impact.

The conclusion of our work validates the objectives set regarding the need to rethink the work of journalists and the communication methodologies carried out by the media.

New formats, new narratives burst onto the communication scene and this demands new training and ways of doing things in the journalistic profession.

The new generations more oriented to multimedia and interactivity connect with the new platforms that, in the case of Twitter, is distinguished by being social, intuitive, versatile and affordable, synchronous, communicative, fleeting and concrete, global, open and interactive, symbolic, with hypertextual language, flexible, and asymmetric and informal (Salgado Santamaría and González Conde, 2014).

In this sense, the future line of research must go through the study and analysis of the training offer that educational centers must propose to incorporate into their university studies in the field of communication to provide future professionals with better tools for greater efficiency in transmitting the message.

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